

# Hebrew for the Goyim

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## Sacrifice

### Sacrifice is a test.

In Genesis 22, we read that “God *tested* Abraham and called to him, ‘Abraham!’”

“Here I am,” he answered.

“Take now your son, your only Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a **burnt offering** (עֹלָה) on one of the mountains that I will tell you.” (As Abraham had done when he left his father’s country, he had no idea where it would lead – just to a “land that I will show you.”)

Long story short, Abraham rose up early, split the wood, saddled up his donkey, took Isaac as well as two young men, and started off in the direction of the mountains.

### Sacrifice is trust.

On the way to the mountain, Isaac noticed one thing was missing.

“Abba,” Isaac spoke up.

“Yes, my son.”

“Where is the lamb for the sacrifice?”

“God Himself will see to it, son – God will provide the lamb,” Abraham promised.

### Sacrifice is terminal.

After binding the wood on little Isaac and laying him on the altar, Abraham stretched out his knurly old hand with a knife in it, prepared to do the unthinkable. For Abraham, it would be the end of the line. All hopes and dreams would end. God’s so-called promise would have been just some fantasy he dreamed up. He would have judged the idols in Ur of the Chaldeans to be just as good as anybody’s religion – that serving and believing Yahweh didn’t make a hill of beans of difference in a man’s life.

**Dictionary Defines Sacrifice.** The English dictionary lists *sacrifice* as:

- The act of offering something to a deity in propitiation or homage; especially the ritual slaughter of an animal or person for this purpose.

- The forfeiture of something highly valued...*in exchange* for someone or something...<sup>1</sup>

- The core of “sacrifice” is “sacred,” or holy. So sacrifice is an offering. A **sacred surrender**.

- The Hebrews had many words for offering and sacrifice: *zebach* (זָבַח that which is slain), *ola* (עֹלָה) - burnt offering- that which ‘goes up’ in the fire), *asam* (אָשָׁם guilt-offering), *battat* (בַּטָּאת sin-offering), *korban* (קָרְבָּן that which is brought near), *minba* (מִנְחָה cereal-offering), *reshit* (רֵשִׁית first fruits) and *bikkurim* (בִּכּוּר the first born), *esh* (אֵשׁ fire offerings), *sbaraf* (שָׂרַף burnt offering), and *shalamim* (שְׁלָמִים peace offering), praise offerings, votive offerings, thanksgiving (תּוֹדָה) and free will offerings. Sacrifices were offered up for expiation of sin, to bring about peace, to make peace with God, as propitiation for wrath and for making atonement.

### Prehistory speaks.

*Thousands of years ago, some of mankind’s earliest marks were prints of human hands, either pressed into soft clay in caverns, or made as positive impressions by and covered in red or black color and pressed on a rock surface, or by negative impressions made when the hand was placed on a rock wall and coloring was blown around it to make an outline.*

*Although the meaning of these hand prints is not known, author S. Giedion suggests they express some sort of supplication to invisible powers, perhaps even prayers. In some caves, many of the hands were deformed, with missing fingers or thumbs. He suggests these may represent self-mutilation, perhaps part of some sacrificial system, standing there, “like a tragic chorus, eternally crying out for help and mercy.” Perhaps they were lifting up hands to the Eternal.<sup>2</sup>*

In other words, they cut off a finger or two, hoping to save the rest, hoping to get God to help, to heal the baby, hold back a storm, ward off trouble. Humans innately know there is a God and cry out in need. Sacrifice gets His attention. Who hasn’t whispered a prayer, “God, if you will do ABC, I **promise** I will do XYZ. Get me out of this and I **promise** I’ll be good - forever.” Right!

This innate tendency to offer something up to God devolved into sacrificing human beings. History is full of mass slaughter of enemies captured in war, but most savage is the practice of child sacrifice to relieve sieges in times of war. Diodorus of Sicily writes that the Carthaginians “selected two hundred of the noblest children and sacrificed them publicly.”<sup>3</sup> Second Kings indicates, “King Mesha took his first born son, offered him up on the walls as a burnt offering. A great wrath came upon Israel so they withdrew from him and went back to their own land.” Human sacrifice was prevalent in history. Israel fell into this practice (2 Kings 21:6), but was severely condemned through the prophet Jeremiah (31). God not only indicated He did not command such a thing, but that it **didn’t even enter His heart** to do so.

### Biblical examples of Sacrifice.

- The first sacrifice in the Bible occurred when God killed an animal to clothe Adam and Eve, “Therefore, Yahweh Elohim made (ya-as עָשָׂה) coats (coatnote כֹּתְנוֹת) of skin (or עוֹר) and he clothed them.” (3:21). They had first tried fig leaves, but after they sinned, the death and blood of an animal was required to cover (coat) them. Which means, by the way, that God is not opposed to fur coats.

- Cain and Abel offered sacrifices to God. Abel offered from the first born (בְּכוֹרוֹת) of his sheep and goats (choice animals killed – with all the potential lambs to be born if they had lived). Hebrews 11:4 indicates Abel’s offering was accepted because of Abel’s faith. However, Cain offered “fruit of the ground” (פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה ha-adamah), which could have been anything that grows out of the soil – perhaps a few apples off a tree, a bundle

of wheat or some shucks of corn, which any good farmer knows is no great sacrifice. In fact, it’s no sacrifice at all.

### Why does this matter today?

The Passover (פֶּסַח) lamb (שֶׁה) (Ex. 12:3-6) delivered the Jews from Egypt. Mosaic law dictated the substitution of an unblemished lamb in sacrifice for sin. Isaiah 53 speaks of the Suffering Servant who as a lamb would die in the place of sinners. It was standard religious practice to offer everything from meal to doves to sheep to oxen for atonement for sin. John, the Jewish prophet who “prepared the way for Jesus,” called Jesus the Lamb of God (John 1:29,36). Those who believe in Jesus (יֵשׁוּעַ Yeshua, Salvation) understand He is **the** “Lamb of God,” the perfect and final sacrifice for sin. Or as the famous hymn tells it, “There is a fountain filled with blood, Drawn from Immanuel’s veins, And sinners plunged beneath that flood, Lose all their guilty stains. The dying thief rejoiced to see, That fountain in his day, And there may I, though vile as he, Wash all my sins away.”

In closing, there is **now no more need of sacrifice** to be made

for sin; Jesus is “able to save completely those who come to God through Him” (Heb. 7:25). However, the believer is encouraged, “present your **bodies, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God - which is your reasonable service**” (Romans 12). Every day, we are challenged to **freely sacrifice to God** – our bodies, our habits, every hateful or unclean thought, every purpose not in keeping with God’s Kingdom. Sometimes we are called upon to sacrifice personal dreams and hopes, loved ones, ambitions, favorite sins, selfish attitudes, even all other hopes not based on God. What are you willing to give up to your Lord? What am I willing to give up to my Lord? As another great hymn says, “I gave my Life for you, my precious blood I shed, That you might ransomed be, and quickened from the dead. **I gave, I gave my Life for you, what have you given for Me?**”

1 American Heritage Dictionary, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, p.1140

2 Pat Mercer Hutchens, *Hebrew for the Goyim*, Xulon, p. 83

3 *Bibliotheca historica*, Book XX.13.4ff, 14.1ff; transl.R.M.Greer.

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### Sacrifice of Isaac - Dover Illustration 022

