

## Progressive Revelation

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**The Bible is a complete, correct, and internally consistent, revelation from the Creator God** to his most important creation, human beings. This revelation gives us the information we need to properly serve God. The text we have in the Bible was written over thousands of years by many different persons under very different historical and cultural conditions. An important concept in understanding the teaching of the Bible is “progressive revelation”. **God does not reveal all information on a topic at one time or in one place.** The entire Bible must be considered in order to understand God’s teaching on any topic. **To properly put the teaching all together requires the guidance of the Holy Spirit** (Is28:9-10,12b-13). To properly understand the revelation in the Bible it is necessary to understand the historical and cultural milieu of each author and what that author intended to say to his original audience. This understanding is the groundwork, the foundation, for allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us into a complete understanding of God’s teaching. **The revelation of the sacrificial system is an example of “progressive revelation”.**

**Early Incidence of Sacrifice:** We have no record of any instruction given to **Cain and Abel**, but they knew about offerings. Abel offered an animal, from which we can infer he knew it had to be killed (see Gn4:3-4). Next is **Noah** after the flood. Again, we have no record of any instruction from God to Noah, but Noah knew to sacrifice only “clean animals”, he was familiar with the concept of “burnt offerings”, and he knew that the “smoke” was a “pleasing aroma” to God. (see Gn8:20-21) The patriarchs, **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**, all built altars and made “offerings” (see for example Gn12:7-8, 13:18, 26:25, 35:1-7, 46:1). The first record we have of instruction for sacrifice is **Abraham’s covenant ratification ceremony** (Gn15:7-11, 17-8a, Jr34:18). The first instance of a sacrifice that was clearly **not a “burnt offering”** is Genesis 31:51-54. The first **Passover** was a unique offering – very specific instructions are recorded. It comprised an animal sacrificed and consumed, not burned. (see Ex12:3-11)

**The Instructions in Horeb:** Clearly **God intended a sacrificial system to be central to Israel’s worship.** Immediately after speaking the Ten Commandments, YHWH delivered the **Covenant Code** to Moses. (see Exodus chapters 21, 22, and 23) The prelude to the Covenant Code is all about sacrifice, note that “**peace offerings**” are first mentioned (Ex20:18-21, 24:1-4a, 20:22-26). The **Covenant Ratification Ceremony** is very important because it specifies the first explicit use of the “blood” of the sacrificial victim (Ex24:4b-11). After the ceremony, Moses and Joshua went back up the mountain and received the **instructions for the Tabernacle** (see Ex24:12-18). In the instructions for the Tabernacle (see Exodus chapters 25-30), the standard offering types, **sin offering, burnt offering, peace offering, and grain offering** are all discussed, as well as several specialized types of offerings: drink, wave, incense, Shekel. Only the “guilt” or “trespass” offering is NOT discussed.

**The formalization of the sacrificial system is in the first chapters of Leviticus:** instructions for **the people** 1:3-6:7 and instructions for **the priests** 6:8-7:38. The **consecration ceremony** for the priests, chapter 8, and the **covenant renewal ceremony**, chapter 9, use the formalized instructions. Later, just before entry into the Promised Land, another series of **public sacrifices** was specified in Numbers chapters 28 and 29. It is possible that the delivered system was more complicated than God had originally intended (see Jr7:22-23). If the people had NOT broken the covenant in the golden calf incident (see Ex32:1-10), the covenant renewal ceremony would NOT have been necessary. The Prophet Amos alludes to the final series of public sacrifices (see Am5:25).

**God’s Intention for Sacrifices: The Sinai Covenant was very simple:** Israel would be a nation under God; the people would obey the teaching of God and keep the covenant; the nation would become a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation”; and, they would receive God’s blessing (see Ex19:3-8a). **The sacrificial system was to teach the people “holiness”** (Ex6:6-7, Lv26:11-12,11:44-45; see also Lv19:2, 20:7,26, 21:8, Nm6:5, 15:40). **The function of the priesthood was to teach the people “holiness” through the animal sacrifices** (Lv10:10-11, Ex29:38a, 42-46). Predicated on the Sinai Covenant and the people’s becoming a “holy nation”, God committed himself to a covenant to accomplish his purpose through the nation of Israel (Ex34:10).

**God’s Requirements: Killing of animals is an object lesson:** sin requires death; the animal is a surrogate for the offeror; only shed blood can make atonement for sin (Rm3:23, 6:23a, Lv17:11). God revealed to King David the deeper meaning of sacrifices: **the attitude of the offeror is far more important than the actual sacrifice** (Ps40:6, 50:7-9,13-15,23, 51:16-19; see also Ps4:5, 5:3, 20:3, 27:6, 32:6, 54:6, 56:12, 110:3, 141:2). Later Psalmists and Prophets echo David (Ps116:16-18; see also Ps66:13-16, 96:8, 107:22, 119:108; **Is1:11,13, 53:10a**; see also Is40:16, 43:23-24, 56:7, 66:3,20; **Jr 6:20**; see also Jr7:21-22, 14:12, 17:26, 33:11,18; **Hs6:6**; see also Hs8:13, 9:4; **Am 5:21-25**; see also Am4:4-5; **Mc6:6-8**)

**The True Sacrifice: The Old Testament sacrificial system foreshadowed the propitiating sacrifice of Jesus Christ** (Hb10:3-4, 9:11-15a, 10:8-10). **The Plan of God has been intact from the beginning.** Informal sacrifices in patriarchal times were part of the Plan. The Old Testament system of sacrifices was part of the Plan. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the most important part of the Plan (1Pt1:20, Hb9:25-26). The purpose of sacrifice remains unchanged: **God requires True Worshipers to become Holy** (1Pt2:4-5, 9-10).

**Progressive Revelation:** To pick up the story of the sacrificial system at any one point, and to take only that point in time as the teaching of God, results in incomplete and incorrect understanding. It is necessary to understand the complete revelation from start to finish within the cultural milieu of each period. The authors of the Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit – **the guidance of the Holy Spirit is required to put together the correct understanding of God’s teaching** (Jh14:25-29, 16:12-15). Pray for deeper understanding and “**search the scriptures daily**” (At17:11).

At any given period of history, God has revealed what was necessary for True Worshipers to know in order to serve God. **We have the complete revelation**, but it requires effort and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to properly understand God’s whole teaching on any subject. God planned for sacrifices from the beginning. Initially, informal sacrifices were acceptable – principally, burnt offerings. For Israel, a more elaborate system was required, so that each person could participate and be accounted “holy” by God. **To have a relationship with God, we must be accounted “holy” by God.** For Christians, this is only possible through the propitiating sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ.

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