



discover insight

*Uncover the secret meanings behind ancient rituals
and why their insights are relevant for us today*

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Published by HopeChannel

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Typeset in Univers

Printed in Australia by Signs Publishing Company®

Unless otherwise stated all Bible texts are from the **New King James Version**

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In April 1943, during World War II, a fisherman found a body floating off the coast of Spain. The corpse was dressed in a trench coat, a uniform and boots, with a black attaché case chained to one of his wrists. His wallet identified him as Major William Martin, of the British Royal Marines. Though the Spanish authorities were willing to hand the case over to the English, the British declined. They asked that the handover go through regular channels. This was an odd decision, because in the days that followed the British had sent a series of frantic requests to the Spanish asking about the whereabouts of Major Martin's briefcase.

Meanwhile, the Germans found out about the corpse of the British officer with the attaché case chained to his wrist, and through the help of sympathisers in the Spanish government were able to get access to the contents of the case in a way that didn't reveal it had been opened. What they found astonished them! It contained secret plans which revealed that English and American forces planned to cross the Mediterranean from their positions in North Africa and launch an attack on Nazi-held Greece and Sardinia. In response, Hitler transferred an entire Panzer division from France to Greece, in an effort to halt the coming assault.

One slight problem - later that year, Allied troops from North Africa did launch an assault, but rather than landing in Greece and Sardinia, as the plans in Major Martin's briefcase clearly said, they invaded Sicily instead.

What happened?

Major Martin it turned out, had been a mentally ill vagrant who had eaten a fatal dose of rat poison. His body, removed from a London morgue, was dressed up in the uniform, given the fake identification along with the fake war plans in the briefcase, and then dumped offshore by the British

in hopes of the Germans getting their hands on him, which they did. Believing that what they read in the briefcase was true, the Nazis fell for what has been called one of the most remarkable deceptions in modern military history.

DECEPTIONS

Though, in this case, the deception turned out for the best, deceptions are just that - deceptions - purposeful means by which the false is hidden or covered by something that appears true and trustworthy.

And, as has been seen so far, Satan is working his deceptions upon the whole world which is involved in this grand epic. We are participants in a planet in rebellion - in a struggle between good and evil. It's the only worldview that makes sense of history and our world today; and it gives hope for the future.



And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. ... Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.

Revelation 12:7-9, 12

Satan is seeking to deceive *the whole world*. And considering the endless number of views about life, about God, about the meaning of human existence - views that are so often in contradiction to each other - many people are, in fact, being deceived. And the scary thing about being deceived is you don't know when you are!

COULD LIFE BE MEANINGFUL?

Such as poor Mitchell Heisman. Though once a believer in God, he lost his faith and wandered into Nihilism, which teaches that the answer to life's meaning is that there is no answer, no purpose, and no grand goal. We just exist, by chance, in a meaningless environment. Hence, our lives are meaningless as well.

Who hasn't, often in times of woe and pain - especially when that woe and pain seemed so pointless - wondered if that weren't true, and if life weren't meaningless? Such belief becomes even easier to accept because, for the past hundred years, atheistic evolution has been incessantly promoted by certain segments of society, thus giving Nihilism a scientific basis.

Mitchell Heisman's thinking led him to believe in the utter pointlessness of life - a terrible deception. *Every word, every thought, and every emotion*, he wrote, *come back to one core problem: life is meaningless. The experiment in Nihilism is to seek out and expose every illusion and every myth, wherever it may lead, no matter what, even if it kills us.*

THE SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM

It is Satan who has been deceiving the world because, as with Mitchell, wrong ideas, wrong views, wrong teachings - all have consequences.

And no question, one of his greatest deceptions has to do with the character of God Himself. Unable to get everyone to believe as Michael Heisman did that God doesn't exist, Satan has done the next best thing, which is to get people to misunderstand God's character instead.

And he has been able to deceive many regarding the character of God through twisting and distorting the concept of sacrifice. Though in the Bible one of the most beautiful and powerful revelations of the self-denying, loving character of God has been revealed in the biblical sacrificial system, the whole idea of sacrifice has been perverted to make God look like a blood-thirsty and vengeful tyrant who demands these sacrifices in order to avert His anger.

For instance, in the city of Cuzco in Peru, ruins remain of the altar where the priests of that ancient religion would sacrifice young girls to the Incan gods. What kind of god would ask a parent to allow their daughters to be purposefully butchered? That's just one example of how the whole idea of sacrifice, which was to reveal what God Himself would do for us, has been perverted in a dreadful way that distorts His true character.

THE DEATH OF JESUS

In contrast, the biblical view of sacrifice and what it teaches about the character of God - as opposed to all these false views - can be summed up in these texts about Jesus:



Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Philippians 2:5-8

These few texts capture not just the essence of Christianity but the essence of biblical truth, which is that God, the Creator of the universe, offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. That is, God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, willingly gave Himself as a sacrifice for sin - yours and mine!

Someone once asked a Christian, *Explain to me in less than one hundred words what your religion teaches.* He answered, *My religion teaches that human beings, given moral freedom, have disobeyed the law of God, which has brought evil and sin and suffering into this world. Rather, though, than make human beings pay the penalty for that evil, which would be eternal death, God Himself, the Creator of the universe, came down, took upon Himself our humanity, and in that humanity paid the penalty for our sin and evil so we never have to pay it ourselves. That is what Jesus' death on the cross was: the Creator paying Himself the penalty for our sins.*

And the Old Testament sacrificial system pointed to the death of Jesus, the Creator, for our sins.

THE SIN-BEARER

There's a story in the Old Testament - one of many actually - that captures this amazing truth, that the sacrifices in the Bible were to symbolise God Himself, in the person of Jesus, as the One who would bear humanity's sin.

After the children of Israel were miraculously delivered from Egypt, they were soon in rebellion against God; sinning and doing evil. Knowing that they could be punished for such a flagrant violation of God's will, Moses prayed that the Lord would forgive them.



Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin - but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.

Exodus 32:31-32

What is incredible is the verb Moses used in the text, translated as forgive. It comes from a Hebrew word - *nasa* - which means to bear, to carry. By far, that's the most common use of the word. But it also means to forgive. In other words, forgiveness is linked to sin being borne or carried by another. Thus, that phrase could have just as correctly been translated, *Yet now, if You will bear their sin ...*

Was Moses actually asking God Himself to bear the sins of the people? Yes! And many centuries later the Lord answered that request: Jesus bore those sins on the cross.

Talking about Jesus, the Bible says:



***Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree,
that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness -
by whose stripes you were healed.***

1 Peter 2:24

Here Peter is paraphrasing from the Old Testament book of Isaiah 53, which predicted Christ's death on the cross centuries before it happened. Isaiah wrote this about Jesus:



***Surely He has borne our griefs.
And carried our sorrows.***

Isaiah 53:4

And this:



And He bore the sin of many.

Isaiah 53:12

In both cases, the verb translated *borne* or *bore* is *nasa*, which also means to forgive.

Yes, God did institute the system of sacrifices, but not for the counterfeit reasons that Satan has pawned off on the world, that God was a bloodthirsty tyrant who demanded sacrifices in order to ward off His anger. Instead, they were to show that God Himself, in the person of Jesus, would ultimately come and pay the penalty for our sins.

THE SANCTUARY

This powerful truth, that God Himself would come into humanity and bear in Himself the punishment for our sins, was prefigured in the ancient Hebrew sacrificial system. After the Exodus from Egypt, the Lord said to Moses:



And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.

Exodus 25:8

This sanctuary, a portable tent structure, actually was the model for the later famous Temple in Jerusalem, whose ruins can still be seen today.

What this text says, however, is amazing. The Creator God tells these people, wanderers in the desert, to make a sanctuary, a building, so that *I may dwell among them.*

The Creator of the universe was willing to dwell among humanity!

That's one example; a symbol of what Jesus Himself would do: He would come to dwell among us.



And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

The Greek verb John used for the verb to dwell comes directly from the same Greek used in the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament) for the sanctuary mentioned above. Thus, John related

the presence of God in the earthly tabernacle with the presence of God in Christ, who in the flesh *dwelt among us*.

TUMOT

However, that's only the beginning. It's one thing for God to condescend to dwell among humans in an earthly structure. That's hard enough to imagine. But that structure became a place defiled and unclean due to human sin. In fact, once a year there was a special service in which that sanctuary actually had to be cleansed from the sins of the people. It was known to the Jews as the Day of Atonement. Talking about the ministry of the High Priest on that day, Scripture says:



And he shall go out to the altar that is before the LORD, and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and some of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar all around. Then he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, cleanse it, and consecrate it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.

Leviticus 16:18-19

Uncleanness? God's dwelling place, the dwelling place of a holy and sinless God, becomes unclean!

How could that be?

The word uncleanness in Hebrew - *tumot* - appears in various forms hundreds of times in the Hebrew Bible, and it often describes the sinful actions of people in violation of God's law.

And this gets to the heart of the gospel message as revealed in the sacrificial system. The sins and evil of the people, the things that made them *tumot*, were ultimately brought into the house of God, which itself became *tumot*. In a sense, the sanctuary - God's house - ultimately carried the sins and evil of the people, and it was through this process, and this process alone, that the people were forgiven those sins.

It was the system of animal sacrifices that represented this transfer of sin. When people were convicted of their sin, they would bring an animal for sacrifice - a lamb, a goat, a ram, a bull - to the sanctuary, confess their sin over the animal, symbolising the transference of their sin to the innocent animal. In that sense, their sin was transferred from themselves and placed on the innocent animal, which symbolised the sinless Jesus. The animal was killed and its blood was poured out beside the alter symbolising Christ's blood poured out for us at the cross. Some of the flesh of the animal sacrifice was eaten by the priest (see Leviticus 6:26), who symbolically became the sin bearer for the sinner as he came before God in the sanctuary. Though the people themselves, because of their sin, deserved death, the animal was slain in their stead, symbolic of the death of Jesus. Every single one of those sacrifices had one main purpose - to point the sinner to the substitute who would die in their stead.

And that substitute was Jesus, God in the flesh.

When Jesus began His ministry, John the Baptist pointed to Him and said:



Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

John 1:29

The lamb was a clear image from the sanctuary service. John was using it to point to what would ultimately be the death of Jesus, who would bear the sins of the world on the cross, all of which was symbolised, pre-figured, in the earthly sanctuary service. The innocent animal died in place of the guilty sinner, and its blood was brought into the sanctuary, God's dwelling place itself, which became filled with *the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and ... their transgressions in all their sins*. Leviticus 16:16

That's why the Bible says this about Jesus:



For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

2 Corinthians 5:21

The parallel gets even stronger, because Jesus associated Himself with the sanctuary - or the temple itself - as well.



Jesus answered and said to them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then the Jews said, It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days? But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

John 2:19-21

Yes, the entire service, from the priesthood, the animals and their death, and the sanctuary and its furnishings, were all symbols, pictures, even prophecies, of what Jesus - God in the flesh - would do for the human race.

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

God had given the sacrificial system to show humans two things. First, that sin had a cost; and second, that He Himself would pay that cost. The sacrificial system was to reveal to the world what God was like. It was to show that though humans have sinned and done evil, God could forgive, but only because He was willing to accept a substitute to pay the penalty for that sin and evil.

And He, Himself, was that Substitute!

We all have sinned. The Bible is clear on that point. In fact, who needs the Bible to know that truth? We see it all around us, and in us as well.

The Bible also teaches that sin is a rejection and violation of God's law.



Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

1 John 3:4

The great news of the Gospel, as revealed in the sacrificial system, is that though we have sinned, though we have violated God's law, we don't have to pay the penalty for it ourselves. If that's not good news, what is!!

The substitute for the law-breakers, wrote British theologian John Stott, is none other than the Law-Maker himself.

How unfortunate that, for thousands of years, the whole concept of sacrifice, which was to reveal the loving, self-denying character of God, has been turned into something that makes God look bad. Sacrifice has often been made to appear as if these deaths would somehow appease

God's wrath, satisfy His anger; that people would have to kill their own children in order to make themselves right with God.

What a deception! We're not made right with God by doing anything, much less killing our own children or killing anything, even an innocent animal. Satan successfully turned a beautiful truth about God into an ugly lie about Him instead.

And the truth is that, though sinners, we become right with God only because of Jesus and His death for us. We claim His death as ours, by faith. It was a death revealed in the ancient Hebrew sacrificial system - a system that was to show us, not what we could do to save ourselves, but instead, what God would do to save us from ourselves.



But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

Read this verse again - but substitute *me* and *I* for *us* and *we*.

Now that's love. And it's that truth that is at the heart of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. What is God like? Take another look at the cross.



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