



Israelites camping around the Holy Spirit during their
40 years of wandering in the desert

More to the Story

The real reason we celebrate Christmas

Most of the world knows about the Christmas holiday, at least superficially. Between the false-Jesus Santa Claus steering most of the holiday attention toward gift-giving, and the atheists' push to remove "God" from everything, it's becoming more and more rare to see much emphasis on the Biblical reason for Jesus' birth.

And by Biblical reason, we mean more than the Sunday School story. Yes, the adventure of Mary and Joseph, their journey to Bethlehem, no place to stay, etc., is awesome, but what seems to get lost in the story is the real reason of "why."

To really understand the depths of what we're celebrating, let's look back at the background, topography and culture of the Jews at that time.

Blood Sacrifices

When the earth was first created, God communed with Adam and Eve-- walking and talking in the midst of them. That close personal relationship was lost when they sinned by being disobedient to God. And the sin infection was passed down to every human born of an earthly father, separating every human from God and His heavenly glory.

To rectify the situation, the Lord set up a system of blood sacrifices so those who are covered by the blood sacrifice are set free from the consequences of sin.

'For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.'

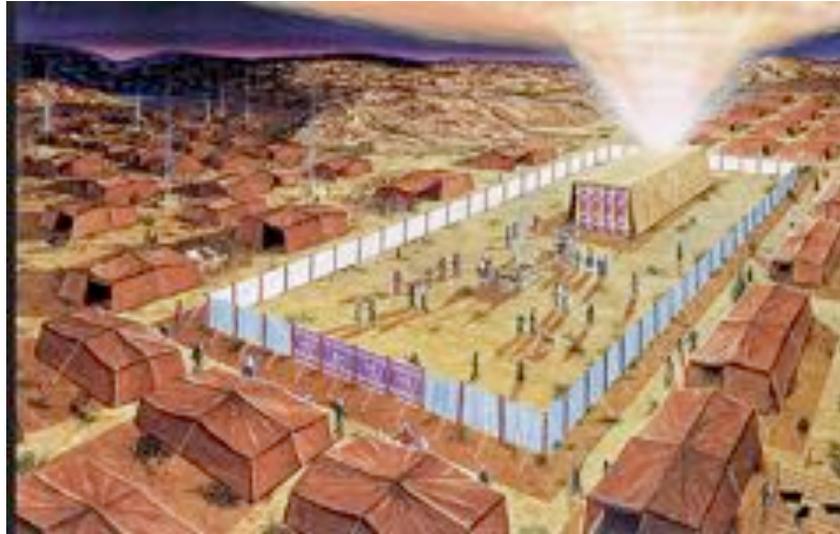
Lev 17:11



"...without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." Heb. 9:22

Sacrificing animals/shedding their blood for atonement of sin enabled God to again live among the sinners. For instance, when the Jews were wandering for 40 years in the desert, God lived in the Tabernacle and Israel, because of their blood sacrifices, could encamp around Him.

"Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Ex. 40:34



*"Now the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, the sons of Israel shall camp... around the tent of meeting (Tabernacle) **at a distance**. Num. 2:1-2*

Notice in the verse above that they had to camp "at a distance" from the Tabernacle area. Animal sacrifices were limited and could not change God's relationship with humans to be like it was in the Garden of Eden. Animal sacrifices were only a temporary solution that allowed God to be close, but not intimate.

"For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." Heb. 10:4

A permanent remedy was needed, a blood sacrifice that would forever take care of the sin issue. Since man was incapable of saving himself, and God so loved the world, He would have to provide the perfect sacrifice.

Therefore the purpose of Jesus being born (named Emmanuel or "God with us") was so God could take on human flesh. This way He could lead a sinless life **in order to be a perfect and permanent blood sacrifice.**

"Behold, the
Lamb of God
who takes
away the sin
of the world!"
John 1:29

So the temporary atoning sacrifices in the Old Testament revealed the need for a permanent sacrifice/atonement for sin.

References to sacrifices show up early in the Old Testament, Genesis 3, and continue through Revelation 22. Here's a list of the most notable:

4000 BC, God, Genesis 3

After Adam and Eve's fall, God killed an animal in order to provide them with animal skins to cover their nakedness.

3970 BC, Abel Genesis 4

Abel brought the first blood sacrifice to the Lord. His brother's sacrifice of food was not acceptable.

3000 BC, Noah Genesis 8

After the flood, the first thing Noah did was build an altar and make a blood sacrifice to the Lord.

1872 BC, Abraham Genesis 22

Abraham, by faith/trusting God, attempted to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, on Mt. Moriah. The Lord halted the sacrifice and substituted an animal to be sacrificed instead.



1450 BC, Moses Genesis 31

Moses petitioned the Egyptian Pharaoh to be able to take the Israelites into the wilderness to sacrifice to the Lord. The Pharaoh refuses and pays a severe price--the devastation of the 10 plagues and ultimately the loss of his army and all his Hebrew slaves.

1450 BC, Passover Exodus 12



The Lord gave specific instructions for the blood of a one-year-old male goat or lamb to be spread over each family's door so the "Angel of Death" would pass over that house. To remember this miracle, the Lord required the Jews to celebrate "Passover" once a year.

To celebrate Passover, the Law required a one-year-old male lamb to be killed and its blood sprinkled on the base of the Altar, located in front of the Tabernacle in the wilderness and later at the Temple on Mt. Moriah.

1452 BC, Tabernacle in the Desert Exodus 29

After departing Egypt, God gave the Israelites specific instructions for building a Tabernacle. He also gave the Law--613 specific commands that include a detailed sacrificial system for both individuals and also for the nation.



960 BC, 1st Jewish Temple In Jerusalem 1Kings 8

Solomon dedicated the Jewish Temple on Mt. Moriah by sacrificing 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. Sacrifices were forbidden to take place anywhere but on Mt. Moriah, the same mountain where Abraham offered Isaac. The Temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC.

516 BC, 2nd Jewish Temple Ezra 6

After 70 years of Babylonian captivity, the Jews returned to Jerusalem and first re-instituted blood sacrifices on the Altar outside the Temple building. They then rebuilt the Temple, referred to as Zerubbabel's Temple.



The only surviving image of the Second Temple is on this Jewish coin minted during the Jewish Revolt, 66-70AD

19 BC, Herod's Temple

Herod the Great took Zerubbabel's Temple down to the foundations to rebuild it from the ground up. Sacrifices were never stopped so the Jews consider this a renovation, not a new Temple.

Most of the work was completed before Herod died in 4 BC, but it was not totally finished until 63 AD. In 66 AD the Jews revolted and after a bloody battle with the Roman Empire, they took over control of Jerusalem for 4 years.

The somewhat embarrassed Roman Empire got its revenge. In 70 AD, the Roman army under Titus defeated the Jews and took the gold and silver from the Temple back to Rome as spoils of war.



A commemorative arch was built in Rome attesting to the great spoils of war from the looting of the Jewish Temple in 70 AD. The carving shows a triumphal procession displaying the solid gold menorah, gold trumpets, silver fire pans, the silver table of showbread, and Jewish slaves.

During the siege, the Temple caught fire and some of the gold adorning the curtains and walls melted, running down into the cracks of the stones. To get every last ounce of gold, the Romans pulled apart every stone of the Temple, fulfilling the prophecy by Jesus:

"not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down." Matt. 24:2

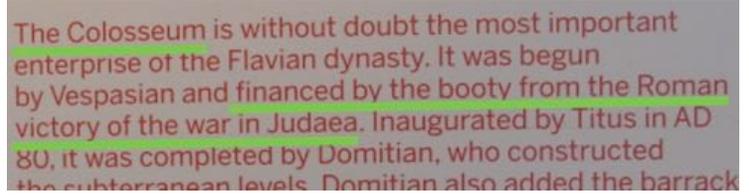
The amount of gold and silver recovered from this Roman victory over the Jews was astronomical. In fact, the riches were so great that this is where the Roman Empire got the money to build the massive and iconic Roman Colosseum!



The Roman Colosseum was financed from the gold and silver looted from the Jewish Temple in 70 AD.

Work began on the colosseum in 72 AD and was completed in 80 AD. Most of the labor came from the over 100,000 Jewish slaves captured in the Jewish Revolt victory.

When you tour the Ancient Roman Colosseum today, the tour guides will never mention this fact. But there is a small sign, hard to find, inside the Colosseum that admits where the money came from to construct such a massive structure.



The Colosseum is without doubt the most important enterprise of the Flavian dynasty. It was begun by Vespasian and financed by the booty from the Roman victory of the war in Judaea. Inaugurated by Titus in AD 80, it was completed by Domitian, who constructed the subterranean levels. Domitian also added the barrack

Close-up of the sign in the colosseum was financed from the gold and silver looted from the Jewish Temple in 70 AD.

Sorry, got off on a tangent. Back to our study of blood sacrifices. All of those temporary atoning sacrifices pointed to the need for an ultimate sacrifice. So that brings us up to the Time of Christ.

33 AD, Time of Jesus

By the time Jesus walked the streets of Jerusalem sacrifices were entrenched in a Jew's life. Sacrifices, called burnt offerings, were performed twice daily at the Temple.

"...This is the offering by fire which you shall offer to the LORD: two male lambs one year old without defect as a continual burnt offering every day." Num.28:3

As mentioned before, in the spring celebration of Passover each family sacrificed a

one-year-old unblemished lamb. Josephus, a Jewish historian living at the time of Christ, said the number of lambs sacrificed at Passover one year was 256,500. Wow! It took a lot of animal blood to cover the sins of the people.



Sacrifices were performed daily in the Jewish temple compound.

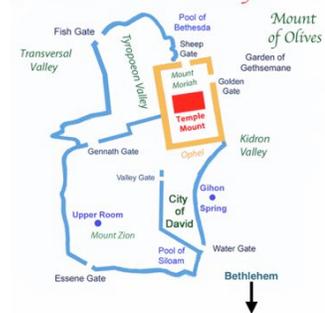
To meet this demand, a huge supply of lambs was furnished by the shepherds tending flocks in the nearby fields surrounding Bethlehem, only five miles south of Jerusalem.

In the time of Christ, Bethlehem was fully encircled by shepherd fields where tens of thousands of sheep were being raised for the sacrifices on Passover.

Once a year, a few weeks before Passover, tens of thousands of sheep would be herded on the five-mile trip from Bethlehem, through the valleys, to the Kidron Valley on the east side of Jerusalem.

Water was needed to keep the sheep alive so those arriving earliest would congregate outside the walled city near the Pools of Bethesda.

Jerusalem at the time of Christ



Next to the Pools of Bethesda was the Sheep Gate, aptly named as those purchasing their sacrifice could bring their sheep straight into the Temple area to be killed.

Those shepherds arriving later would have to station themselves farther away at the Watergate, outside the Pool of Siloam. They would have to wait their turn to be examined, approved and sold.



Lambs being examined by Levitical Priests

The sheep were examined by the Levitical Priests to make sure they had no defects. The Levitical Law demanded the sacrifice had to be "unblemished" to qualify. (Lev. 1:3)

Once approved, the man of the house would take the sheep to the Temple where it would be slain and its entrails and blood thrown on the massive Altar outside the Temple building.

The sheep's carcass would then be taken back to the family to be roasted and eaten as part of the Passover meal in celebration that their sacrifice had been accepted as a temporary covering for their sins.

The Ironies of Blood and Christmas

So during your family holiday Christmas celebrations this year, think about this:

It was in the middle of all these sheep being born and raised for sacrifice in the fields of Bethlehem that Jesus was born--the Lamb of God.

"The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" John 1:29

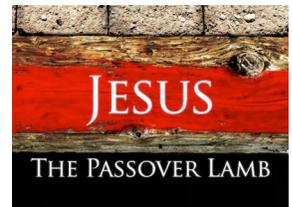
And just like the sheep born in Bethlehem, Jesus too went to the Temple and was examined by the Priests for defect, but they could find no fault in Him. Neither could Pilate find any fault in Him. He was the perfect sinless unblemished sacrifice.

"and [Pilate] said to them, 'You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him.'" Luke 23:14

Therefore Jesus was born in order that His blood, that had no taint of sin, would be an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord. He was born to be the perfect blood sacrifice to take away our sins--forever!

"and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood. He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."

Heb. 9:12



So really, Christmas is also about the blood.



Today sheep are still raised in the shepherd fields surrounding Bethlehem. In the picture above, you can see the City of Bethlehem in the distance and the shepherd fields still being used today. The Arab girl raises sheep on the land just like in the time of Jesus.

The word Bethlehem means "House of Bread." So it's no coincidence that Jesus said:

"I am the bread of life." John 6:48

As you celebrate Christmas this year, thank the Lord for Him allowing His Son to be born in human flesh as our Redeemer. He had the only blood that counted.

*"He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood,
and His name is called The Word of God."
Rev.19:13*



The blood on His robe in the above verse has to be His shed blood as He's coming from Heaven and has yet to fight and defeat the armies of the antichrist. He will wear this blood-stained garment as a sign to the Jews of His blood sacrifice at Calvary.

He's Coming again to reclaim this earth as the Jewish *King of Kings*, ruling in Jerusalem from His throne on the top of Mount Moriah, in the same area where He was sacrificed! And we Believers, those trusting His atoning sacrificial blood, will reign with Him. Praise the Lord!

From all of us at Compass, may you and your loved ones have a Christ-centered celebration of Jesus' birth as you remember what His blood did for us!

Reference:

<http://www.tribunesandtriumphs.org/colosseum/building-the-colosseum.htm>

Administrator Mar 28, 12:42 PM

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