

The Important PURPOSE for the Ceremonial LAW

“Done Away for Good and for All Time.” This is the Chant of Traditional Christians of nearly every Persuasion regarding the Old Covenant worship system. WHY did God give the LAW to Israel in the First Place? And, Will it be among the ‘All Things’ that are to be ‘RESTORED’ under Christ? (Matthew 17:11 & Acts 1:6)

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While Christian religions nominally affirm the importance of the Moral Code as found in both Testaments, (at least most of it), what are known as the ‘Ten Commandments’, the Ceremonial Laws, are held in a different regard entirely.

Certain Patriarchs of ancient times knew of and were examples of God’s moral Laws, as we can read of in places such as Genesis 26:5. Realizing that the Laws of God were not ‘invented’ for the first time as the children of Israel encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai, which is a major premise of many in the evangelical world, we are confronted with an important question. “Why did God create a lengthy list of ‘ceremonial’ laws that He required the national priesthood perform incessantly?”

Not a NEW Thing

Though the formal ceremonial performances were given by Moses after (a year after?) the giving of the Ten Commandments, we are forced to realize, by the examples of Cain and Abel, Noah, Job, Abram, Isaac and Jacob, that ritual sacrificing was NOT a Mosaic institution. From earliest times, even before the Flood, and in many non-Israelitish societies, the performance of ceremonial and sacrificial rituals was culturally embedded. (1st Cor. 8:4) Even Egypt, Greece and pagan Rome offered sacrifices, and not in imitation of any ancient “Jewish” practice.

The point here? Ceremonial or sacrificial laws did not originate at Mount Sinai. So, the suggestion that they ‘came in with’ and ‘are ended with’ the “Old Covenant” system is an entirely faulty premise though one popularly accepted.

But, why did God impose a ceremonial form of worship with the emerging Nation of Israel under the Covenant He was making with them? If it was His intention to later “do away with it all”, what possible purpose was there for all that WORK, all that BLOOD and gore, all that water and firewood, all the laundering of bloody garments and all those ‘wasted’ animals? And, then realizing that all of that rigid ritualism did not render the worshippers, to any real degree, sinless,¹ most are left without a credible answer. From a modern religious perspective, the question is quite understandable.

Is There Any Useful Point?

So, was God capricious or absent minded? Is He in the business of imposing pointless ritualistic demands upon the time and resources of His worshippers, only to leave them no better off with respect to being absolved of their sins?

Now, do the scriptures anywhere address this question? Do we have any commentary from any New Testament writer who explains the seeming pointlessness of all of that “old form” of worship?

Some might ask, what does it matter? We understand what we need to understand for our day. What might have been a concern to them is no particular concern to us!

That approach might have traction among those who are generally unfamiliar with the whole Plan

¹ “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.” Hebrews 10:4

of God as it involves the greater majority of humanity, but a number of biblical passages raise further disturbing questions still! We will come to those.

What Was It All For?

Why did God give the Ceremonial Law to Israel? (And for that matter, why not to other peoples?) A modern Bible student, listening to their Bible College-educated pastor, might conclude that the **only** reason why God gave them those specific requirements was so that He could ‘do away with it all’ as soon as He could. Hopefully, we’re not satisfied with such reasoning. Even that position leaves us with an obvious question. What did it DO for them? What ‘temporary benefit’ did they derive from it at the time, even though it was only a precursor of something substantially better that would be brought on scene at a later date?

We are drawn logically to a realization that the Old Covenant and its Ceremonial performances (also called “the Law”) **did** have intrinsic value, though not necessarily in providing forgiveness of their sins,² but in **preparing** their minds for that later-to-be renewed “New” Covenant, one that provided that essential agency, the REAL Lamb of God, not that symbolic one they offered repetitively. In other words, the ceremonial legal system was largely educational. It made them **aware** of their sinful condition, and what needed to be done about it, but without actually doing something about it.³

Educational Preparedness

Now, this brings us to an interesting realization. If a people were made aware of their condition, and if they were repetitively impressed with the process, (though only thru symbolic means), of those things that needed to be done to remedy their incessant sinful conduct, what good could it have done them, considering that virtually all of those people were long dead before the time of Christ? Another dilemma!

Let’s consider the premise from a different angle. If a people were ‘made ready’ in their minds to be

² Hebrews 10:1-4 & 11

³ Romans 7:7-25

brought into that “New Covenant”, what good did it DO them, considering that they were all dead well before the New Covenant was available?

Considering the New Covenant

It would be informative for us to pause for a moment and consider the major differences made possible under the New Covenant. First, we have the True Lamb of God, which makes the remission of sins possible,⁴ where their repetitive physical representations could not. Secondly, we have a new High Priest interceding on our behalf, before the very Throne of God in Heaven,⁵ offering His OWN Blood for the remission of our sins. An **effective** ritual, as opposed to the **ineffective** representative one presented again and again under the Old Covenant system. Those rituals might have acquainted them with those functions (IF they were attentive – likely they weren’t) but they were ineffective other than to educate the worshipper at the time. But what good is education in the grave?

(We should also keep in mind that our reviewing of those ritualistic performances and their inherent symbology teaches US important lessons as it did (or should have) them!⁶ We in this age are blessed to have the results of their experiences to consider in the process of availing ourselves of the redemptive opportunity that we now have, that they simply did not!) It would be good to review Hebrews chapters 7 thru 10 in connection with this subject.

But from the Old Covenant era, we have a nation at least nominally acquainted with God’s Plan of redemption, even though they were not in receipt of its efficacy at the time. Those peoples are all now deceased, not having received the Promises. What purpose, what benefit, did it provide them? This is the question, and it is germane to our question of the real purpose of the Ceremonial Law having been given to them in the first place.

A Not So Hidden Clue!

In the book of Genesis, at that place in time when “the Promise” was first being confirmed, a very

⁴ Hebrews 9:11-15

⁵ Hebrews 9:24 & 7:22-28

⁶ 1st Corinthians 10:11

meaningful ritual Sacrifice was instructed,⁷ that Abraham participated in, but only in a physical way, by way of setting up the Sacrifice. He was not a participant in the key procession. God alone was the Officiant, being made manifest by two Divine Representations. But it is **not** the two representations that I want us to consider at this point. (Those are covered in more specific detail in another article: “*The Abrahamic Covenant*”.) It is the sacrificial animals themselves that are of particular interest for the progression they outline.

God made an immutable Covenant with Abraham employing **four** specific types of sacrifices. That event has direct application to all ages, even to us! (Gal 3:16 & 29) In order of progression, there were a heifer, a she goat, a male lamb, and **two birds**. These revealed the progression through which God would work His redemptive Covenantal Process through all ages. We could refer to this as the “**Everlasting Covenant**”, but its progression of types of sacrifice reveal the evolving characteristic of it. The heifer (bull) represented the Patriarchal Era, (Abraham to Moses – the Law existed in this era, as Abraham was commended as being a dedicated Law keeper!); the she goat the Old Covenant era; the male lamb the New Covenant era. Each of these are animals in their reproductive prime. It’s the two similar but distinct bird types that add interest to this amazing scene, being exceptions in two distinct ways.

Two Distinct Types of Worshipper

Considering the sacrificial progression, as God presented them in Genesis 15, we’re drawn to the post-Christian era as being what the two birds represent in the developmental progression of the Covenant: Quite similar to each other in a way, but distinctly different in another. And, one of the two is shown to be not fully matured, “*young*” as it words it. Now, anyone familiar with a young bird, particularly a pigeon, realizes that it can appear to be fully grown, looking almost like its mature parent, but unable as yet to fly. These differ from the other sacrifices in two ways: first, they are not blood sacrifices, like the others; second, one is immature, not yet capable of bearing offspring. Also notice, it is only the dove, of all the sacrificial

types, that’s age-indefinite! Naturally, we’d wonder what relevance these two types of birds would have in God’s redemptive Plan. There IS one!

But being representations of the Covenant extant in the post-Christian era, we realize it represents the millennial age: The 1000 years following the Second Coming, a world ruled by Christ and His immortal Saints. This is an era which does not require any further blood sacrifice, as that effective Sacrifice was accomplished at the onset of the Christian era. However, that Sacrifice will not apply to all at that time. It will apply only to those who have come under the terms of the Everlasting Covenant. Now, in the millennial age, there will be two kinds of Covenant peoples living together: those converted (represented by the dove), and those ‘being converted’ (represented by the ‘young’ pigeon). Those who survive through the Great Tribulation and their physical descendents will re-populate that world. But conversion will not be (nor has it ever been) automatic!

The Law Our Schoolmaster

But it’s the reinstatement of a Sacrificial System, as we read of in the last 13 chapters of Ezekiel that is profoundly revealing. These amazingly detailed chapters show that the Law is **not** “all done away” as religiosity wants to believe. Neither the Ten Commandments, nor the Sacrificial Ceremonial System, (though the latter is suspended under the present Covenant era). In the millennial age, two separate systems will be functional: a system similar to the Old Covenant Sacrificial system for those being prepared for conversion and ultimate salvation, and another system similar to the present New Covenant system, appropriate to those who have entered into the Covenant, being converted. The purpose of the sacrificial / ceremonial system, then, as in ancient history, is to prepare the minds of the worshipper to be able to understand the steps involved in becoming truly converted. As Paul said, *the Law was our schoolmaster, to bring us unto Christ*. He understood! Not just acting ‘religious’, but changed inwardly, putting on the ‘new man’ fully imitating Christ. Modern religious peoples by-and-large ‘fake’ this condition!

Keeping in mind that this is THE open opportunity period for Salvation for all living humanity at that

⁷ Read of this event in Genesis 14:18 through 15:21

point in time, insincere ‘conversion’ is effectively a self-imposed death sentence. Any commitment made in that era is life-binding. There will then be **no excuse** for ignorance. “*The earth (then) will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*” (Habakkuk 2:14)

But that is for the future. What about the past?

Why the OC Sacrificial System?

Considering that all of those who came under the Old Covenant ceremonial / sacrificial system in the ancient past, are long dead, and considering that it did not lead to true conversion on their part, we are drawn to ask, why? What was the purpose for all that heavy labor and gore?

When we understand the real message of Ezekiel 37, the ‘valley of dry bones’ chapter, we’re presented with a graphic picture of what will happen at the end of the 1000 years, as Revelation 20:5 explains. After the 1000 years, the ‘rest of the dead’ will be restored to physical life. Israel will be given God’s Holy Spirit, largely en-masse, as they were prepared for its receipt, in that they already experienced the lessons of that ‘schoolmaster system’ in their first lifetimes. There are lessons in the Law! The ‘model nation’ that Israel was always intended to be will emerge onto the world scene already largely prepared for true conversion,⁸ while the other nations, **un**prepared, will have to experience a form of a Ceremonial System until such time as they are ready for conversion.

God has prepared Israel, BOTH houses we might add, for ultimate salvation.⁹ They will lead the rest of the world in the conversion process, while erroneous religious concepts will be cleansed from their minds. This isn’t a mere intellectual exercise, like it is with many today, it’ll involve reorienting the minds of these emerging potential believers, formerly pagans and agnostics, to the Truth of God’s Way of Life: Worshipping the True God, living by His righteous Commandments. Fresh out of their graves, those greater masses of humanity will not be at all ready for that. And, they’ll have

⁸ Ezekiel 37:14 “*I will put my spirit in you...*”


⁹ Most people today are blissfully unaware of who the two houses of Israel are. It’s a greater ethnicity than just the Jews!

the contaminations of their vile past to overcome, thankfully without Satan’s influence. (Rev. 20:1-3)

(Let’s not forget that some in the Patriarchal age were quite familiar with a sacrificial system also.)

So the populations of the millennial age who are not ready to become converted, will, in the interim, worship God under a physical system comparable to that system that national Israel once worshipped under. As they are brought to a state where they CAN come to Christ, then they will come under a grace-based system (resembling the New Covenant Era) as they work through their conversion process. (God’s spring Holydays illustrate that process). Those who are resurrected after the millennial age will be subject to the same. This is the Covenant condition represented by the two birds: the young pigeon and the dove. There will be two kinds of worshipper living together in that future society.

Consider Ezekiel 44:6-9. These two kinds of worshipper, illustrated by either physical circumcision or circumcision of the heart, are pre-required before anyone can rightfully ‘enter His Temple, availing themselves of its function. (See also Rev. 11:19.)

God has a Plan by which the greatest number of individuals can be brought to Salvation. He is not willing that any should perish, and His Plan is completely commensurate with that! His Ceremonial System is not the contemptible or pointless ‘burden’ that religious society has long made it out to be! It had, and it will have, a great purpose in the World-Redemption Process. It is the lead-up environment to create the state of mind that can become truly converted: in that period of time allotted to ‘whosoever wills’! 

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