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Is the Temple Sacrifice Animal Abuse?

Oftentimes, critics of the Bible attempt to discredit the Scriptures, alleging that it’s morally inconsistent because it encourages cruelty to animals. More specifically these arguments are directed at the Levitical sacrificial system which God established in the Torah. They attempt to paint God as a bloodthirsty and malevolent being, and his sacrificial system as an archaic and uncivilized system that gratuitously killed millions of domesticated animals to satisfy outdated cultural superstitions.

Is God bloodthirsty and cruel? Or does he actually care about the well-being of all animals, even during their death? Let’s examine the Scriptures.

Deuteronomy 25:4

Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.

It is kindness to animals to allow them to eat while they are working. How cruel would it be for an animal to be working with food while hungry and not be permitted to eat?

Proverbs 12:10

The righteous care for the needs of their animals, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel.

This passage connects “righteousness” with caring for the needs of a domestic animal, and “wickedness” with abuse. So in other words, how someone treats an animal could be indicative of how he will treat others.

Because God is righteous (Psalm 145:17) he also cares for the needs of animals. This kindness is reflected in His Eternal law.

Exodus 20:10

*“but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD (YHWH) your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, **or your livestock**, or the sojourner who is within your gates.”*

Here we see that YHWH requires the owners of domesticated, working-class animals to give them a full 24 hour period of rest (Friday sundown to Saturday Sundown). This is something we don't even see all secular employers do, as millions of people are required to work over-time on weekends during peak business seasons.

In terms of workload, God shows more kindness to an ox or horse than most employers show to their staff. That speaks volumes. For more on the Sabbath, please see our teaching, "[The Sabbath Day](#)".

The Sabbath is one of the most important commandments in the entirety of Scripture. There were strict consequences for breaking it, yet saving the life of a domestic animal is considered more important than actual Sabbath rest.

Matthew 12:11-12

He said to them, "**Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out?** How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

Here, we see that Yeshua regards the life of a beast as being more important than the physical commandment to rest. Christ attributes the safety and protection of an animal to "doing good," which, of course, is lawful on the Sabbath; thus life and mercy is always a weightier, more important matter than our weekly requirement to rest.

For more on weightier matters, please watch our teaching "[Weightier Matters](#)."

Amazingly, God's kindness is even demonstrated through the Levitical sacrifices. Historical slaughtering proves divine knowledge and mercy.

Leviticus 17:11

For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.

The life of a creature is in the blood. An animal dies as soon as it's brain stops receiving blood. Thus, if you can sever the blood-flow from the brain then the creature would die, passing out from the lack of blood into its head.

The Levites literally applied the understanding that "life is in the blood" as well as the spirit of God's kindness to animals embedded in the Torah by creating a process that virtually eliminated any pain or suffering in the sacrificial process.

Leviticus 11 defines the difference between clean and unclean animals. Only clean animals (ie. goats, sheep, oxen) were sacrificed and eaten for the temple sacrifices.

Most unclean animals have two arteries connecting to the brain, the Carotid artery located at the bottom of their neck and the Vertebral at the top of their neck. Thus, if their throat was slit in the traditional method, they would suffer a painful death for a prolonged period of time because the brain would still receive blood from the Vertebral artery.

Interestingly, the clean animals that are sacrificed for the sin and worship offerings when their throat is slit, the clean animal almost immediately pass out from the lack of blood to the brain resulting in a quick and nearly painless death because the blood from the Vertebral artery joins with the Carotid artery before it reaches the brain.

If you would like to consider additional study on this, we would recommend these resources.

1) *Dr. Stuart D Rosen, Physiological insights into Shechita, The Veterinary record 154(24):759-65 · July 2004 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/8483053_Physiological_insights_into_Shechita In this Viewpoint article, Dr Stuart Rosen discusses physiological aspects of Shechita, the Jewish method of religious animal slaughter. He outlines the religious context and describes the act of Shechita. He discusses the scientific literature on the behavioural responses to Shechita as well as neurophysiological studies relevant to the assessment of pain, and concludes that Shechita is a painless and humane method of animal slaughter.*

2) *Rabbi Zamir Cohen - Kashrut, Shechita: Jewish Ritual Slaughter (You can find the diagrams I sent you on Page 154) (Research Summary by Dr. Norbert Netanya Klein Pg. 157). <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwGhLXMOBluVU3Rkb0pfbXIDNkE/edit>*

3) *Sisson, Grossman and Getty, Sisson and Grossman's The Anatomy of the Domestic Animals (Oxford. W.B. Saunders, 1975).*

4) *Daly C.C. Kallwei, E. & Ellendorf, F. (1998), Corical Function in Cattle During Slaughter, Veterinary Record 122, pp. 325-329.*

5) *Dukes, H.H. (1958), A Study of Blood Pressure and Blood Flow in the Vertebral Arteries of Ruminants, Report to the Humane Slaughter Advisory Committee, US Department of Agriculture, Ithaca University.*

6) *Levinger, I.M. (1995b), Effects of Shehita on the Nervous System. In: Shehita in the Light of the Year 2000. Jerusalem, Maskil L'David. pp. 69-75*

Isaiah 55:9

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Modern science reveals that God's ways are truly higher than man's ways. In ancient Israel, domesticated animals were highly valued and then given the most painless death imaginable. Furthermore, the people of Israel gave their best to God.

Nothing was put to waste, the meat provided nourishment for the Levites, and their skins would have been used for clothing and other materials, as we see demonstrated in Genesis 3:21:

Genesis 3:21

“And the LORD (YHWH) God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.”

Ever since the garden, God has desired to meet the needs of his children, but he also desires to meet the needs the most insignificant of creatures.

Matthew 6:26

“Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and **yet your heavenly Father feeds them....**”

God created a world where the needs of every creature would be met. The suffering that takes place in the world has been caused by men, not God and is a direct consequence of sin. Our loving Creator made a world where all creatures would live in perfect harmony. Something we will see restored in the coming kingdom.

Isaiah 11:6-7 (speaking of the future kingdom)

“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.”

In conclusion we see that God’s Word places great stress on the proper treatment of animals. In many cases, they are afforded some of the same sensitivities as humans. The biblical standard for the well-being of animals is much higher than today's secular standards. All over the world we see millions of animals abused, and raised in poor or restrictive living conditions, suffering tremendously at the hands of mankind.

We hope that this teaching has blessed you, and remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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