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Appendix 8i: The Cross and the Temple

This page is part of a series exploring the laws of God that could be obeyed only when the Temple was present in Jerusalem.

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- Appendix 8i: The Cross and the Temple (This page).

The Cross and the Temple are not enemies, and they are not two "phases" where one cancels the other. The Law of God is eternal (Psalm 119:89; 119:160; Malachi 3:6). The Temple system, with its sacrifices, priests, and purity laws, was given by that same eternal Law. The death of Jesus did not abolish a single commandment. It revealed the true depth of what those commandments were already saying. The Temple was not destroyed to end sacrifices, but as judgment for disobedience (2 Chronicles 36:14-19; Jeremiah 7:12-14; Luke 19:41-44). Our task is to hold these truths together without inventing a new religion that replaces the Law with human ideas about the Cross.

The apparent conflict: the Lamb and the altar

At first glance, there seems to be a conflict:

- On one side, the Law of God commanding sacrifices, offerings, and priestly service. (Leviticus 1:1-2; Exodus 28:1)
- On the other, Jesus presented as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2).

Many people jump to a conclusion the Scriptures never make: “If Jesus is the Lamb, then the sacrifices are over, the Temple is finished, and the Law that commanded them no longer matters.”

But Jesus Himself refused that logic. He said plainly that He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, and that not even the smallest stroke would fall from the Law until heaven and earth pass away (Matthew 5:17-19; Luke 16:17). Heaven and earth are still here. The Law still stands. The commandments about sacrifices, offerings, and the Temple were never revoked by His lips.

The Cross does not erase the Temple laws. The Cross reveals what they were truly pointing to.

Jesus as the Lamb of God — fulfillment without cancellation

When John called Jesus “the Lamb of God” (John 1:29), he was not announcing the end of the sacrificial system. He was declaring the true meaning of every sacrifice that had ever been offered by faith. The blood of animals never had power by itself (1 Peter 1:19-20). Its power came from obedience to God and from what it represented: the future sacrifice of the true Lamb. God does not speak one thing and later contradict Himself (Numbers 23:19).

From the beginning, forgiveness has always depended on two things working together:

- Obedience to what God commanded (Deuteronomy 11:26-28; Ezekiel 20:21)
- The provision God Himself appointed for cleansing (Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22)

In ancient Israel, the obedient went to the Temple, presented sacrifices as the Law required, and received real, but temporary, covenantal cleansing. Today, the obedient are led by the Father to the true Lamb, Jesus, for eternal cleansing (John 6:37; 6:39; 6:44; 6:65; 17:6). The pattern is the same: God never cleanses the rebellious (Isaiah 1:11-15).

The fact that Jesus is the true Lamb does not tear up the commandments about sacrifice. It proves that God was never playing with symbols. Everything in the Temple was serious, and everything pointed to something real.

Why sacrifices continued after the Cross

If God intended to abolish the sacrifices the moment Jesus died, the Temple would have fallen that same day. Instead, what happened?

- The veil in the Temple was torn (Matthew 27:51), but the building remained standing while worship continued there (Acts 2:46; 3:1; 21:26).
- Sacrifices and Temple rites continued daily (Acts 3:1; 21:26), and the entire narrative of Acts assumes a functioning sanctuary.
- The priesthood continued serving (Acts 4:1; 6:7).
- The festivals continued to be observed in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1; 20:16).
- Even after the resurrection, believers in Jesus were still seen in the Temple (Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:20-21; 21:26), and thousands of Jews who believed in Him were “all zealous for the Law” (Acts 21:20).

Nothing in the Law, nothing in the words of Jesus, and nothing in the prophets announced that sacrifices would instantly become sinful or invalid once the Messiah died. There is no prophecy that says, “After My Son dies, you shall stop bringing animals, for My Law about sacrifice is abolished.”

Instead, the Temple services continued because God is not double-tongued (Numbers 23:19). He does not command something as holy and then quietly treat it as unclean because His Son has died. If the sacrifices had become rebellion the moment Jesus died, God would have said so clearly. He did not.

The continuation of the Temple service after the Cross shows that God had never canceled any commandment tied to the sanctuary. Every offering, every purification rite, every priestly duty, and every national act of worship remained in force because the Law that established them remained unchanged.

The symbolic nature of the sacrificial system

The entire sacrificial system was symbolic in its design, not because it was optional or lacked authority, but because it pointed to realities that only God Himself would one day bring to completion. The healings it affirmed were temporary — the healed could become sick again. The ceremonial cleansings restored purity only for a time — impurity could return. Even the sacrifices for sin brought forgiveness that had to be sought again and again. None of these things were the final removal of sin or death; they were divinely commanded symbols pointing toward the day when God would destroy death itself (Isaiah 25:8; Daniel 12:2).

The Cross made that finality possible, but the true end of sin will only be seen after the final judgment and the resurrection, when those who have done good rise to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment (John 5:28-29). Only then will death be swallowed up forever. Because the Temple services were symbols pointing to eternal realities, and not the realities themselves, Jesus' death did not make them unnecessary. They remained in force until God removed the Temple in judgment — not because the Cross canceled them, but because God chose to cut off the symbols while the realities they pointed to still await His final completion at the end of the age.

How forgiveness works today

If the commandments about sacrifices were never abolished, and if the Temple system continued even after the cross — until God Himself brought it to an end in 70 A.D., a natural question arises: How can anyone be forgiven today? The answer is found in the same pattern God established from the beginning. Forgiveness has always come by obedience to God's commandments (2 Chronicles 7:14; Isaiah 55:7) and by the sacrifice that God Himself appointed (Leviticus 17:11). In ancient Israel, the obedient received ceremonial cleansing at the altar in Jerusalem, which the Law carried out primarily through the shedding of blood (Leviticus 4:20; 4:26; 4:31; Hebrews 9:22). Today, the obedient are cleansed through the sacrifice of the Messiah, the true Lamb of God who takes away sin (John 1:29).

This does not represent a change in the Law. Jesus did not cancel the sacrificial commandments (Matthew 5:17-19). Instead, when God removed the Temple, He changed the outward place where obedience meets cleansing. The criteria remained the same: God forgives those who fear Him and keep His commandments (Psalm 103:17-18; Ecclesiastes 12:13). No one comes to the Messiah unless the Father draws him (John 6:37; 6:39; 6:44; 6:65; 17:6), and the Father draws only those who honor His Law (Matthew 7:21; 19:17; John 17:6; Luke 8:21; 11:28).

In ancient Israel, obedience led a person to the altar. Today, obedience leads a person to the Messiah. The outward scene has changed, but not the principle. The unfaithful in Israel were not cleansed by sacrifices (Isaiah 1:11-16), and the unfaithful today are not cleansed by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 10:26-27). God has always required the same two things: obedience to His Law and submission to the sacrifice He has appointed.

From the beginning, there has never been a moment when the blood of any animal, or the offering of any grain or flour, truly brought peace between a sinner and God. Those sacrifices were commanded by God, but they were not the true source of reconciliation. Scripture teaches that it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Hebrews 10:4), and that the Messiah was foreknown before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:19-20). Since Eden, peace with God has always come through the perfect,

sinless, only begotten Son (John 1:18; 3:16) — the One to whom every sacrifice pointed (John 3:14-15; 3:16). The physical offerings were material signs that allowed humans to see, touch, and feel the seriousness of sin, and to understand in earthly terms the cost of forgiveness. When God removed the Temple, the spiritual reality did not change. What changed was the material form. The reality remained exactly the same: it is the sacrifice of the Son that brings peace between the offender and the Father (Isaiah 53:5). The outward symbols ceased because God chose to remove them, but the inward reality — the cleansing provided through His Son to those who obey Him — continues unchanged (Hebrews 5:9).

Why God destroyed the Temple

If the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. had been meant to “abolish sacrifices,” the Scriptures would say so. They do not. Instead, Jesus Himself explained the reason for the coming destruction: judgment.

He wept over Jerusalem and said that the city did not recognize the time of its visitation (Luke 19:41-44). He warned that the Temple would be brought down stone by stone (Luke 21:5-6). He declared that the house was left desolate because of the refusal to listen to God’s messengers (Matthew 23:37-38). This was not the announcement of a new theology where sacrifices become evil. It was the old, familiar pattern of judgment: the same reason the first Temple was destroyed in 586 B.C. (2 Chronicles 36:14-19; Jeremiah 7:12-14).

In other words:

- The Temple fell because of sin, not because the Law changed.
- The altar was removed because of judgment, not because sacrifices had become ungodly.

The commandments remained written, eternal as always (Psalm 119:160; Malachi 3:6). What God removed were the means by which those commandments could be carried out.

The Cross did not authorize a new religion without the Law

Most of what is called “Christianity” today is built on a simple lie: “Because Jesus died, the Law of sacrifices, the festivals, the purity laws, the Temple, and the priesthood have all been abolished. The Cross replaced them.”

But Jesus never said that. The prophets that prophesied about Him never said that. Instead, Christ was clear that His true followers must obey His Father’s commandments as given in the Old Testament, just like His apostles and disciples did (Matthew 7:21; 19:17; John 17:6; Luke 8:21; 11:28).

The Cross did not give anyone authority to:

- Cancel the Temple laws
- Invent new rituals like the communion service to replace Passover
- Turn tithes into pastor salaries
- Replace God’s purity system with modern teachings
- Treat obedience as optional

Nothing about the death of Jesus authorizes men to rewrite the Law. It only confirms that God is serious about sin and serious about obedience.

Our posture today: obey what can be obeyed, honor what cannot

The Cross and the Temple meet in one unavoidable truth:

- The Law remains untouched (Matthew 5:17-19; Luke 16:17).
- The Temple has been removed by God (Luke 21:5-6).

That means:

- The commandments that can still be obeyed must be obeyed, without excuses.

- The commandments that depend on the Temple must be honored as written but not practiced, because God Himself removed the altar and the priesthood.

We do not rebuild a human version of the sacrificial system today, because God has not restored the Temple. We do not declare the sacrificial laws abolished, because God never canceled them.

We stand between the Cross and the empty Temple mount with fear and trembling, knowing that:

- Jesus is the true Lamb who cleanses those who obey the Father (John 1:29; 6:44).
- The Temple laws remain written as eternal statutes (Psalm 119:160).
- Their present impossibility is the result of God's judgment, not our permission to invent replacements (Luke 19:41-44; 21:5-6).

The Cross and the Temple together

The right path refuses both extremes:

- Not "Jesus abolished the sacrifices, so the Law no longer matters."
- Not "We should rebuild sacrifices now, in our own way, without God's Temple."

Instead:

- We believe that Jesus is the Lamb of God, sent by the Father for those who obey His Law (John 1:29; 14:15).
- We accept that God removed the Temple as judgment, not abolition (Luke 19:41-44; Matthew 23:37-38).
- We obey every commandment that remains physically possible today.
- We honor the Temple-dependent commandments by refusing to replace them with human rituals.

The Cross does not compete with the Temple. The Cross reveals the meaning behind the Temple. And until God restores what He removed, our duty is clear:

- Obey what can be obeyed.
- Honor what cannot.
- Never use the Cross as an excuse to change the Law that Jesus came to fulfill, not to destroy (Matthew 5:17-19).