

Atoning Blood

by G.H. Lang

The sermon explores the significance of atoning blood in the context of biblical sacrifices and its ultimate fulfillment in Christ's sacrifice for humanity's redemption.

Topics: "Atonement", "Salvation"

Description

G.H. Lang preaches about the significance of atoning blood in the Bible, highlighting its dual nature of crying for vengeance and protecting from vengeance. The sermon delves into the historical and biblical evidence of blood sacrifices as a means of approaching God, emphasizing the importance of innocent substitutes dying for the guilty. The narrative explores the Passover event in Egypt as a prime example of how the blood of a lamb spared the Israelites from the destroyer, showcasing the power of blood as an agent of salvation and preservation.

Transcript

ATONING BLOOD

WHAT IT DOES AND WHAT IT DOES NOT DO

The taking of life in the service of God and to the advantage of man began immediately after man sinned. It appears that the Creator Himself originated the practice. That the fallen pair might not be always exposed to His indignation as naked, and thus unsuitable to His eye, and that their nakedness might be hidden from each other, "Jehovah God made for Adam and his wife coats of skin, and clothed them" (Gen. iii. 21). It is presumed that this involved the death of victims to provide the skins. While the basic instinct to worship the Deity is inherent in man it could scarcely have been otherwise than by Divine instruction that Abel slew a firstling of his flock and offered this, including the richest element, the fat (Gen. iv. 4).

When the judgment of the Flood had swept away the wicked, and a new era opened for the cleansed earth, Noah consecrated all to God by offering clean beasts and birds, and these must die and be burned in fire on an altar.

This distinction between living creatures, that some were "clean," suitable to and acceptable to the Deity, and some were not, continued in the remembrance and observance of the race, even after mankind had again revolted from the only true God. Of early Babylonian sacrifices Sayce says:

"It is noticeable that it was only the cultivated plant and the domesticated beast that were thus offered to the deity. The dog and swine, or rather wild boar, are never mentioned in the sacrificial list." This essential distinction was revived and amplified by Moses.

The learned author showed various other parallels between that earlier Babylonian religion and the Mosaic ritual. Ch. ix, "The Ritual of the Temple" is of great interest, but his conclusion is wrong: "The Mosaic Law must have drawn its first inspiration from the Abrahamic age." Rather was the human religion a debased survival of the original God-appointed arrangements by which man could approach Him, and the Mosaic system a revival and extension by Divine instruction of that original system of worship. 2 3 In the same way Abraham drew near to God at altars he built, and God's covenant with him was ratified by the sacrifice of clean animals and birds (Gen. xii. 7, 8; xiii. 4; xv. 9, 10). This ground of approach to God culminated in the offering of Isaac his son on an altar and the substitution of a clean animal, a ram, for the deliverance of Isaac (Gen. xxii). Isaac and Jacob similarly drew near to God at altars (Gen. xxvi. 25; 35:3, 7). During that same period Job likewise offered burnt-offerings on behalf of his family, in case their hearts had failed in reverence to God (Job i. 5).

All this is Biblical and historical evidence that from the very beginning of man's history God had taught him that, being a sinner, he could draw near to God only upon the basis that a death had taken place to redeem him from death as the consequence of his transgression of the Divine law. Death as the penalty of sin cannot be remitted but must be exacted; only it may be exacted by means of an innocent substitute dying instead of the culprit.

Down to this stage the Divine records have summarized two and a half thousands of years of man's history, and no mention has been made of the blood of the sacrifices. But it were wrong to infer from this that the use of the blood in sacrificing was unknown in earliest times and that the emphatic use of the word is a later addition not warranted by primitive usage. When writing this brief summary of the salient events of most ancient times Moses knew well (1) that the sacrificial use of blood was practised universally and known by his hearers and readers; (2) that he had already, before writing his records, explained and enforced this usage upon Israel; and (3) that in the next following sections of his history (Exodus and Leviticus) the theme would be enlarged. Thus no one of those times would make the false inference suggested, or would regard the extensive use of the blood as an innovation.

This leads to our first topic,

WHAT THE BLOOD DOES.

But before considering its atoning virtue it is most necessary to notice first its opposite power, as the background of its atoning power.

1.--BLOOD CRIES FOR VENGEANCE.

This God had sternly emphasized in the earliest years when He said to Cain: "the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground. And now cursed art thou from the ground, which hath opened its mouth to receive thy brother's blood; when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee its strength" (Gen. iv. 10-12). This, as other first events in man's history, must have been well known to Noah, seeing that for 600 years he was contemporary with Methusaleh who had been contemporary with Adam for 243 years, and that during that period the race formed but one society in one region. The memory of those words of God to Cain would, it may be taken for granted, be fresh in Noah's mind when, directly

after the Flood, God added this declaration fundamental to human society: "Every moving thing that liveth shall be food for you; as the green herb have I given you all. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. And surely your blood, the blood of your lives, will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it: and at the hand of man, even at the hand of every man's brother, will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed : for in the image of God made He man" (Gen. ix. 3-6. R.V.).

These early Divine statements are basic to the affairs of earth and man as viewed by God. They have never been abrogated but rather amplified. These essential points are to be observed:

i. That blood shed unrighteously brings Divine judgment on the very land it stains. This was incorporated into the Mosaic law. Speaking of murder Moses said: "blood it polluteth the land" (Num. xxxv. 33). Considering the torrents of blood that have been shed without Divine warrant how defiled this earth must be before God, and what judgments must hang over it. How heavy must be the wrath of heaven accumulating against, say, the United States of America with over 11,000 murders annually, and only a few punished, and 21,000 suicides.

2. Blood is the vehicle of bodily life.

This also forms the basis of sin being atoned by blood, which will be considered later from Lev. xvii. Life is the gift of God alone. No one else can impart it, though one may rob another of it. To take life therefore is to rob God. He sets upon human life such value that He exacts reparation from the man who takes it and even from the beast which takes it. Such is the control of the Creator over every creature, even the wild creatures. What an awfully solemn title of God is this : "He that maketh inquisition for blood" (Ps. ix. 12). It is said that when Metternich urged Napoleon to agree to peace and to spare human life, the Emperor replied by cursing human life. "He that maketh inquisition for blood" could not overlook this.

3. The penalty of shedding man's blood, so taking his life, is that the murderer's blood must be shed. Capital punishment is by express Divine command. It is not simply a deterrent against murder, though it is this: much more it is demanded by equity. Life is of higher value than anything else ; as Satan truly said, "all that a man hath will he give for his life" (Job ii. 4). Therefore nothing else could be accepted from the murderer in place of his life, for nothing else could be equivalent to the other man's life he had taken (Num. XXXV. 33).

4. Hence arises the prohibition against eating blood, or flesh

with the blood undrained from it. It is self-appropriation of an article which belongs exclusively to God, its only Giver, its permanent and solitary Owner. The prohibition was heavily enforced upon Israelites (Lev. xvii. 10; Deut. xii. i6, 23), and duly re-enacted upon Gentile Christians (Ac.-xv. 20; XV1. 4; xxi. 25). The ground for it admits of no exceptions.

In its highest aspect war is a Divine judgment upon peoples for their sins (Ezek. xiv. 21). Yet even so, David, the God-fearing soldier who executed this judgment on the surrounding nations, and was supported by God in his campaigns, was disqualified from the honour of building God's house at Jerusalem because he had shed much blood (I Chron. xxii. 6-8). Let the soldier who is a Christian ponder this. It emphasizes the value that God sets on human life, and that, even when war is viewed ideally, it is a lower service that disqualifies for the highest service. Suppose that the extermination of some degraded tribe or nation be a Divine judgment, required for the general moral good of mankind, yet clearly a

Christian soldier who, by order of his superiors, carries out that extermination cannot build up God's spiritual house, the church, among that people he destroys. Thus does blood shed defile man and land and cries aloud for vengeance, which cry God hears.

This being the case when any common man is murdered, how much louder must be the cry for vengeance of the holy blood of the murdered Son of God. What an incubus of guilt and penalty His murderers accepted when they shouted in a frenzy of rage "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matt. xxvii. 25). That penalty is not yet exhausted because, as a people, the descendants maintain the attitude to Christ of their ancestors. The observant sojourner in Palestine can note how the above cited curse upon the soil is in force, for the nearer one gets to Jerusalem the more sun-scorched and barren is the land.

11.--BLOOD PROTECTS FROM VENGEANCE.

Some fourteen centuries B.C. God was dealing judicially with the richest and dominant nation on earth, the Egyptians. The visitor to the monuments of that period can see the damning records the people left of their vileness and cruelty. These make fully credible the account of Moses in Exodus of the enslavement and bitter oppression of Israel by Pharaoh, with the order to kill all infant boys. This is the judicial background for the severe penalties exacted from them by the 4 5 6 Judge of all the earth. The culminating crime of Pharaoh and his people was this : The supreme and only God, the Creator of all men, had seen fit to choose one race to be to Him among the nations what a firstborn son is to the father of a family, even the senior member of the circle under the father. Pharaoh was enslaving that chosen race and had designed their absorption into his people, by killing the boys and marrying the girls to Egyptians. To this tyrant Jehovah sent the message : " Israel is My son, My firstborn: and I have said unto thee, Let My son go that he may serve Me; and thou hast refused to let him go : behold, I will slay thy son, thy firstborn " (Ex. iv. 22, 23).

The haughty monarch of the ruling nation on earth was not prepared to see his supremacy pass to this hated race of slaves and he doggedly rejected the demand. After much patience, and when it had become evident that the king and his people would not yield, the execution of the Divine decree was ordered, which Moses announced in these words "Thus saith Jehovah, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of cattle." (Ex. xi. 4, 5).

i. God acts personally. It is to be noted that : A judgment so extensive and terrific was superintended by God personally: "I will go out into the midst of Egypt." This had been the case at four earlier crises recorded : (a) God had Himself dealt with Cain : (b) "Jehovah sat as King at the Flood" (Ps. xxix. 10) : (c) when at Babel the whole race was set on its own exaltation, "Jehovah came down to see the city and tower which the children of men builded" (Gen. xi. 5), before He confounded their speech and scattered them: and (d) when two great cities were to be destroyed by fire from heaven Jehovah said : " I will go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it [angelic report concerning it, with application for judgment], which is come unto Me; and if not, I will know" (Gen. xviii. 2!).

Lesser situations on earth might be left to angel or human rulers in the execution of powers entrusted to them by God as the universal Sovereign, but on such solemn and fearful occasions He personally superintended for the securing of strict and impartial justice. See further Josh. v. 13- Vi 2 Ezek. viii ; ix, esp. 3, 4 : Rev. v ; vi. i ; xix. 11-16 xx. II : etc.

2. The Destroyer acts. The recognition of this personal presence of God is essential to a true understanding of the events in Egypt that fateful night, even as Jehovah said:

"I will go out into the midst of Egypt," and as Moses added, "Jehovah will pass through to smite the Egyptians," but he 5 6 7 adds, "Jehovah will pass over the door, and will not suffer the Destroyer to come into your houses to smite you" (Ex. xi. 4; xii. 23). This great Destroyer is a distinct figure in Holy Scripture. He acts here ; he smote Israel in the days of David (II Sam. xxiv. 15, i6 : II Chron. xxi. 14, 15) ; .he destroyed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night (Isa. xxxvii. 36) ; and in Rev. ix. i i, in connection with one of the appalling judgments of the End days, his very name is given in its Hebrew and Greek forms, Abaddon and Apollyon, both meaning Destroyer. All the ancient world knew of him and dreaded him. To him they attributed the unexpected deaths of men, as the Greeks said, "Apollo has shot him with his arrow." Abaddon is here described as the angel ruler of the Abyss, the world of the dead. The word is found at Job xxvi. 6 ; xxviii. 22 ; xxxi. 12 : Ps. lxxxviii. II : Prov. xv. ii xxvii. 20 only. In each case it is associated with Death and Sheol, the world of the dead; and the passages range from about 1000 B.C. to 1700 B.C., which includes the period of the Exodus.

It was therefore a terrible threat that this mighty Angel of Destruction should be let loose on Egypt and kill in every house. All the preceding plagues had been inflicted by angels, as it is said of God: "He cast upon them [the Egyptians] the fierceness of His anger, wrath and indignation and trouble, a sending of angels of evil" (Ps. lxxviii. 49) not merely "evil angels," as A.V., but as R.V., "angels of evil," angels who because evil by nature would eagerly inflict evil. This last judgment would be the culmination of the dread work of the Destroyer and his hosts.

This is not past history only. Pharaoh and his servants had hardened their necks, and had not obeyed the truth as to the true God, Jehovah, and His will, brought to their knowledge by Moses. On the contrary they had obeyed unrighteousness; upon them had been poured out God's "anger, wrath, indignation, and distress." Romans ii. 8 denounces against all in every age who so defy God "wrath and indignation, tribulation, and anguish," the same solemn terms with which the Psalmist described the judgments on Egypt of old.

And the agency is the same; for when the Lord comes down again for the judgment of His foes who have not acquainted themselves with God, nor obeyed the good tidings of the Lord Jesus, nor received the love of the truth that they might be saved, then shall the same supreme Judge who dealt with Egypt be accompanied by "the angels of His power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance" (II Thes. i. 7-9; ii. 9-12) ; even as He said, "so shall it be at the consummation of the age; the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the righteous, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire : there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth."

It was thus in Egypt that awful 6 7 8 night of old when" there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead" (Matt. xiii. 4!, 42, 49, 50 : Ex. xii. 30). 3. Justice distinguishes. The words of our Lord just quoted from Matthew show that when God executes judgment His wrath is guided with strict discrimination. He distinguished between Abel and Cain: He saved Noah and his family: He delivered righteous Lot from the overthrow of Sodom. In the days of Ezekiel He set a mark upon each who sighed and cried over all the abominations that blighted Jerusalem, and He forbade the destroying angels to touch these, though no others were to be spared (Ezek. ix.).

It must always be thus, and it was to be so that night in Egypt. But upon what ground in Divine law could the Israelites be rightly exempt? Morally and religiously they were no better than the Egyptians. The strict laws and severe penalties which Moses had to impose on them after their deliverance from Egypt show that their moral life was in general as low as that of their Egyptian tyrants. Slavery ever debases. Ere Joshua left the next generation, which he had led to victory in Canaan, he reminded them that their first ancestors had originally served false gods in Chaldea and that their immediate ancestors had worshipped the gods of Egypt.

For a time there were exceptions, such as the parents of Moses and Moses himself (Heb. xi. 23-26). But forty years after his flight he had to remind the God of Abraham that the patriarch's descendants in Egypt did not even know the name of Abraham's God (Ex. iii. 13). It is a natural tendency with slaves to accommodate themselves to the opinions and practices of their oppressors, if they may thereby gain a lightening of their lot. From Ezekiel xx. 7-9 we learn the same : for God tells the Israelites of that time that, in the day when He made Himself known unto their fathers in Egypt, He had been obliged to say to them "Cast ye away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt," but that at first the people rebelled against the moral deprivations and the change of religion. Therefore they were legally under sentence of death with the Egyptians, and on what ground could they be justly spared?

4. The Passover Blood. The answer given in the famous account found in Exodus xii is that for each house a lamb without blemish was to be killed, and "they shall take of the blood, and put it on the two side posts and on the lintel, upon the houses wherein they shall eat it . . . And the blood shall be to you a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and there shall no plague be upon you to destroy you when I smite the land of Egypt . . . ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the 7 two side posts with the blood that is in the basin: and none of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. For Jehovah will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, Jehovah will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come into your houses to smite you" (Ex. xii. 5-7, 22, 23).

The term "pass over" in verse i is distinct from the "pass through" of verse 12 (A.V.), which distinction the R.V. indicates by its rendering "go through." The latter means to go through in judgment; the former to pass over and preserve. Yet "passover" obscures the picture and the manner of deliverance. The real sense is found in Isa. xxxi. 5, which speaks of a deliverance of Jerusalem yet to come. Here Jehovah compares Himself and His preserving action to a mother bird fluttering over her young, darting to and fro, to defend them from some beast or reptile that would attack them : "As birds hovering, so will Jehovah of hosts protect Jerusalem ; He will protect and deliver them, He will pass over and preserve " (A.S.V.) ; or as Darby : " As birds with outstretched wings, so will Jehovah of hosts cover Jerusalem; covering, He will also deliver, passing over, He will rescue " ; or Delitzsch : " Like fluttering birds, so will Jehovah of hosts screen Jerusalem; screening and delivering, sparing and setting free," on which this learned commentator writes : "The word *pasoach* recalls to mind the deliverance from Egypt (as in ch. xxx. 29) in a very significant manner. The sparing of the Israelites by the destroyer passing over their doors, from which the passover derived its name, would be repeated once more . . . Jehovah's attitude [is] . . . one resembling the action of birds, as they soar round and above their threatened nests." Upon this Hebrew word Canon Cook (Speaker's Commentary in loco) says: "In Egyptian the word *Pesh*, which corresponds to it very nearly in form, means to 'spread out the wings over,' and 'to protect'; see Brugsch, 'D.H.' p. 512."

This gives significance to the phrase in verse 23 above that "Jehovah will not suffer the destroyer to come into your houses to smite you." That great Destroyer, being an evil angel prince, would have gone into every house blood or no blood, but God Himself restrained him as to the houses sprinkled with blood. Hence the prophet as he recalls the past says of Jehovah, "So He was their Saviour" (Isa. lxiii. 8). And He spared and saved solely out of regard to the blood.

It must not be supposed that this striking method of preserving a house from danger of death was new at that time. On the contrary it was practised in early Babylonia, whence both the Hebrew and Egyptian races had migrated. Prof. Sayce writes: Still more interesting it is to find in the ritual of the prophets instructions for the sacrifice of a lamb at the gate of the house, the blood of which is to be smeared on the lintels and doorposts, as well as on the colossal images that guarded the entrance.

And he shows that the most ancient customs may persist the ages through, long after their meaning may have been lost, by adding: To this day in Egypt the same rite is practised, and when my dahabiah [sailing boat on the Nile] was launched I had to conform to it. On this occasion the blood of the lamb was allowed to fall over the sides of the lower deck. (Religions 472).

It is evident that neither Moses, nor a supposed later redactor or imposter, invented this story to serve some imagined religious end. God on this occasion was reviving, purifying, and applying a primeval rite, one which we must presume had formed part of an original body of instructions given by Himself as to how sinful men could be granted Divine mercy without dereliction of Divine justice. This means of grace was that life must be sacrificed that life might be spared, an unblemished substitute dying in place of the death-doomed sinner. And in this history of the Passover there comes the heaviest possible emphasis upon the use of the blood as the agent of salvation : "When I see the blood" I will spare and preserve.

Thus in the one case the blood cries for just vengeance, yet in the other case protects from just vengeance.

Abel's blood for vengeance

Pleadeth to the skies,

But the blood of Jesus

For our pardon cries.

(E. Caswell).

On July 21st, 1914, with the Egyptian summer sun at full blaze, I stood alone, in the stillness of the desert, amid the roofless, ruined houses of Pithom, the treasure city built by Pharaoh's cruelly oppressed slaves of Israel. One could somewhat estimate the severity of their work in such heat and also, gazing at the broken doorway of a small brick house, one pondered whether perhaps that was a lintel that had been splashed with blood and where Jehovah arrested the steps of that fierce Destroyer. Does my reader know in personal heart experience the meaning and power of the events of that far off stirring night? or is it all to him but one among other curious items of antiquity?

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