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See Festivals and Holy Days.

SACRIFICE AND OFFERINGS

Even a cursory reading of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament underlines the importance of sacrifices and offerings in the biblical world. However, historically, exegetes and theologians have often struggled to understand the underlying rationale of ritual activities and prescriptions related to sacrifices and offerings because of two competing approaches: either scholars focused exclusively on the origins and Sitz im Leben ("life setting") of sacrifices and their "textuality" or, highly influenced by social studies and anthropology, they succumbed to the temptation to search for the grand rationale of sacrificial activity in religion per se, not paying sufficient attention to the details and nuances of biblical sacrifices and offerings. In order to avoid the pitfalls of the two extremes, this entry first situates sacrifices and offerings within the larger context of the religious worldview (or universe) of biblical religious activity, followed by a brief introduction to individual sacrificial types and their significance and meaning within the temple economy. Following this, the important innerbiblical prophetic critique of sacrifices and offerings will be revisited as well as the New Testament's transformation of this highly significant ritual activity. The next section focuses upon the later extrabiblical reception within Judaism (e.g., at Qumran), early Christianity, as well as subsequent historical periods. Finally, the significance of sacrifices and offerings for a biblical theology is highlighted and their relevance for contemporary theology and culture discussed.

Sacrifices/Offerings, Ritual, and Biblical Theology. Sacrifices and offerings lie at the very heart of ritual activity, yet ritual is not limited to only these activities. The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have witnessed significant cross-fertilization between social science research and biblical studies. Ritual theory has informed numerous studies dealing with biblical ritual. Insights from these "exchanges" have influenced the thinking about sacrifices and offerings in the Bible, including the importance of carefully considering key elements of ritual (such as space, time, action, participants, objects, sequence, language, and sound) without overlooking the larger issue of ritual meanings or dimensions that undergird every ritual activity. Unfortunately, scholars influenced by Wellhausen (in the field of biblical studies) or Robertson Smith (in the area of religious studies) have often considered sacrifice an early and primitive stage in the evolution of religious thought and activity. In addition to overly evolutionist perspectives, reductionism focusing upon one model or theory represents another
problematic aspect discussed in current scholarship. Interestingly, Girard’s extremely influential model relied heavily on evolutionist underpinnings. Girard’s focus on primal violence led him to interpret sacrifice as the transformation of the instinct of violence; this transformation then is a community’s way of deflecting its own violent instincts on someone (mostly an animal) who becomes the scapegoat. Other scholars (e.g., Burkert, 1983) have suggested other anthropological models for the study of biblical sacrifice in order to discover the interpretational key that would unlock this ritual practice as noted in the texts of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, yet none of these models has proven the one-for-all key to unlock the significance and meaning of sacrifice and offerings.

Dimensions such as gift giving, feeding of the gods, substitution, expiation, restoration of community or fellowship following the break in a relationship, restoring the right order of the world, or a symbolic system of imitating God along the lines of rules that are similar to biblical purity concerns and involving the divine presence are some of the suggested rationales of sacrifices and offerings. However, considering the wide range of linguistic expressions (i.e., terminology), vastly differing literary and historical contexts, an increasing appreciation of the complexity of ritual and its communicative functions, and the conscious decision to avoid reductionism, it seems more appropriate to describe a plethora of key elements of biblical sacrifice and offerings instead of searching for the overarching model or theory. Before attempting this descriptive task, however, it is important to consider the complex relationship between ritual and biblical theology, especially in view of the “textuality” of the biblical data. Anthropologists would affirm a close link between ritual activity and the worldview and thinking about the divine of a particular people. Utilizing the mainstay of fieldwork (including observation, interviews, and possibly even participation), they would argue for a likely link between practice and theology/ideology. Regrettably, in the past, biblical theologians have often ignored biblical ritual (including often biblical law) as a valid source of information regarding Israel’s theology.

The often complex literary history—supposed and real—of a particular corpus and the repetitive nature of ritual texts have been major reasons for this neglect. Yet, what is done in worship and cult events (including sacrifices and offerings) is often more important than what is said. Action speaks louder than words; careful attention to the details of biblical ritual will significantly benefit the task of writing a comprehensive biblical theology.

Sacrifices and offerings were a common staple of religious expression in all ancient cultures inhabiting the Levant (including Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia). Their existence is reflected in the pictorial and—not always as clear but definitely present—in the archaeological record (Porter and Schwartz, 2013). Offerings sought to establish or maintain communication with the deity and were often linked to specific times in the calendar (such as the Day of Atonement ritual in Leviticus 16 or the Akitu festival in Babylon) or were part of the strategy to respond to a specific crisis. They could occur in both a public and a private setting, as illustrated by the existence of incense altars, libation vessels, or libation pits in private homes in the material culture of the Levant. Good illustrations of this family religion activity are the abbreviated altar construction notices in Genesis 12:7, 8; 13:18; 22:9–10; 26:25, pointing to a more complex and elaborate sacrificial ritual involving purposeful communication with the covenant deity in the context of a clan or family. This description of patriarchal family religion in Genesis clearly illustrates family-centered sacrificial activities and introduces the reader to the wide spectrum of Hebrew sacrificial activity and terminology.

Sacrificial/Offering Types and Functions in the Hebrew Bible. A significant number of different terms are used in Hebrew and Greek to mark a sacrifice or offering. Some of the terms (e.g., nesek, “libation,” and minhā, “grain offering”) point to nonbloody offerings involving animals, vegetables, or fluids. In the following, the terms marking sacrifice or offering will be briefly introduced. The first term, linked to an offering, to appear in Genesis is minhā, “grain offering” or “offering per se.” In Genesis 4:4–5 minhā is used to describe both an animal offering as well as the
offering of produce. Leviticus 2:13 and 23:13, 18 describe a grain offering, which appears to be a more generic term for an offering (cf. Ezek 45:17; Isa 57:16; but 1 Sam 2:7 referring to an animal offering). The term *zabah*, "sacrifice," appears repeatedly in the patriarchal narratives (Gen 31:54; 46:1). The verbal form is used constantly in the plague narrative (Exod 3–10) in the dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh that provided the rationale for Israel's release: the people had to go into the desert to "sacrifice" to Yahweh (e.g., Exod 5:3). The Passover sacrifice is called a *zabah pesah* (Exod 12:27), even though it appears as if *pesah* represents the larger expression in most instances (Exod 12:21).

Another term, *šelāmīm*, "peace offering" or "fellowship offering," can occur with or without the generic *zabah* (Exod 29:28; Lev 3:1). *Šelāmīm* appears also with *‘lā*, often in public contexts involving the larger community (e.g., Exod 20:24; 24:5; 32:6; Josh 8:31; Judg 20:28). Exodus 24:5–8 describes how Moses sprinkled half of the blood of a combined *šelāmīm* and *‘lā* offering upon the people—most likely to bind the people to the altar (where the other half of the collected blood had been sprinkled) and to the deity associated with the altar.

The *‘lā*, "burnt offering," was completely burnt on the altar (Lev 7:8) and appears in public contexts involving a national crisis (1 Sam 7:9; 1 Kgs 18:38) or celebration (1 Kgs 9:25). The levitical legislation of the *‘lā* (Lev 1:1–17; 6:8–13) indicates the animal type (male small herd animal or bird, without blemish) and highlights the purpose of the offering, namely, *lēkāppēr ālāyaw*, "to make atonement for him" (Lev 1:4). The laying on of hands pointed to the substitutionary nature of the sacrifice. The blood manipulation involved sprinkling the blood of the slaughtered animal around the altar base. The *‘lā* was the most frequent sacrifice in the list of Israelite festivals (Num 28–29), involving also the daily *tamid* (Num 28:1–8; cf. 2 Kgs 16:15).

The *ḥattā‘t* (Lev 4–5) represents another key sacrifice of the Hebrew Bible. Translation of the technical term has varied from "sin offering" to "purification offering." Milgrom's argument for the rendering "purification offering" has resonated with many scholars and is based on the fact that the *ḥattā‘t* was required in cases of material impurities (e.g., sacrifice for women after childbirth [Lev 12:6], people who had recovered from a skin disease [Lev 14:9] or from bodily discharges [Lev 15:5], people who had come into contact with a corpse [Num 19:14–17]) or in rituals that marked a changed status (e.g., ordination [Lev 8:14–16], the completion of a Nazirite vow [Num 6:11]). However, the specific association with the verb *ḥattā‘*", "to sin," in Leviticus 4:2, 3, 23, 28 clearly describes a dimension beyond purity concerns. Kiuchi (2003) has suggested a different translation of the verb and the noun as "hiding oneself [before God]," which has, however, not garnered many supporters. In view of the diverse contexts of the *ḥattā‘t*, the best strategy may be to recognize the multivalency of the term and let the specific context determine the exact significance.

The use of the *ḥattā‘t* during the important Day of Atonement ritual (Lev 16:10–19) specifically indicates removal (or purification) of the sins of Israel, accumulated during the entire year, from the sanctuary. However, throughout the year, the *ḥattā‘t* removes evil and uncleanness from the offerer (Lev 12:7; 14:20). Finally, the *ḥattā‘t* marks diverse social strata as the animal that needed to be offered was distinct for different groups (i.e., an anointed priest [Lev 4:3–12], the congregation [Lev 4:13–21], a prince or tribal leader [Lev 4:22–26], and a common Israelite [Lev 4:27–35]). As was the case with the *‘lā*, the *ḥattā‘t* often appears in conjunction with other offerings.

The *‘åšām*, "reparation offering" or "guilt offering," involved not only a sacrifice but also the payment of a 20 percent penalty (Lev 5:16). The *‘åšām* was only effective for unintentional sins (Lev 5:15), an important element that characterizes the entire Israelite sacrificial system: only unintentional sin could be atoned for by a sacrifice (Num 15:25–29, but note v. 30). The horizontal dimension of the sin or trespass, as well as the economic penalty included in addition to the cost of the sacrificial animal, underline the close integration of the sacrificial system into the ethos and larger tapestry of Israelite society.

The *nēsek*, "liberation offering," appears in patriarchal narratives and was not restricted to the sanctuary/temple (Gen 35:14, yet note that the narrative describing
a similar activity in 28:18 utilizes a different term). The \textit{nesek} appears repeatedly in offering lists (Lev 23; Num 28–29) for specific Israelite festivals. Interestingly, Israel's prophets include repeated references to libations in their critique of idolatrous cult practices (Jer 7:18; 19:13; 32:29; Ezek 20:28). Liquids played an important role in the ritual and cult of the Hebrew Bible. They were used to wash, bathe, purify, rinse, clean, swab, dip, soak, scrub, scour, anoint, smear, rub, or daub ritual participants, objects, or locations—typically in public settings. The pouring or smearing of a costly liquid (such as scented oil) before a deity often leveled the playing field (e.g., Lev 8:6–8 describes how both the altar and the priestly family are anointed using the same oil mixture) and indicated commitment and surrender, marked by deliberate wastefulness. Others have suggested that the libation (which often preceded other sacrifices) functioned as an “entrance fee” into the presence of the deity. The significant number of libation vessels or other utensils used in libation offerings in the material culture of Palestine during the Late Bronze and Iron Ages provides a helpful backdrop for the biblical data.

The final term that will be briefly discussed here does not describe a particular sacrificial type but rather focuses upon the modus operandi. The \textit{qētōrā}, “incense,” emphasized both the content and the manner of presenting it (Deut 33:10; 1 Sam 2:28). The verbal form often marks the burning (or “going up in smoke”) of some parts of the sacrificial animal (e.g., Exod 28:13; Lev 1:9, 13, 15, 17). However, the \textit{qētōrā} as an offering type was specifically connected to the altar of incense offering (Exod 30:1–10), providing a strong smell in the holy place of the sanctuary. It required the exclusive use of a special mixture of ingredients (Exod 30:34–38), making it “Yahweh’s smell.” The successful “turning into smoke” of sacrificial offerings was often described with the formulaic expression \textit{lērēāh nihōāh}, “for a pleasing smell” or a “soothing aroma.”

The completion phrase is found in connection with the \textit{ʿblā} (Exod 29:18, 41; Lev 19), \textit{qorbān} (or “grain offering”; Lev 2:2, 9, 12; 6:8), \textit{sēlāmīm} (Lev 3:5, 16; 17:5), \textit{nesek} (Num 15:7, 10, 13, 14; 28:24), and once with \textit{ḥattāʾ} (Lev 4:31). The anthropomorphic metaphor suggests the notion of establishing a relation with the deity and always appears to mark the successful completion of the ritual—as commanded by Yahweh (see esp. Lev 8:21, where the completion formula is explicitly linked to the \textit{lērēāh nihōāh} formula). Obedience to divine prescription results in divine recognition and acceptance of the offering. Notably, only male sacrificial animals were considered appropriate (Lev 1:3, 10; 4:23) for the \textit{ʿblā} and the \textit{ḥattāʾ}, while the \textit{sēlāmīm} could include either a male or a female animal (Lev 3:6). Gender relations are reflected in sacrificial requirements, even though most scholars would affirm that women could also participate in sacrificial rites.

\textbf{Later Reception.} The following section will highlight the prophetic critique of sacrifices and offerings within the Hebrew Bible, its interpretation in intertestamental Judaism, as well as the New Testament appropriation and adaptation of sacrificial practice and imagery.

\textbf{Prophetic critique of sacrifice/offering}. Israel's prophets, at times, interacted critically with sacrificial rituals, suggesting (at minimum) the common practice of these rituals or their popular recognition. Some of these critiques decried the incongruence of ritual and ethics, juxtapositioning offerings and sacrifices with obedience (1 Sam 15:22). Samuel, representing both prophetic and priestly functions (e.g., 1 Sam 7:17; 9:12–13; 16:1–5), accuses King Saul of putting ritual performance over obedience to explicit divine commands. Samuel’s critique is not directed against ritual per se but rather against Saul’s stepping outside the agreed upon covenant relation. Interestingly, Samuel’s symbolic act of tearing the hem off his robe when Saul clings to it (1 Sam 15:27–29) is immediately integrated into the divine message. Tearing rites were well known in Israel and the cultures surrounding Israel.

Hosea’s iconic message to northern Israel in the eighth century B.C.E. employs a marriage metaphor for describing Yahweh’s relation with his covenant people. The relationship between cult and ethics is highlighted by the use of \textit{hesed}, “lovingkindness,” and \textit{da’at}, “knowledge,” set in opposition to \textit{zebah} and \textit{ʿblā} in Hosea 6:6. The prophetic critique does not primarily contradict prior cultic legislation; rather,
it appears to reiterate the basic principles laid down in the Pentateuchal laws and emphasizes discrepancies between the divine ideal and Israel’s reality. Amos’s dark critique of Israel’s cult (Amos 5:21–27) continues the conversation between covenant partners. “I hate, I despise your festivals; and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies” (Amos 5:21; italics added; cf. Isa 1:15–18) highlights the difference between “yours” and “mine.” Amos 5:24 provides the rationale of the divine disgust. The terms mishpāt, “justice,” and šēdāqā, “righteousness,” are not evidenced in the horizontal relations of the covenant people.

A distinct element of the prophetic critique can be found in Jeremiah 7:1–7, 21–28 and focuses not only on the well-known indictment of sacrificial practices without ethical repercussions but also on the Jerusalem Temple, or sacred space per se (cf. Jer 7:1–7, 21–28). Jeremiah’s message highlights the fact that the right space, even one involving covenant promises (cf. Ps 132:13–14; 2 Sam 7:12–13), will not guarantee safety and salvation. Lifestyle change is required (Jer 7:3). Israel’s prophets argued against the sacramental understanding of ritual and sacrificial offerings, disconnected from lifestyle and ethos.

**Offerings and sacrifices in intertestamental Judaism.** The breadth and width of intertestamental Judaism has been the subject of many volumes. Suffice to say that, instead of suggesting some type of normative Judaism, it would be more accurate to speak of a multiplicity of religious perspectives within Judaism. The discovery of the “ sectarian” (in itself a problematic concept since it presupposes a clearly defined mainstream) Dead Sea Scrolls from Khirbet Qumran highlights some of the diversity. Elsewhere, Philo, a prominent member of the thriving Jewish community in Alexandria, Egypt, is well known for his allegorical interpretation of biblical texts and ritual. His hermeneutics suggested that many laws, rituals, and narratives of the Hebrew Bible had a deeper (or second) level of meaning beyond the literal. Apparently, Philo himself went to Jerusalem to “offer up prayers and sacrifices” (Prov. 2:64), yet it seems that he spiritualizes the sacrificial temple ritual, arguing that prayer is a superior sacrifice.

The religious community at Khirbet Qumran represents another important strand in the continuum of Jewish traditions in the intertestamental period. Based on analysis of the writings of the community, scholars have noted the “hegemony of ritual” at Qumran (Kugler, 2002). Khirbet Qumran’s inhabitants focused particularly upon purity concerns, food preparation and ingestion, and the critical (or even hostile) relationship to the sacrificial ritual of the Jerusalem Temple (1QS IX 3–4; CD VI 11–15). They apparently expected the continued use of burnt and sin offerings in their eschatological perspective (1QM II 5) yet, similar to Philo, seemed to redefine sacrificial practices in terms of worship, prayer, and an ethical lifestyle following (most likely) the laws of the community (1QS IX 4–6). Their strict nonpriestly purity concepts clashed with other Jewish interpretations of the Law that were influenced by Hellenistic philosophy. Ultimately, it was a way of maintaining a particular religious identity in an ever-changing world that challenged basic Jewish concepts. The Qumran texts not only highlight the immense ritual density of life in the community but went, in many areas, beyond the legislation found in the Hebrew Bible. As noted by Bell (1997) and others, ritual intensification can function as a defense mechanism against secularization. Interestingly, a similar tendency can be found in Rabbinic literature which, following the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, dedicated an entire order of the Mishnah (i.e., Qodashim) to rulings governing sacrifices that could not be offered (because of the lack of temple and altar). Similar to earlier attempts, the sacrificial offering theology of the Hebrew Bible was reinterpreted to include prayer, fasting, good works, and Torah study.

**New Testament transformation of sacrifice/offerings.** Following the death of Christ, early Christians of (mostly) Jewish origin sought to adapt the basic concepts of Hebrew Bible sacrificial ritual to their changed perspective regarding the Messiah and his sacrifice. Christology and soteriology clearly top the list of inner-Christian conversations during that period, evidenced by the New Testament texts. The birth, ministry, and death of Jesus Christ are framed by the New Testament authors as fulfillment of prophetic
texts of the Hebrew Bible. Fulfillment formulas mentioning specific prophets (e.g., Matt 4:14; 8:17; 12:17) or more general intertextual links (e.g., Matt 1:22; 2:15; Luke 18:31; John 13:18) focus particularly upon two important events: the Messiah’s birth and death. Jesus is described as the “Lamb of God” in John 1:29, 36; Revelation 5:6; 7:14; 19:19; 22:1-3, utilizing metaphorical language that clearly points to the sacrificial practice of the Hebrew Bible. The most obvious adaptation of Hebrew Bible sacrificial ritual to the substitutionary death of Jesus (echoing perhaps Isa 53:12) is represented in the Lord’s supper texts (Mark 14:22-24; 1 Cor 11:23-25). Its clear link to the Passover celebration highlights the power of ritual innovation, where a known ritual is adapted to a new historical or theological reality. Later discussion in Christianity revolved around the issue of whether the Eucharist was a mere metaphor, a sacrament of sacrifice or a surrogate.

Key terms for sacrifice in New Testament Greek include *θυσία* and *προσφορά*. Paul beseeches his readers to present their bodies as a *θυσιαν ζῶσαν*, “a living sacrifice” (Rom 12:1), and tells his audience that he himself was being poured out as a drink offering (Phil 2:17). Ephesians 5:2 suggests that Christ’s death was an offering and sacrifice (utilizing both key terms) to God for a sweet-smelling aroma, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew lērēš nīḥōḥ, pointing to the successful completion of Jesus’s sacrificial mission. By far the largest number of references to sacrifice and offerings can be found in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which focuses upon the high priestly function of Jesus (Heb 7) who is the “guarantee of a better covenant” (Heb 7:22). As a perfect high priest and sacrifice, Jesus does not need sacrifices covering his sins (Heb 7:28). Jesus’s high priestly ministry is linked to the heavenly sanctuary that is connected to the divine presence (Heb 8:1–5). The author of Hebrews clearly navigates the Israelite sanctuary with its associated sacrifices and festivals with ease yet emphasizes the “better” (or “more excellent”) nature of Jesus’s ministry (Heb 8:6). Echoing the important function of blood in the sacrificial cult of the Hebrew Bible (Lev 17:11), Hebrews underlines the cleansing function of blood in the ministry of Jesus, whose death is a one-time event, capable of accomplishing atonement (Heb 9:22–28). In fact, Hebrews 10:4 goes so far as to state that the blood of sacrificial animals in the Israelite cult could not really remove sin, a feat that could only be accomplished by the atoning death of Jesus (Heb 10:10).

Paul’s reference to *hilastērion*, “propitiation,” emphasizes the substitutionary element that is also present in the sacrificial cult of the Hebrew Bible (Rom 3:25–26). Interestingly, the close link to God’s righteousness in Romans 3:25 connects to the important theodicy motif in the Day of Atonement ritual noted by Gane (2005). Substitution and expiation are also expressed by *hλασμός* (1 John 2:2; 4:10; cf. 2 Cor 5:21) and are associated with blood imagery (1 John 2:7).

In summary, the New Testament authors were not only familiar with the sacrificial/offerings practices of the Hebrew Bible cult; they, in line with other Jewish groups during the intertestamental period, reinterpreted them. They clearly understood them as pointing to Jesus, the suffering Messiah, whose death, resurrection, and heavenly high priestly functions are described using language that is deeply rooted in the language and conceptual world of the Hebrew Bible. The close link to familiar ritual terminology and concepts suggests a proximity to the larger world of first-century B.C.E. Judaism. While the early Christian church recognized the completeness of Christ’s substitutionary death in terms of the typological relationship between Hebrew Bible sacrificial systems (including altar, sanctuary, cult personnel, and cultic times/festivals), they remained rooted in the language and text of the Hebrew Bible and considered Christ’s sacrifice the fulfillment of Messianic references found in the Hebrew Bible (Isa 53).

**Postbiblical Reception.** Sacrifice and offerings continued to be important topics in postbiblical periods because of their marked presence in the biblical text. The division adopted in this entry is primarily for the purpose of organization and does not suggest importance or relevance.

**Patristic Christianity.** Early Christianity often found itself in a tight spot between two worlds. A disdain for Judaism, as well as its problematic standing within the Roman Empire (esp. following the Jewish revolt
in 73 C.E.), caused some church fathers to adopt an "anti-Jewish" stance, often leading to marked criticism of the Jewish temple economy (including sacrifices). Their metaphorical use of sacrificial terminology undermined any literal significance but marked an important theological process of reinterpretation, already present in early New Testament writings. Instead of literal sacrifices, offered in a specific geographical location, offering language is adopted to prayer, giving alms, fasting, financial support of the poor, or even martyrdom. At the same time, Greek philosophers begin to engage Christian leaders, leading to an even greater emphasis upon spiritualized "offerings"—"liberating" the Christian God from the notion of having to rely on gifts. Origen's allegorical method provided a way of transforming Hebrew Bible ritual or sacrificial texts directly to his immediate context and time (e.g., Hom. Exod. and Hom. Lev.). His hermeneutics does not aim at discovering the literal meaning of a specific text from the Hebrew Bible (which he read in the Greek of the Septuagint) but rather at edifying his Christian readers and jumping effortlessly from keywords to contemporary theological issues.

**Medieval Christianity.** By the seventh or eighth century C.E. Christianity had become the dominant religion in what used to be the Roman Empire. Monasticism was on the rise and scholars in these monasteries produced important texts that help us understand their hermeneutical and theological methods. One of the more important authors was the Venerable Bede from Northumbria, England. Utilizing the typical monastic lectio divina ("divine reading"), Bede spends significant space on explaining the function and meaning of the altar of burnt offerings and its vessels (On the Tabernacle 2.11). Every element of the ritual is applied to the individual Christian (e.g., the altar designates the "heart of the elect"). Medieval hermeneutics tended to atomize and randomly apply biblical text, without providing appropriate exegetical clues. For another important representative of medieval Christianity Anselm of Canterbury sacrifice (or Latin sacrificium) was a clear cipher for the Eucharist and for the offering of prayer and a contrite heart (Epistles 10, 65). The celebration of the mass thus became the focal point of Christian worship and theology.

**Protestantism.** The Reformation was not only an important theological or social movement; it meant, above all, a hermeneutical sea change that challenged the importance of tradition over against sola scriptura. The translation of the biblical text in the vernacular in Germany, France, and England served as impetus and invitation to return to the Word. "Righteousness by faith" and the "priesthood of all believers" were rallying cries of the Protestant Reformation. In consequence, ritual (as the sacramental understanding of the Eucharist and the doctrine of transubstantiation) was considered unsympathetically, based in a deep-seated suspicion that wondered about righteousness by works in biblical texts emphasizing biblical law. This critical attitude toward all things ritual is still reflected in later Protestant scholarship, as well as in contemporary evangelical traditions (Klingbeil, 2007).

**Critical scholarship.** As already noted, Wellhausen's influential work grew out of a desire to describe the theological and historical development of Israel's religion. His emphasis on distinct sources and his decisions regarding the dating of biblical texts led him to characterize the Jewish religion as a decline from spontaneous and free worship in an early age to a highly regulated expression of religion (including sacrifice) that smothered true spirituality. Wellhausen's Protestant heritage may have led him to entertain such a negative notion of ritual per se, and this evolutionist paradigm has continued to inform Pentateuchal scholarship, even though it should be noted that current academic interest in ritual has opened the door for fruitful dialogue with anthropology and sociology, highlighting the complexity of ritual and its power to unite groups of people and give them an identity.

**Sacrifice in Biblical Theology and Contemporary Culture.** Both biblical theology and contemporary culture have at times struggled with sacrificial biblical ritual, for different reasons. Moderns and postmoderns relate differently to ritual as a whole and, more specifically, sacrifice. Some consider the sacrificial practices of the Hebrew Bible barbaric, bloody,
boring, too complex, or simply irrelevant. Others wonder about the very essence of addressing through a physical ritual activity a divine being whose existence modern science cannot verify. Yet, further reflection reminds us of our own public rituals (just consider the Super Bowl in American football) and the need to decipher ritual and sacrificial activity appropriately (Bergen, 2005).

As already noted, most biblical theologians have long been focusing upon prophetic or wisdom literature instead of law or ritual and have highlighted the difference between the history of Israelite religion and biblical theology. While attempts at writing a more comprehensive biblical theology that pays attention to all types of genres and texts are encouraging, the "omnipresence" of sacrificial language and metaphors in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament clues the careful reader of the canonical text of the Bible to its conceptual importance. Sacrifice and offering represented a prime means of the human desire to "communicate" with the divine. At times, a sacrifice was meant to represent a gift; in other contexts the clear substitutionary notion involved in atonement reminds us of its role in taking care of the sin problem separating erring humans from a holy God. Sacrifice and offerings not only leveled the playing field in the Hebrew Bible (everybody had to offer a sacrifice when he or she sinned; the Day of Atonement affected the entire community) but also represented an important element of theodicy—God's vindication as the forgiver within the larger cosmos of his law. The transference of the guilt and "stain" of Israel's sins upon the Azazel goat (Lev 16:20–22), representing the originator of sin, during the key Day of Atonement ritual was a yearly reminder to Israelites that the sin problem required more than the shedding of blood—it needed an ultimate purification and outside resolution.

Sacrificial activity, however, not only involved specific ritual action pointing to important theological concepts; the complex and prolific prescription of sacrificial law represented also an important rhetorical tool used to communicate divinely authorized texts (Watts, 2007). Thus, ritual and rhetoric went hand in hand in a process whose results we now recognize as canon.

Ultimately, sacrifice and offerings speak of the human need to reach out to the divine. The clear identification of Jesus as the "Lamb of God, taking away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) changes the equation dramatically. The New Testament's reuse of familiar sacrificial terminology and concepts inverts the familiar direction of humans seeking to connect to heaven (or the divine). Rather, New Testament authors highlight the complete opposite. It was really the Son of God who ultimately carried the sins of the world, denoting divine salvation and restoration of a broken relationship. This radical recycling of a well-known biblical concept continues to challenge readers and scholars engaging with the biblical text.

[See also Forgiveness; Guilt and Innocence; Leviticus and Numbers; Prayer; Priests and Priesthood; and Tabernacles, Temples, and Synagogues.]

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Salvation History

The term "salvation history"—alternatively translated as "revelation history" or "revelation in history"—refers to an approach to biblical theology that focuses on particular "saving acts" or "revelatory acts" in the history of Israel or the early Christian community. Central to this view is a series of connected, intentional actions by which God reveals his nature and covenantal relationship to humanity. In the Old Testament these acts include Israel’s election, the Exodus, covenant, exile, and restoration. In the New Testament the critical events are Jesus Christ’s life and ministry, his death and resurrection, the church’s formation, and the expansion of Christian faith to all peoples. In both testaments large narratives or narrative units carry the most weight. The main proponents of this view were G. Ernest Wright, Gerhard von Rad, and Oscar Cullmann.

Salvation History and the Biblical Theology Movement. Salvation history is best understood as part of the biblical theology movement of the mid-twentieth century, which itself was in part a reaction against earlier liberal theologies and the narrowly descriptive task of historical criticism. The biblical theology movement arose alongside a renewed interest in theology occasioned by the various impulses of neoorthodoxy. Salvation history identified God’s activity in critical events of faith communities as the “kernel” of theological reflection and interpretation.

G. Ernest Wright. Wright (1952) took issue with those who saw the focus of biblical theology on God’s words. Instead, he understood God’s self-revelation in Israel’s history as central to Old Testament theology. He pointed to three key elements: (1) “The Old Testament betrays a peculiar attention to history and to historical traditions as the primary sphere in which God reveals himself” (p. 55); (2) God chose a people, first through Abraham and subsequently through Moses, by whom to accomplish God’s purposes; and (3) that election was clarified by means of a covenant ceremony at Sinai, which presented legal expectations of Israel. Wright regarded Jesus’s ministry and death as the central element of the New Testament, connected to the Old Testament by means of a carefully controlled typology.

Gerhard von Rad. In what many consider the preeminent Old Testament theology for the latter half of the twentieth century, von Rad (1962) developed a “consistently heilsgeschichtlich approach” (Barr, 1999, p. 32). Rejecting a systematic description of Israel’s faith, von Rad focused instead on the formative influence of certain events on Israel’s reflection on its relationship with God. While focusing on the narrative of God’s “saving events,” von Rad critically viewed the ways in which traditions about these events developed over time. For him, Israel developed its unique