



Yeshua – A Sacrifice or Not?

by Tim Kelley

As a person moves out of the comfort of the churches and into the Hebrew Roots movement he's often faced with challenges he had never considered before – should I continue to tithe, can I trust a particular teacher, when do I start a new month – these are all valid questions that we now have to answer ourselves, based, of course – on our study of the scriptures. One of the questions practically all of us have had to face and come to grips with is whether Jesus, Yeshua, was indeed a sacrifice.

Most of us were brought up in Christian homes where it was understood that He indeed was a sacrifice . . . a sacrifice for sin. And, of course (as we were taught), since He was that sacrifice; there is no longer a need for sacrifice. That concept was so deeply ingrained in our minds that we really never gave it much thought . . . that is, until the time when we're in a Biblical discussion with others who have been searching on their own, and someone makes the statement "But doesn't God hate human sacrifice?"

"Oh – why did you have to ruin my day?" you say to yourself. "Of course He's a sacrifice, and of course God hates human sacrifice – but . . ." Now you've got a problem. You're faced with two opposing points, and how are you going to reconcile this. If God hates human sacrifice, and if Yeshua and His followers claim He was a human sacrifice, then is Yeshua really the promised Messiah, and what's more, can I trust the New Testament to be an accurate reflection of God and His Son?

I have been faced with this challenge, and I know some of you have as well. Unfortunately for me, when I was faced with it, I was not grounded enough in God's word to help those who were asking the questions. Though my belief didn't change, my desire to study the scriptures more diligently did to where I hope I could answer these questions more intelligently now.

As we approach the Passover season, it's important that we understand God's view on human sacrifice, especially as it pertains to our Messiah, the Lamb of God.

In this study, I want to show that Yeshua was indeed a sacrifice. We'll start by asking whether human sacrifice is honorable or not, then check the scriptures to see what they really say about human sacrifice. A study of this topic would not be complete without analyzing the sacrifice of Isaac, so we'll work through that, then move into a short discussion of what the ancient Jewish writers had to say about human sacrifice. We'll finish up by offering some insight into why Yeshua would sacrifice Himself.

So let's begin!

Yeshua was born to save His people from their sins. When instructing Joseph in regards to his betrothed wife, the angel said -

^{ESV} **Matthew 1:21** She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

This is, in itself, an often misunderstood passage, but suffice it to say that Yeshua was born to restore His people, the Hebrews, back to the covenant their fathers had made with God. But how would this come about? Was His death and resurrection all it took to restore the relationship? If so, what was the purpose for His 3 ½ year ministry, the hours spent teaching His disciples, His constant travels throughout Judah and Samaria, the miracles and healings that brought Him notoriety? And, of course, why did He have to die such a gruesome death if a simple stoning and burial would have satisfied the requirements. It's clear from the gospel writer's that Yeshua's life was a life of sacrifice.

But with all His good deeds, all the sacrifices of time and energy he made to help draw people back to God, it still wasn't enough to take care of the problem that had caused Israel to be exiled in the first place. That problem, according to the prophet Isaiah, was sin.

^{ESV} **Isaiah 59:1-2** Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

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So what takes care of sin? We know that according to Romans 6, the wages of sin is death, that is, unless there is an innocent blood sacrifice that can atone for the sins of the people.

^{ESV} **Leviticus 17:11** For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

According to the testimony of the apostles, Yeshua became that innocent blood sacrifice.

^{ESV} **Mark 10:45** For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom (atonement) for many."

Apparently, the writers of the Apostolic Scriptures, the New Testament, didn't see a problem with Yeshua becoming a sacrifice, at least not in regards to the Torah. But many today do! So what's the problem? What have we missed? Does God really hate human sacrifice? If so, why did Yeshua say –

^{ESV} **John 15:13** Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.

Let's think about this for a moment. Have you ever known of, or heard of someone, who gave his life for another person. I'm not talking about a police officer who was shot in the line of duty, or a soldier killed on the battlefield. I'm talking about someone who knew they would die in their attempt to save another person's life. It doesn't take much thought to come up with a number of examples.

In 2006, Ross McGinnis, an American soldier serving in Iraq, was riding in a troop carrier with 4 other soldiers when his convoy was attacked and a grenade landed in his vehicle. In order to shield the other soldiers, Ross threw himself on the grenade and was killed instantly when it exploded. This 19 year old man sacrificed his life for his comrades, and no one seems to have a problem with that.



Another example and one that from time to time comes to mind, especially when reading an article or watching a program about the holocaust, is a scene from the 1983 television mini-series titled "Winds of War". The scene is of a German concentration camp where two young Jewish boys play a prank on the German commandant. He calls all the occupants of a certain barracks to line up outside and determines that the boys were responsible for the prank. He thus has the boys lined up to be executed. Just before they are to be shot, two Jewish men ask to take the boys' place and are allowed to do so, thus saving the lives of the Jewish boys. These men sacrificed themselves for the lives of the boys.

Obviously we don't have a problem with human sacrifice as long as a person willingly gives his life for another person. In reality, it happens quite often, especially in times of war. So why does God forbid it in the Torah . . . or does He?

Before going further, I want to give credit to Glenn Miller, founder of [A Christian Think Tank](http://christianthinktank.com/)¹ for connecting the dots on these next couple of points and drawing an interesting and obvious conclusion -

God's instructions to Israel contain a number of references to human sacrifice. Except for the case of Isaac, they all have a common thread, which we should be able to discern as we list them.

^{ESV} **Leviticus 18:21** You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.

^{ESV} **Leviticus 20:2** "Say to the people of Israel, Any one of the people of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones.

¹ <http://christianthinktank.com/> - this writer has not studied Mr. Miller's web site, thus I do not necessarily agree or disagree with any of his conclusions.

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^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 12:31** You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the LORD hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 18:10** There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer . . .

As you can see, in all these cases of human sacrifice, the people were sacrificing their children, and they were sacrificing them to other gods, not the God of Abraham. In fact, in every case of detestable human sacrifice spoken of in the Tnakh, the victims were children . . . never the offerers' wife, brother, uncle or father . . . always children! Now think about it. Why didn't they offer their adult relatives? Could it be because the adults were not wanting to be sacrificed? And if they were not willing to die to appease some other person's god, would they not have to be overpowered in order to get them on the altar. So if you can't find a willing adult to be your sacrifice, who do you get? You get someone who can't take up for himself – a little child. The child is not a willing sacrifice, but he is small enough to be overpowered by his ever-loving parents. According to archeologists, most of human bones found on ancient sacrificial altars were of infants.²

Let's take a look at a few more passages that will help us to see why YHVH outright forbid these sacrifices. There again, let's look at the common thread.

^{ESV} **Psalms 106:34-38** They did not destroy the peoples, as the LORD commanded them, ³⁵ but they mixed with the nations and learned to do as they did. ³⁶ They served their idols, which became a snare to them. ³⁷ They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; ³⁸ they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood.

^{ESV} **Ezekiel 23:37** For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. With their idols they have committed adultery, and they have even offered up to them for food the children whom they had borne to me.

^{ESV} **Jeremiah 19:4-5** Because the people have forsaken me and have profaned this place by making offerings in it to other gods whom neither they nor their fathers nor the kings of Judah have known; and because they have filled this place with the blood of innocents, ⁵ and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it come into my mind-

The common thread in these verses is that when a person offered their children in sacrifice, they were shedding innocent blood, which according to scripture is MURDER.

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 19:11-13** But if anyone hates his neighbor and lies in wait for him and attacks him and strikes him fatally so that he dies, and he flees into one of these cities, ¹² then the elders of his city shall send and take him from there, and hand him over to the avenger of blood, so that he may die. ¹³ Your eye shall not pity him, but you shall purge the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, so that it may be well with you.

Thus according to YHVH, when a person takes his child, kills it, and then offers it to be burned on an altar, as was the case with the worship of Molech and other ancient near-eastern religions, they are in fact murdering that child because the child did not make a conscious, educated decision to willingly offer himself. This is why God considers child sacrifice an abomination.

But does God hate adult sacrifice? It depends, of course, on the willingness of the adult sacrificial victim. If the victim is unwilling to be sacrificed, but is bound and sacrificed against his will, you again have murder. As far as I know, there are no examples of this in scripture.³ On the other hand, there are at

² *Unger's Bible Dictionary* by Merrill F. Unger (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957); page 416.

³ Some claim that the case of Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11:29-39) fits into this category, but that seems highly unlikely. For one, Jephthah was obviously being led by the Holy Spirit when he made his

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least two examples of an adult becoming a willing sacrifice, one of course is Messiah Yeshua, and the other is Isaac. Let's look at Isaac's case first, which in Judaism is called the "Akedah", or "Binding of Isaac". The story is found in Genesis 22, starting in verse one and continuing through verse 19. To paraphrase the story –

God told Abraham to take his only son Isaac and offer him as a burnt offering on Mount Moriah (present day Jerusalem). Abraham, along with Isaac and two of his young servants, set out early the next morning to do as YHVH had commanded, leading a donkey packed with firewood. On the third day of the trip, he saw Mount Moriah in the distance, so he took the wood off the donkey and put it on Isaac's back, then told his servants to wait for them because they would both be returning.

Let's break here and think about what has happened so far. Abraham loaded a pile of wood, enough to completely burn a grown man's body, on a donkey. Then three days into the trip, he transferred that entire load to his son. Though we don't know exactly how old he was, but all indications are that he was at least in his mid twenty's. According to some Jewish sources, he was probably around 33 years old. What's more important than his age is that he was obviously strong enough to carry up a 2000' tall mountain at least a hundred and fifty pounds of firewood. Obviously, he was not a child, but instead, a quite muscular young man – a man who could have easily overpowered his 120+ year old father.

So let's go on –

Abraham and Isaac proceeded up the mountain, Isaac carrying 150 lbs of wood and Abraham carrying a knife and a pot of coals. Isaac, though, is somewhat puzzled. He knows that once they reach their destination, they'll quickly build an altar, lay the wood on the altar, and then his father will quickly and painlessly slit the throat of an innocent lamb. After the blood has drained out, he'll take the lamb, lay it on the altar, and start the fire to consume it. He'd probably seen it happen hundreds of times before. But as they neared the top of the mountain, his father has yet to purchase a lamb. So he asks – "Father, we've got the wood and the fire, but where's the lamb". Anticipating the question, Abraham answers that God will provide a lamb.

Though it's not spelled out in the text, we have to assume that at this point, Abraham had to begin to explain to Isaac what was getting ready to happen, and that Isaac had to accept his fate. Otherwise, Isaac would have said "No Father – I'm out of here!". I believe that when Abraham told Isaac what was being asked of both of them, Isaac understood that he had become a player in the greatest prophecy of all time.⁴ Things were beginning to make sense. He knew that he was a miraculously born special child. As a young man he realized that all his friends parents were in their thirty's, but his parents were over 100 years old. His father had obviously told him numerous times about how God had come helped him in the battle of the five kings, how he had been able to rescue his nephew Lot, and how God had answered their prayer for a son. He was also quite aware of the fact that there were enormous prophecies and promises made that were contingent on him getting married and having a male child.

As he and his father continued up the mountain, he probably came to see that if he willingly laid his body on the altar he himself was getting ready to build, his father would be glorified, and he, after a short sleep, would see him again. So he agreed to go through with it, as a willing sacrifice, for the good of his father, and for the hope of future generations. So as Abraham bound his son and prepared to mercifully slit his throat, YHVH sent an angel to stop him, and sent a ram instead to take Isaac's place.

Let's now look at the only other example of a willing sacrifice we find in scripture, that being the sacrifice of Messiah Yeshua. Yeshua knew that that He was the focus of all the prophecies and all the promises

vow, thus God would not have inspired him to make a vow that was contrary to His way of thinking, and secondly, as a result of the vow, Jephthah's daughter spent her life as a virgin, probably in the service of God. Though she was offered as a burnt offering in that Jephthah received nothing from God in return, she was not killed and put on an altar.

⁴ According to Yeshua, Abraham had a clear understanding of the role of the Messiah - John 8:56 "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad."

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made by His Father. He also knew that His work on the earth was about to come to a close. Thus the night that He was betrayed, He prayed –

^{ESV} **John 17:1** . . . "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you . . ."

This is an interesting statement. Yeshua may have been making a play on words to link Himself back to the Akedah, the Binding of Isaac. Though it's not obvious in the Greek, if He had been praying in Hebrew, instead of saying "doxazo" (the Greek word for "glorify"), He would have been saying "kavod" the Hebrew word for glorify, which comes from the Hebrew root word "kabad" (כָּבַד Strong's 3513), a word that can mean "glory" or "weight". In other words, He more than likely was saying –

"Father, the hour has come; weigh down your Son that the Son may glorify you . . ."

And this is precisely what happened. Yeshua was weighed down with His own cross, and then the weight of the sins of Israel was put on Him, all for the purpose of glorifying His Father. He offered himself as a willing sacrifice – when they came to arrest Him, He didn't resist, at His trial, He gave no defense.

So why did Yeshua become a willing sacrifice, and would the Jewish people in His day take offense to what He did? Let's look at some passages in scripture as well as in Jewish writings in order to discover an answer.

The most obvious statements are those found in the gospels themselves. We know that the High Priest at the time of Yeshua's trial believed that one person dying for the nation was acceptable. John records this in regards to the High Priest -

^{ESV} **John 11:49-50** But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰ Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish . . ."

In this passage Caiaphas was expressing the thought that one person could die for the benefit of the people as a whole – a thought not uncommon in first century Judaism. Where did they come up with that? One very obvious way would be to think of our example of the soldier who fell on the grenade. He gave his life, and in so doing saved the lives of four others. If one person can offer his life to save the lives of countless others, is that not a noble thing?

Another source of Caiaphas' thought could have been the example of Moses who after the sin of the golden calf, offered his eternal life for Israel –

^{LXE} **Exodus 32:32** And now if thou wilt forgive their sin, forgive *it*, and if not, blot me out of thy book, which thou hast written.

By far, the most common source for a "willing sacrifice" understanding was Isaiah 53, a passage that – up until the third century CE- the Jews attributed to a messiah figure -

^{ESV} **Isaiah 53:5-11** But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. . . . ¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. ¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

This passage has for the past 2000 years been a problem to the rabbis for it speaks of a righteous person giving his life to cleanse Israel from their sins. Thus, when they disagree with the so called "Christian" concept of a willing sacrifice, they are actually disagreeing with the Tnakh.

Michael Brown is a Jewish man who shortly after his bar-mitzvah, hung up his Judaism and sowed his wild oats – so to speak. But at age 16, he became a believer in Messiah Yeshua, and because of the many attempts by his parents and the rabbis to bring him back into Judaism, he set out to come up with Biblical answers to all their objections. This culminated in a four-volume set of books titled "*Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus*". In volume 3 of the set, he attempts to answer the Jewish objections to a

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willing human sacrifice by using their own writings, one of which is the Zohar – the encyclopedia of mystic Judaism. He quotes the Zohar saying –

“The children of the world are members of one another, and when the Holy One desires to give healing to the world, He smites one just man amongst them, and for his sake, heals all the rest. Whence do we learn this? From the saying, ‘He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities’ . . . In general, a just person is only smitten in order to procure healing and atonement for a whole generation.”⁵

Michael also quotes a more familiar piece of Jewish literature, the Book of Maccabees, which is a history of the Jewish people from about 300 BCE to 100 BCE that was probably written in the century before Yeshua’s birth. Recorded in the book are various prayers that were believed to be offered by many of the Jewish martyrs in their fight against the Selucid army (the army of Antiochus Epiphanes). Michael writes –

“It is written that they prayed ‘Cause our chastisement to be an expiation for them. Make my blood their purification and take my soul as a ransom for their souls’ (4 Maccabees 6:28-29). Of these righteous martyrs it is recorded: ‘They have become as a ransom for the sin of our nation, and by the blood of these righteous men and the propitiation of their death, Divine Providence delivered Israel (4 Maccabees 17:22)”⁶

Thus, the concept of a willing sacrifice to heal the nation and to atone for their sins was not foreign to the first century Jewish people. Thus, His audience clearly understood what Yeshua meant when he made statements such as –

^{ESV} **Mark 10:45** For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

^{ESV} **John 10:14-18** I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

So why did he do it? He did it to ransom, or better – to redeem his sheep. And who are the sheep? The children of Israel – both Judah (the flock that was of the nearby fold) and Israel (the scattered flock). He didn’t die so he could re-marry Israel as some have said. He died for both nations – Israel and Judah. Both nations had sold themselves into spiritual bondage and were thus in need of a kinsman redeemer to buy them back. But instead of buying them back with money, Yeshua, became their redeemer by offering His life to cover their sins.

^{ESV} **Isaiah 52:3** For thus says the LORD: "You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money."

Both nations were in need of redemption, and both were redeemed by the blood of The Lamb, just as it was in the first Passover.

It’s interesting to note that the Hebrew word for “heal” as in “with his stripes we are healed” is “rapha” (רָפָא – Strong 7495), a root word that according to Gesenius is derived not from a pictographic meaning, but from the sound of a person sewing rapidly. In fact, it’s literal meaning is “to sew together”. This fit’s right in with Yeshua’s purpose, to bring two people - Israel and Judah - back together as one.⁷

⁵ , Michael L. Brown; *Answering the Jewish Objections to Jesus, Volume 2*; page 157; Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI; 2007

⁶ ibid pg. 158

⁷ H.W.F. Gesenius; *Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*; pg. 775; Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI; 1996

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Over the past 16 years, I've come to see that God is much more committed to His people than I had ever believed. The people He called out of Egypt 3500 years ago, the people He called to do a work for Him, are the same people he was calling during the first century, and they are the same people he's calling today. What's more, the people He had betrothed to Himself at Mount Sinai, are the same people he's calling back to be His bride.

In the book of Ephesians, Paul writes a lot about family relationships, especially that between a man and his wife. He also directs most of his statements toward the men. In chapter 5 he says to them –

^{ESV} **Ephesians 5:25** Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

This statement is commonly understood to mean that Yeshua (Christ) gave his life for this bride, and that husbands should love their wives so much that they would do the same. But think about it . . . wouldn't most men give their lives for their wife? How many times, while seeing his wife, or even his children suffering in a hospital bed, have we heard a man say that he wishes he could trade places with them? How many men, who truly love their wife, would stand by silently and watch their wife be tormented or killed? Hardly any! Instead, we would do anything to protect and save her, even to the point of losing our life while doing so. It's just the way we're made!

Thus, if Yeshua is (as many believe) the one who betrothed Himself to Israel at Mount Sinai, He is also the one who had to send her away, and He's the one who knew that unless He did something, she's would eventually die. So as most husbands would, He stepped in to take her place. He covered her sins by taking her sins on Himself and bearing the penalty of her sins. He became a willing sacrifice so that He could become her covering, the atonement (Hebrew – "kaphar") for her sins.

So to review:

- The scriptures do not teach that God is opposed to human sacrifice, He's just opposed to child sacrifice or any type of forced sacrifice, which He and any civilized society would consider murder.
- A person who willingly gives his life in an attempt to save another's life is honored in most civilized societies
- Isaac offered himself as a willing sacrifice, and the Jewish sages have no problem with that
- The Jewish sages teach that a righteous man can give his life for the sake of the people
- Yeshua was a willing sacrifice
- Yeshua gave his life as a covering for His people Israel, His bride.

As we enter the Passover season, we don't have to fear that we might be participating in some pagan religion when we link the death of our Messiah to the Passover sacrifice, or to any of God's sacrifices for that matter. Yeshua gave His life so as to preserve the lives of His people, His bride. That was OK with the Jewish sages; I hope it's OK with you; and it's definitely OK by me.

Shalom Alecheim!