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## COVER ART

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# IT IS FINISHED

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PRIESTHOOD



## LENTEN DEVOTIONS ON

CAIN AND ABEL  
THE GRAIN OFFERING  
JEHOIADA'S SANCTUARY

THE ALTAR'S SHEATH  
ABIATHAR  
ISAAC'S REPLACEMENT

“AND THE LORD HAD REGARD FOR ABEL AND HIS OFFERING, BUT  
FOR CAIN AND HIS OFFERING HE HAD NO REGARD.”

GENESIS 4:2-7

## CAIN AND ABEL

Woody Allen is credited with the joke, “I’m not a vegetarian because I love animals; it’s because I hate vegetables.” When we hear how God looked upon the sacrifices of Cain and Abel, it may sound at first as if God feels this way too. It’s not readily apparent at first why one sacrifice was looked upon favorably while the other was not.

However, God looks at the spirit in which our offerings are made. Moses tells us that “Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground” (Gen. 4:3). On the other hand, we hear, “Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions” (Gen. 4:4). From the very best of his livestock Abel selected the prized portion for his gift.

I once served in a congregation of tobacco farmers. At the time of the harvest, the farmers could often be seen pulling some leaves and setting them aside. They were saved for judging at the Agriculture Fair. Needless to say, they put great effort into selecting only the very best. It may well be that while Abel selected the very best, Cain merely brought some of his harvest. However, when God reacted to the offerings of Cain and Abel, it wasn’t as judge at an agricultural fair.

Instead, we hear, “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts” (Heb. 11:4). We’re reminded that “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6). It was by faith that Abel was commended as righteous before God and faith that made his gift acceptable before Him.

Instead of a blue ribbon, it’s the red blood of our Savior shed for us on the cross and the righteousness that comes by faith that enables you and me to bring our offerings to God. Redeemed and rejoicing, we come before Him with resounding thanks and praise.

By Rev. David Tannahill

WE PRAY

*Gracious Savior, thank You that, clothed in Your righteousness, I may bring to You my offering. Amen.*

“AND ABRAHAM WENT AND TOOK THE RAM AND OFFERED IT UP AS  
A BURNT OFFERING INSTEAD OF HIS SON.”

GENESIS 22:1-24

## GOD WILL PROVIDE FOR HIMSELF THE LAMB

Imagine how Abraham’s heart must have sunk when God said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering ...” (Gen. 22:2). God could have simply said, “Abraham, sacrifice Isaac.” But instead, like the pounding beat of a drum, God’s command really drives home the size and scope of this sacrifice. Here was Abraham’s son, the son for whom he and Sarah had longed and prayed for so many years. It was Abraham’s only son by Sarah. It was his much beloved son.

The idea of sacrifice is difficult to comprehend in our culture. The popular practice of giving up something for Lent, like chips or chocolate, may simply fit with our winter diet plan. But what God commanded Abraham was a sacrifice of truly incomprehensible proportion.

In addition to the prospect of Abraham sacrificing his son, it would appear that God was walking back His promise on salvation. As the writer to the Hebrews notes, “He who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named’” (Heb. 11:17). In short, Abraham was being asked to sacrifice *everything*.

Abraham didn’t undertake this heartlessly or recklessly. He did it in faith. “He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back” (Heb. 11:19). Thankfully, God stayed Abraham’s hand and provided a ram to take Isaac’s place. However, the very nature of the command brings into startling clarity the sacrifice at Calvary.

Jesus is the Lamb of God, the sacrifice for our sins and our substitute. You and I need never doubt the great depth of His love for us. Here is our God who “did not spare his own Son, but gave Him up for us all” (Rom. 8:32).

By Rev. David Tannahill

WE PRAY

*Gracious Lord, thank You for giving Your Son, your only-begotten Son, Jesus, whom You love, as the sacrifice for my sins. Amen.*

“FOR THE PRIEST SAID, ‘LET HER NOT BE PUT TO DEATH IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD.’”

2 KINGS 11:1-21

## JEHOIADA’S SANCTUARY

Jehoiada stands out among those in the Old Testament who might be called “warrior priests.” When the line of succession within the house of David was being threatened by a dowager usurper, Athaliah, Jehoiada sprang into action. As a result, the Davidic line continued through King Joash.

The narrative of 2 Kings 11 can be difficult to follow without some context. At this point in history, Israel and Judah have been divided for several generations. Jehu, a general of the northern kingdom, has assassinated both Israel’s king Joram and Judah’s king Ahaziah, Joash’s father. Joram’s death would end the rule of the house of Omri in the north. But the Lord had made no lasting promises to the rebels of Israel. David’s house was another matter. God had promised that a king from that house would rule forever.

Jehoiada therefore plots to anoint Joash, hidden away from his murderous grandmother, as king. At the same time, he will kill Athaliah and her supporters. He gathers an army, equips them with David’s own armaments, gets Joash to the temple, and anoints him king. Jehoiada orders the army to kill Athaliah and her followers, who show up, crying, “Treason!” Mission accomplished.

Life is complicated. As the preacher once said, there is a time for everything, “a time to kill and a time to heal” (Eccles. 3:3). Jesus is born into the world at the end of centuries of literal blood, sweat and tears. Salvation is not neat, and it is not tidy. Sometimes kings are holy. Sometimes priests end up at the head of a slaughter.

It should not be surprising that our salvation is not neat or tidy either. A descendent of both Joash and Athaliah redeems the world through His own suffering and bloody death. Rather than surrounding and protecting the Son of David, the high priest hands Him over to be crucified. That crucifixion becomes Jesus’ coronation. Through His own bloody death, the Lord’s will for us is accomplished.

By Rev. Charles St-Onge

WE PRAY

*Blessed Father, help us to see through the death and misery of history to Your will being accomplished for the salvation of all people. Amen.*

“SO ELEAZAR THE PRIEST TOOK THE BRONZE CENSERS... AND THEY WERE HAMMERED OUT AS A COVERING FOR THE ALTAR.”

NUMBERS 16:1-50

## HIGH PRIEST ELEAZAR AND THE ALTAR’S SHEATH

The Lord has consistently taught His people to honor leaders and flee insurrection (Ex. 20:12; 1 Pet. 2:13-18). Each of us must search our own hearts. Weeding out hatred for authorities is only the first step; we must also husband seeds of respect.

Numbers 16 shows how the rebellious spirit indulges self-deception and how the Lord sets a bulwark for truth. Korah, one of the great-grandsons of Levi, rebelled against Moses and Aaron. Moses devised a test that the people would know. Korah and his company would stand before the Lord with bronze censers. If He heard their prayers, they would live, but if not, Moses called for dramatic judgment. The ground opened under Korah, swallowing his family alive. Fire came out and consumed the men offering incense.

Eleazar, Aaron’s son, was tasked to take those bronze censers and hammer them out to sheathe the altar to be a sign to the people. We might naively wonder if such a reminder is necessary, given all that drama? “But on the next day all the congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and against Aaron,” preferring to believe a lie (Num. 16:41). Even after Korah’s death, his propaganda shaped their thinking such that they claimed Moses killed the Korahites. Disrespect for authority and disintegration of truth go hand-in-hand (John 18:37-38).

Years later, Aaron was gathered to his people. Moses took the garments of the priesthood and clothed Eleazar (Num. 20:22-29). Aaron’s son served on into the conquest of the holy land, and whenever he stood before the altar of the Lord, his eyes saw bronze.

Revelation 8 describes the altar in heaven. It also matches the censers, but, praise the Lamb on the throne, now all is covered in gold. For the King of Kings, who submitted even to corrupt authorities, reestablishes truth in grace. What Korah sought to seize in rebellion, Jesus gives through submission. Through Him, the prayers of all the saints rise with the smoke of incense (Rev. 8:3-4).

By Rev. Daniel Guagenti

WE PRAY

*Merciful Lord, You hear our prayers; give us ears to hear truth. Amen.*

“WHATEVER TOUCHES THEM SHALL BECOME HOLY.”

LEVITICUS 6:14-23

## THE GRAIN OFFERING

There are many details concerning all the sacrifices prescribed in Leviticus 1-7, e.g., the specific animal or item sacrificed, the manipulation of the blood, which parts are burned and which parts consumed. But there are two principles to keep in mind amidst the details:

1) The sacrifices are prescribed and given *by God* for the well being of the community of God’s people. The sacrifices were not invented by people to “keep God happy,” nor to express what humans imagined to be their own worthy sacrifices.

2) All the Old Testament sacrifices are fulfilled in the life and work of Jesus Christ. As Christians live in community, they see the sacrifices from before Jesus to be folded into our relationship with God and others.

The **grain offering** is described in Leviticus 2 and 6:14-23. The offering consisted of a mixture of grain, flour, olive oil, salt, and incense. Neither honey nor yeast was to be included. The offering was given to the priests who burned some of it and consumed the rest.

The grain offering was a voluntary act of worship to God who provided daily bread and other needs of life. This offering often followed a burnt offering or fellowship (peace) offering, thus accenting devotion and thanksgiving to God.

As the grain offering provided substance for the priests’ diets, so our offerings in our congregations help to sustain our pastors, teachers, and others in service to us. Our prayers before meals also remind us that Christ provides what we cannot obtain on our own, namely, the forgiveness of sin.

By Rev. Ron Richeson

### WE PRAY

*Dear Lord, help us to resist taking food and our daily comforts for granted. Receive our thanks and the portions of the bounties we have received. Remind us each day of the gift of forgiveness which we cannot earn by ourselves. Amen.*

“WHEN ABIATHAR THE SON OF AHIMELECH HAD FLED TO DAVID TO KEILAH, HE HAD COME DOWN WITH AN EPHOD IN HIS HAND.”

1 SAMUEL 23:1-14

## THE HIGH PRIEST ABIATHAR

Abiathar’s father had been a faithful priest. He had been true to God and to God’s anointed king, and he was killed for it. Doeg, the Edomite, slaughtered eighty-five priests, including Abiathar’s father, on the orders of King Saul (1 Sam. 22:6-23). They almost slew Abiathar as well. He had to flee for his life.

While it makes sense that he would run to David, Abiathar does something important. He brings an ephod, a priestly tool, with him. Abiathar doesn’t abandon being a priest; rather he steps up in the void and takes over for his father. Fear of death doesn’t prevent him from being the priest. Some things are more important than your own safety.

Fear—very real fears—can make all of us forsake our duties. Jesus even notes that this will happen in the church, that hirelings will abandon the sheep to the wolves. But Jesus doesn’t flee. Abiathar only had Saul against him, but he had David on his side. Jesus, on the other hand, took on Satan all alone. Yet He doesn’t flee, even when He knows that Satan will see Him dead. Some things are more important than your own safety or health.

For Jesus, your salvation is one of them. He is determined to be your High Priest who will atone for you. He will not flee this world’s foul prince and his threats. He will go to the cross. He will do His priestly duty. Jesus saves you not by an ephod in His hand but by the nails of the cross.

By Rev. Eric Brown

### WE PRAY

*Make us to be faithful to our duties, O God, and have the blood of Jesus cover us when we are not. Amen.*