

A white lamb is lying down, facing left. The lamb's wool is thick and curly. Its front legs are tucked under its body, and its hind legs are also tucked. The lamb is positioned in the center of the frame, with its head on the left and its body extending towards the right. The background is a plain, light-colored surface.

Non-Atoning Offerings & Passover

Jesus and Biblical Law Part 5

A World of Offerings and Sacrifices

Context and Terms



Sacrifices Were Normal Expressions of Worship

- The ANE to the Greco-Roman world was a world of offerings and sacrifices to gods
- Ancient Israel would have been strange if the *didn't* participate in a sacrificial system
- Leviticus prescribes and prohibits specific kinds of offerings (5 main typical offerings; several annual special offerings on holidays)
- Rituals are a part of biblical law (meaningful habits)
- Sacrifice was *not* primarily conceptualized as a violent act, but as a giving of food as a gift/tribute
- Animals were killed regularly for meals in nearly every ancient culture

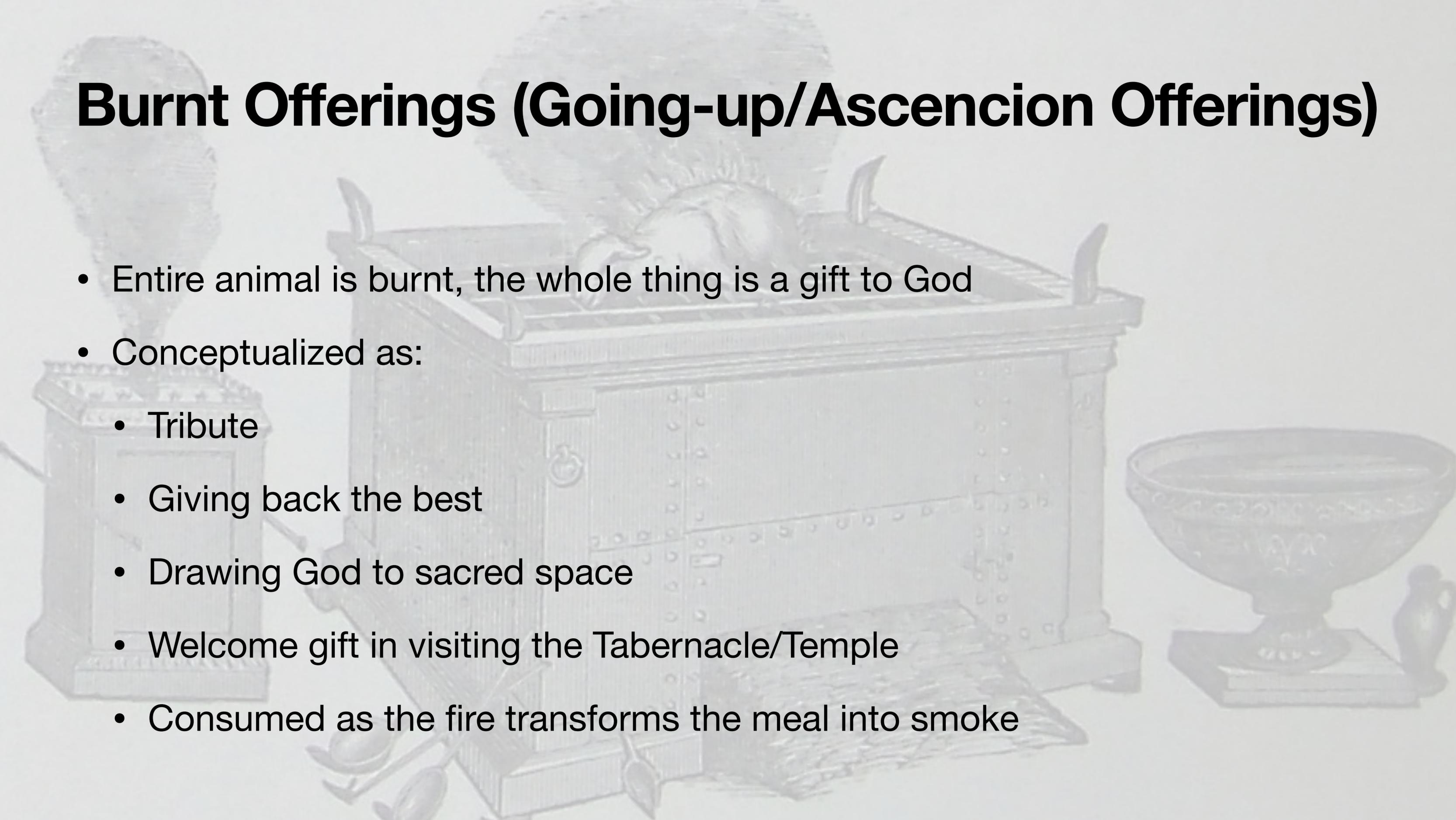
KEY Terms

- **Offering (קָרְבָּן)** — *Literally:* Brought near; a gift (usually of a meal) given to God on his altar (ideally in sacred space) by a priest
- **Sacrifice (זָבַח)** — An offering that involves the death of an animal and is eaten by the offerer.
- **Sacred space** — Places where God is present in a unique way (tabernacle/temple)
- **Holy (קֹדֶשׁ)** — Objects, people, or concepts that are dedicated to exist in or around sacred space, affected by God's holiness
- Levitical offerings primarily play a relational role in giving gifts back to God, who is the source and provider of all provisions (especially food in the wilderness)
- *Not all Levitical offerings are atoning*
- Detailed symbolism in Leviticus largely absent

Non-Atoning Offerings

Burnt Offerings, Grain Offerings, and Wellbeing Offerings

Burnt Offerings (Going-up/Ascencion Offerings)

The background features a faded, light-colored illustration of the Tabernacle, a large rectangular structure with a golden roof and intricate details. To the right of the Tabernacle is a golden chalice or offering vessel with a wide rim and a stem. The entire scene is set against a light, textured background.

- Entire animal is burnt, the whole thing is a gift to God
- Conceptualized as:
 - Tribute
 - Giving back the best
 - Drawing God to sacred space
 - Welcome gift in visiting the Tabernacle/Temple
 - Consumed as the fire transforms the meal into smoke

Grain Offerings (Gift Offerings)



- Flour, frankincense, olive oil, salt, honey, sometimes baked flatbread
- Same conceptualization of thanksgiving, returning meal resources to God out of appreciation and tribute
- Food and smell for God

KEY DETAILS so far

- Offerings are given in a context of sacred space
- Sacred space is a space of life (you don't kill an offering there)
- Altar is something like God's dinner table
- Offerings are not about death or violence, about meal and communion (which is why you can give a grain or drink offering or a meat offering)
- Non-atoning offerings have nothing to do with forgiveness of sins
- Placing hands does not transfer sins, but dedicates a gift for a purpose (entering sacred space)
- Hebrew Bible does not conceive of God actually consuming these gifts (*Psalms 50*)
- Not empty ritual, but patterns and symbols of communion in an ancient bonding table-culture

Wellbeing Offerings (Peace Offerings)

- Another Thanksgiving meal, where the offerer eats the meal also
- All of it is brought into sacred space (making it holy), the fat (best parts) given to God, the rest of the meat taken and consumed by the offerer and their household
- A way of having a meal with God for festivals
- Communion with God, where the offerer gets to eat holy food (the food of God)

Wellbeing Offerings (Peace Offerings)

- Reasons for wellbeing offerings:
 - Passover and memorial festivals
 - Covenant inauguration
 - Covenant memorial
 - Bonding/Communion function

Passover



The OG Passover

Exodus 12

- A day where God *protects* the firstborn from “the destroyer”
- Instructed each household to eat a lamb as a meal commemorating their rescue
- The hyssop and blood likely functioning as a symbol of life (*Lev. 17 description of blood*) or alert for protection (*Josh. 2*)
- The first Passover lamb is NOT an offering, but a meal
- Not about death for death, about commemorating deliverance from Egypt and the destroyer, and marking one’s house for life

Passover Lambs in Ancient Israel

- Annually celebrated with a Passover wellbeing offering of a lamb
- Liturgy of memorial of Passover and Exodus around the feast
- Sacramental communion with God
- Memorials and remembrance in Ancient Israel
- All Israel must participate, but foreigners cannot

Covenant Inauguration and Memorial

- Burnt offerings and wellbeing offerings offered at Sinai in covenant inauguration
- Covenant memorial and holidays feature wellbeing offerings

A stylized illustration of three prophets in traditional attire. The central figure is a man with a long white beard and a white head covering, wearing a white robe with a blue sash. To his left is a man with a long white beard and a white head covering, wearing a white robe with a blue sash. To his right is a man with a long white beard and a white head covering, wearing a white robe with a blue sash. The background is a soft, hazy landscape with trees and a sky with birds. The text "The Prophets and Offerings" is overlaid in the center in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

The Prophets and Offerings

The Prophets' Critique of Israel's Offerings

Pslam 51; Isaiah 1:11-17; Jeremiah 7:22-23; Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:21-24

- Israel's prophets frequently confront offerings given in the temple NOT because...
 - offerings are barbaric/bad
 - God doesn't like offerings
- But because...
 - they are insincere in their intentions and unjust in their actions and/or worshipping other gods
 - e.g. giving gifts to a spouse you're cheating on

The Prophets' Hope

- Once covenant curses applied and exile begins, the hope is...
 - NOT for a grand offering
 - For covenant renewal, end of covenant curses, and rescue from exile (which would likely include eating commemorative wellbeing offering and meal)
 - For a transformation of the heart

Jesus and the Last Supper



Jesus's References to wellbeing offerings

- First, Jesus would *of course* have given offerings at the Temple
- Jesus constantly referred to a banquet/wedding ceremony in his parables for the renewal of the covenant and Israel's restoration (*Luke 14; Matt. 22*)
- Jesus uses this as the reason his disciples were not fasting, covenant renewal, feast time (*Matt. 9:14-17*)
- Luke 9:31 depicts Jesus's death as a new Exodus (rescue from the nations and their gods/covenant curses into the inauguration of a covenant renewal)
- The gospel accounts portray Jesus as intentionally dying during Passover (*Passover day in the synoptic gospels; the evening before in John*)

Jesus's Death and Resurrection in the Gospels

- **Death —**

- Primarily the king/messiah who has been faithful to the covenant instructions (biblical law) experiencing the fullness of the covenant curses (submission to nations and their gods, death) in solidarity with Jerusalem and the Temple

- **Resurrection —**

- Primarily the king/messiah exhausting covenant curses, emerging in covenant renewal (life of the age to come), life not subject to death, the nations, or their gods

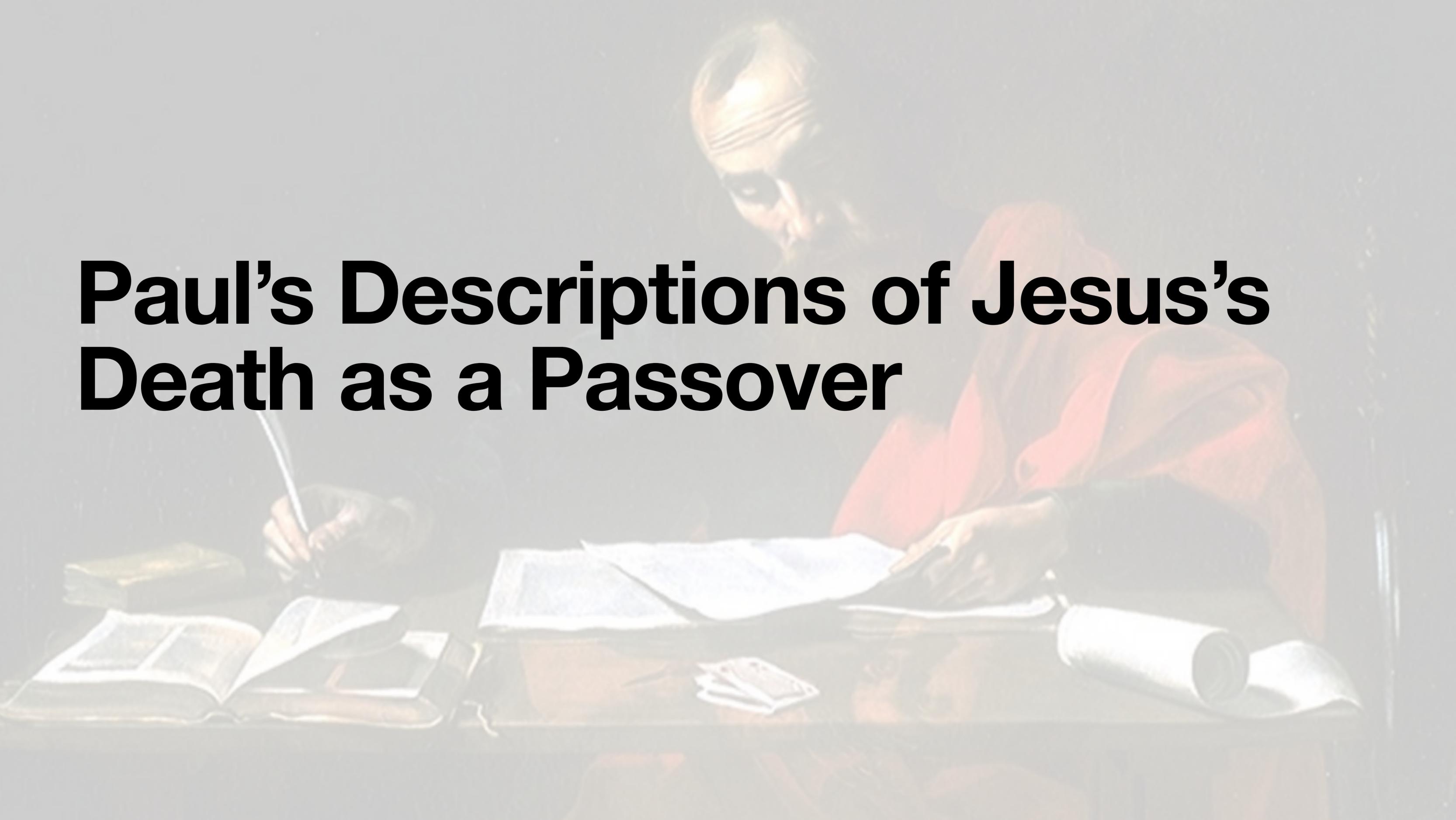
The Last Supper (Jesus as a Wellbeing Offering)

- In John, Jesus depicted as Passover lamb (*John 1:29; Jesus killed at the time the lambs would be*)
- In all gospel accounts, Jesus commands his disciples to eat him as a commemoration of the covenant renewal
- Bread equated to flesh eaten on Passover (signifying new rescue)
- Wine equated with blood and covenant renewal (wedding feast drink, life and rescue from death)
- Early church took conception of Passover lamb as holy food and shared meal with God that was bonding, commemorated rescue from nations, their gods, and death and applied to —> Jesus as Passover lamb in bread and wine
- Celebrated every Sunday as day marking rescue

Jesus's Death and Communion as a Passover Lamb

- NOT primarily about forgiveness of sins
- Not the means of covenant renewal
- The commemoration of the rescue that is achieved without offering metaphors
- Hebrews 13:10 Communion (the bread and wine) is depicted as eating holy food as a celebration offering from God's altar

Paul's Descriptions of Jesus's Death as a Passover



Paul

- Primarily depicts Jesus's death and resurrection as the king embodying the covenant curses and passing through them into victory and covenant renewal/restoration (*Galatians 3:13-14; 2 Cor. 5:21*)
- When uses offering imagery (Passover)...
 - Doesn't mention forgiveness of sins or suffering (Passover offerings should be without blemish)
 - Treats it as a celebratory feast (*1 Cor. 15*)
 - **1 Cor. 5:7-8** "For our Passover lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the feast!"
 - **Ephesians 5:2** "Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, an offering of aroma and wellbeing offering to God."
 - **KEY:** Jesus's death not just the offering/tribute to God, but his whole life epitomized by his death as an act of love

Paul

- Romans 12:1 tells the church to present their lives as living offerings to God
- Does not see Jesus's life as a Passover offering instead of us, but that we join him by likewise presenting our lives as offerings to God
- Did Messianic Jews stop performing non-atoning offerings after Jesus?
 - There was a new conception of sacred space
 - But clear indications that the temple was still the primary location of worship
 - Probably not until the temple's destruction in 70 AD

TAKEAWAYS

- Wellbeing offerings about communion, memorial, celebration, not sin or atonement
- Offerings were not about suffering or brutality (their ethical standards were higher than ours usually are; e.g. humane treatment of livestock, Leviticus 17:3-4, death not allowed in the Temple as sacred space)
- Jesus is depicted as a Passover lamb, commemorating his own divine rescue from exile and celebrating the renewal of the covenant
- René Girard did not understand Leviticus
- I know this leaves a LOT of questions about atoning offerings, which Jesus also gets compared to in other NT books, which we'll get in another lecture...

Reading for Next Time

- Leviticus 12-15
- Matthew 8:1-4
- Luke 8:26-56

Recommended Reading

- *Lamb of the Free: Recovering the Varied Sacrificial Understandings of Jesus's Death* by **Andrew R. Rillera**
- *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics* by **Jacob Milgrom**
- YouTube: *Leviticus is Fun*

Questions

- Does this change the way you think about communion (the bread and wine)?
- Why do you think Paul is so strict in 1 Cor. 15 about not taking communion if you are actively oppressing others in the community? Is he channeling the prophets critique of eating offerings while practicing injustice?
- Does Western table culture diminish the significance of the bonding element of sharing a meal?
- How can we be more precise in how we refer to what Jesus's death and resurrection accomplished?