

X-RAYING HUMAN SACRIFICE IN JUDAISM AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION WITH SOCIO-RELIGIOUS LENS

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Abstract

Human sacrifice is the highest offer/gift to god(s) for appeasement or benevolence of a family, people, community and society. There are societies in the world which has the conception that only human blood can atone or expiate for a crime and epidemic made in the land. The philosophy that an angry god place demand on human life is very common in the Old Testament (Judaism) and African traditional religion and leave humans with continuous phobia of the unknown. Issues that bother on sacrifice are predominant in all societies of the world especially in African worldview. For one to obtain blessings and favour from God(s) in most traditional African societies, rites with the utilization of grains, burnt offerings, animal sacrifices are required. For a better understanding, this research clearly views the definitions of sacrifice, historical concept of sacrifice in Judaism, historical concept of sacrifice in African traditional religion, human sacrifice in Africa traditional religion and its implications and the implications of human sacrifice in the Old Testament context. By way of its implications, so many questions will be addressed. However, this research made use of the historical method as well as the utilization of books, journals, and internet source. It recommends amongst others that God cannot require the blood of any human to be appeased, hence the sanctity of human life should be upheld and respected by all especially in African traditional society.

Keywords: African, Sacrifice, Human, Religion, Traditional

Introduction

Sacrifice is the heartbeat of every religious ritual. It is not surprising that it has become the dominant paradigm by which scholars of religion analyse and evaluate religious rituals in all religions of the world (Egbucha and Onu, 2005). Sacrificial rites exist virtually in all places where religion is found. It is a universal phenomenon. The idea of the practice of sacrifice is as old as man's existence on earth. Every religion of the world whether ancient or modern, agrees to the rite of sacrifice as a core aspect of their worship. Sacrifice is among the numerous elements of worship through which man expresses himself to higher beings in worship. Awolalu (1979) has well stated that every act of worship has distinct element. In discussing the prominent among these elements, he enumerated; liturgy – which consist of ritual form and its contents including prayer, music, and dancing; sacrifice – offering for different purposes; cultic functionaries – the official and attendant at worship; sacred places – where worship is carried out including shrines, temples and altars, as most significant aspects of worship in all religions. As an important element of worship, sacrifice stands out in both Judaism and African Traditional Religion.

In the context of human sacrifice, man offers human beings as the highest form of sacrifice for the averting of the anger of a super abundant being believed to have possessed the power to destroy lives and property or cause chaos and evil/suffering in the human environs as well as its appeasement. Human sacrifice can also be carried-out to demand benevolence on the land and for installation of a king or burial of a monarch. It is the weaker/helpless ones that are always used for sacrifice. It is obvious that where these practices exist, there is no reverence, respect and sanctity for human life. In this research, we shall find out the rationale behind human sacrifice in Judaism and African Traditional Religion. Why the demand for human sacrifice and the benefits and beneficiaries.

Definition of Sacrifice

The word 'sacrifice' is a biblical terminology which emerged from three basic Hebrew terms according to *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary* (2000, p.1497): "1. *Miha* which means 'gift' presented to deity, 2. *Qorban* which implies offering and 3. *Zebah* which means 'sacrifice". This is the act of giving up something more important or valuable. It also means offering of something valuable to god, often an animal killed in a special ritual. Sacrifice in religion generally means an offering made to a god or other supernatural beings in a religious ceremony.

The Encyclopedia of Religious Ethics, Vol. 11 (nd, p. 1) describes sacrifice "as a rite in the course of which something is forfeited or destroyed, its object being to establish relations between a source of spiritual strength, and one in need of such strength, for the benefit of the latter". James (1962) posits that sacrifice involve the destruction of a victim for the purpose of maintaining or restoring a right relationship of man to the sacred order. It may affect a bond of union with the divinity to whom it is offered or constitute a peculiar expiation to 'cover', 'wipe out', neutralize or carry away evil guilt contracted wittingly or unwittingly. Mondeh (1978, P. 76) sees sacrifice "as a situation in which animal life is destroyed in order to present it in part or wholly to God, supernatural beings, spirits and ancestors or living dead". Eichrodt (1961, p.142) opines that "Sacrifice is the means by which the deity is provided with nourishment and renewed strength". Kwesi (1969:57) says that so much material is already available on the question of sacrifice, that it is imperative we should seek primarily to clear the ground in terms of the African environment.

But more important still is the fact that in almost every territory in this vast continent, sacrifices are offered daily for the preservation of health, the appeasement of some vengeful spirits, for the celebration of a deity, or for the appeasement or the glorification of the ancestral spirits. At sowing or at harvest-time, in times of peril or drought, at the birth of a child, or the death of an aged adult, a whole range of rites are performed which require the offer of some sacrifice. This may be in the form of grain or an egg or an animal, and in the ultimate case, of a human being. According to Wright (1968:103) "Sacrifice is one part of the total service rendered to the god who was felt to be in need of food, drink, cloths and servants".

The International Bible Dictionary Illustrated (1977, p. 380) states that: "Sacrifice is an offering made to God on his altar by the hand of a lawful minister". Norman (1953, p. 90) is of the view that sacrifice refers to "tribute paid to God". He said that the *minchab* was a gift to God at the shrine as if to a King. For instance, Noah believed he offered God a gift, something that immolated. In a religious sense, the gift must be the best. Okpaku (1986, p. 16) notes that etymologically, the word sacrifice is derived from the Latin word *Sacrificium*, which further consist of two stems, namely, *sacrum* and *facio*. The term *sacer*, or *sacrum*, derives from the Greek, and has been interpreted to refer to what is sacred, holy and consecrated. *Facio* means to make or to do. Thus *sacrum-facio*, is to do a holy thing. *Sacerdos* would mean one who does holy things. Holy here pertains to supernatural powers. Hence sacrifice according to Okpaku "is the religious act of offering something to God".

Awolalu (1979, p. 136) asserted that "Sacrifice is an act of making an offering (of animal or vegetable life, of food, drink or of any objects) to a deity or spiritual being". In another sense, it is an offering of any kind laid on an altar or otherwise presented to a deity or divinities for definite purposes. Omoregbe (1999, p. 51) defined sacrifice as "that which is central to both Judaism and Christianity. The two religions attach great importance to the sacrifices of blood, the blood of the sacrificial victim". Mbiti (1970, p. 81) posits:

Sacrifice and offering constitute one of the commonest acts of worship among African people. It refers to cases where the animal life is destroyed in order to present the animal in part or in whole, to God, supernatural beings, spirits or the living dead.

Mbiti mentioned that an ontological balance must be maintained between God and man, the spirits and man, the departed and the living. When this balance is upset, the people experience misfortunes

and suffering or fear that these will strike them. The making of sacrifice on the other hand is a psychological device to restore this ontological balance. It is also an occasion of making and renewing contact between God and man, or man and spirit. When this act is directed towards the living-dead, they are symbol of fellowship recognition that the departed are still members of the families deserving tokens of respect and remembrance.

Ferguson (1998, p. 608) emerged from the antiquity period by saying that “sacrifice was the universal religious observance”. It is an indication that it cuts across every age. McCain (1996, p. 102) opines that “sacrifice is a gift and a burnt offering to God in form of animal, money or other tangible goods”. Okey (2005, p. 209) says that “sacrifice is a means of relating the visible, physical word in which people exist to the invisible, intangible, and uncontrollable world in which God or the gods exist”. Having viewed some authorities above, sacrifice could be seen as price paid to enhance appeasement to God or divinities which is geared towards restoration of peace and order in the society over some blunders made.

Historical Concept of Sacrifice in Judaism

“Sacrifice was a consistent feature in ancient Near East. Israel appears to have shared many of the techniques and conceptions of sacrifice of their neighbours, but his own observations were firmly in the framework of God’s revelation” (Sibani, 2009, p. 15). Sacrifice is the most distinguishing factor of the Old Testament worship (2 kings 16:15) and it was a daily ritual at the temple. Fundamental to Jewish worldview was the understanding that Yahweh is the source of everything. According to Bratcher (2018), the Israelites lived in a culture dominated by Canaanite Baal worship. The religion of the Canaanite like most Ancient Near East revolved around the cycles of the natural world and personified those processes into gods. There were gods for virtually everything – rain, crops, death, etc. They had to be constantly appeased and made happy with sacrifices to bring order into the uncertainty of human life championed monotheism. Yahweh was the only one true, great and holy God (Abe, 2005). The Israelites is perhaps the only nation know in ancient world to have by implication, all sacrifices made in the course of their religions as ceremonial engagements were directed to Yahweh. Sacrifices were attached to one form of ceremony or the other. According to Abe (2004), festivals and sacrifices were prominent features of the Hebrew religion. It was necessary in order to maintain and renew constantly, the corporal bond between God and the people.

In many ancient religions, sacrifice is a way of feeding the gods like in African traditional religion. The Old Testament however rejects this view (Psalms 50:7- 15). Sibani (2009) says that the Old Testament understanding of sacrifice is dominated by its perception of the meaning of holiness, this simply means that the function of sacrifice is to secure ritual purity (Leviticus 11: 1-15:33). As this went on, the events of history made the need for forgiveness more obvious, this came to be the predominant meaning attached to sacrifice (Ezekiel 45:18-25). Okey (2005) says that this does not mean, of course, that sacrifice and sin were related only at a later date. At an earlier period, even sacrifices that were not identified as ‘sin offering’ could be accompanied by great repentance (Judges 20:26; 21:1-4; 1Sam. 7:2-9; Job 1:5).

The prophets and others often reminded the people of the need for true confession and repentance to accompany sacrificial worship (Micah 6: 1-8; Amos 5:21- 24; Psalm 51:16-19). The Hebrews were also tempted to offer sacrifices to gods other than Yahweh, using rituals that were alien to the Old Testament faith. At one time, sacrifice was thought to have gotten its base on superstition and ignorance. It was only relatively late in Israel’s history that it came to have any theological significance, as sacrifice became a way of making amends for sin. According to Sibani (2009), peace and harmony with God is a fundamental requirement for a good life. Peace and harmony comes from God and therefore sacrifice is done to be in tune with God.

Historical Concept of Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion

In Africa ontology, there are two types of beings, the physical beings and the invisible beings. The visible consist of human beings and is represented by all the material surroundings familiar to man (the sky, earth, rivers, mountains and others). The invisible world is the spirit world which constitutes of the supreme being, divinities and ancestors. These spirits attract man’s attention to the fact that they are gods and there is the need to show loyalty to them through various mode of sacrifice.

Parrinder (1974) opines that sacrifices, human or otherwise in African societies, and other societies in the world, constitute historical and social facts that cannot be reasonably denied. Historical records indicate that in the traditional religions of Asia, as part of the cult of the deities, the offering of sacrifice has always been a central and important part of worship. They offered such things as cows, goats, sheep, pigs, buffaloes, chickens, rice-beer and money. In china, records indicate that they used to offer a human at the occasion of a marriage in order to ensure its success. He says that

the Aztecs reportedly engaged in ritual battles in the course of which they took prisoners who were then sacrificed.

African Encyclopedia (1974) states that in Africa, the Lozo people of Zambia have been known to offer water in a bowl to god on a daily basis. The Yoruba of Nigeria usually offer a dog to Ogun, the god of iron and war. The Bambuti of Central Africa still offer to God part of anything killed, and part of their fruits whereas the Dinka of Sudan still offer cattle or goats. Further examples indicate that the Bagisu of Uganda offer goats, chickens and even cows at the occasion of their *imbalu* (circumcision ceremonies). The Zulu of Southern Africa are wont to offer bulls or cows at marriage celebrations. And in Swazi history, their kings have been known to offer human beings every year at the occasion of the *Incwale* (feast of first fruits). This was for the purpose strengthening the king and ensuring the success and well-being of the state. This may be linked to a description in the Drum Magazine of October 1972 concerning the Wuhor Ritual Murder. It was reported that a certain young man was killed in order to obtain his heart for ritual. Such a ritual was deemed necessary for the smooth installation of new senior chief.

Mushanga (cited in Okpaku, 1986) describes a case in Bugere (Uganda) where the victim was discovered with his right hand dumb cut off, and small pieces of flesh cut off from the soles of the feet. The bodily portions acquired are supposed to be for medical purposes. In South African, such parts include the vital organs. He also observed that in Toro (Uganda), female victims have had their vaginas excised for medicinal purposes. There are also cases in which male victims have been found with their penises and testicles cut off. Mushanga observed that the most likely men to kill as a result of their belief in witchcrafts are those that are sexually impotent. This is because it is widely held that impotence is due to witchcraft and sorcery and is hardly ever regarded as a result of a malfunction of the reproductive organs.

This explains why some diviners are so-called native doctors prescribe certain human organs for restoring one's sexual potency. In such cases, the patient begins to hunt for victims to obtain the organs. Broadly speaking, the author classifies such victims as human sacrifices. In Islamic religion, when the faithful undertake their religious pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, they are known to sacrifice sheep at a certain stage. This has been interpreted by some to mean a replication of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son to God. In Abraham's case, a sheep was substituted by God. In like manner, Muslims may want human sacrifice for purposes of worship, but then their religious system makes provisions whereby a sheep can be substituted. In this ritual, they have

continued the practice of a blood sacrifice. Generally speaking, human history seems to indicate that the offering of sacrifice is a pattern of behaviour not peculiar to any one society.

Human Sacrifice in Africa Traditional Religion and its Implications

Sacrificing Twins and their Mothers:

In the traditional setting, the issue of human sacrifice is very predominant. The Killing of twins was very rampant before the advent of Western religion. Many ethnic groups in Africa believed that twins birth was unnatural and so either the twins were killed or the twins and their mother were killed. Mbiti (1970) describes how an Udhuk woman preferred going to the bush to deliver when she knew that her time for delivery was approaching. The reason for this was that Udhuk people used to kill the twins and the mother. To avoid this, a woman would prefer going to the bush with a relation so that if she delivered twins or triplets she would kill one or two and return with one baby.

Killing of twins in Ohafia, Abireba, Bende and Alayi of Abia State of Nigeria was taken seriously. A woman who gave birth to twins or triplets was regarded as having polluted the “land” (Earth goddess). A woman was not expected to produce more than one child at a time. It is only animals and birds that nature made to do that and not human beings. Ogbajie (1995) says that such births bring sorrow to the family and to the woman in particular. The twins were killed by being put in an earthenware pot and thrown into the ‘bad forest’. (Bad forest is where evil spirits are believed to inhabit and people who died as a result of the wrath of God from lightning; smallpox, swollen body, etc. were buried in such forests). Such twin babies could stay alive up to two or more days before they died. In some communities, the mother of such babies was driven out of home and a small house built for her at the outskirts of the village. Note that these twins were sacrificed to the gods/goddess of the land.

However, Mary Slessor, a Presbyterian British Missionary was very popular because of her work among the Efiks and Igbos. She protected twins and their mothers and also preserved those condemned by the traditionalists. Ogbajie (1995, p. 53) states:

There were two categories of human sacrifice before and during the arrival of Christianity in Igboland. One was for atonement of a great sin committed against God and man. It could also be for appeasement of an angry god. The other was to enable a chief or nobleman like an Ozo titleholder a good passage into the land of the dead.

The Act of Sacrificing Slaves:

In Achebe (1958), we can see the example of the first type of human sacrifice. A neighbouring village killed Udo's wife, who was from Umuofia Okonkwo's village. They demanded for a maiden and a young lad. Failure to do this would result to war between Umuofia and that village. This request was met. The young lady was given to Udo as a wife and Ikemefuna remained in the home of Okonkwo. After a few years, when the boy had grown and forgotten much about his original home, the gods demanded that he be sacrificed and Ikemefuna was killed. Similarly, a very powerful juju in African traditional setting would sometimes demand human sacrifice. Basden (1921, p. 231) has this to say:

Should political affairs become unusually complicated, or the town be threatened by a powerful enemy, or laid under a devastating epidemic or afflicted by any catastrophe whatever, the king and the chiefs consult with the (dibia) medicine men. That certain malignant spirits were in league against the town! The spirits of the lower regions (gods) might be manifesting their wrath against the whole town for its sins, or simply for those of one man, possibly even the king himself when all other forms of sacrifice failed they were driven back upon human sacrifice as their last hope! When this extreme form of sacrifice was needed, the person was never a fellow town's man he was always a slave purchased especially for the purpose, or a captive war.

The Act of Sacrificing Humans to Avert Calamities:

Metuh (1998) posits that human life is very precious and should not be substituted for mere material development. The traditional society upheld this idea of the sanctity of human life and practicalizes it through religious rituals, various rites of passage, dedications, festivals and all kinds of initiation ceremonies. Through these, it drums it into the ears and consciences of adherents that human life in all its ramifications should be upheld and respected. Quarcoopome (1987, pp. 89-90) avers:

The act of offering human beings in a sacrificial ritual is a long-established practice in West African Traditional religion. This is in consequence of the belief that it is highest form of sacrifice and therefore the most potent. The occasion is usually a matter of communal or national importance. Then a human being is sacrificed to divinities in order that the society might be saved from some serious calamity such as flood, plagues, famine, drought and so on.

The practice of human sacrifice as manifested in the daily exercise of wars, coups and counter coups, civil riots, political, economic, social and all sorts of upheavals, is still very much a reality to be reckoned with; people die or are killed in the hope of bettering prevailing conditions. Accordingly, one finds abundant evidence of sacrifices, human or otherwise.

Sacrificing Humans for Selfish Reasons:

Media sources have documented the following incidents of ritual murder that resulted in arrests.

According to *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* (2012, p. 4);

Nigerian media sources report on the killing of a "hunchbacked". The "hunch" of the victims was removed, reportedly for use in money-making rituals 27 Oct. 2009). In July 2012, two men from Nasawara State confessed to killing a seven-year-old boy, the child of neighbours, and severing his head for a man who had promised them 250,000 Nigerian Naira. In August 2012, in Ebonyi State, seven people were arrested for kidnapping, killing, and dismembering a young girl, reportedly for money-making rituals; two of the suspects confessed to the crime. In 2012, in Osun State, a young man was found dead with his head and genitals severed from his body; a close friend of the man was reportedly arrested in connection with the murder. One source indicates that a herbalist who reportedly performs money rituals and two other individuals were also arrested as suspects. In June 2012, in Nasawara State, a man and a "witch doctor" were arrested for their involvement in what police suspected to be a ritual murder of the man's wife, whose body was found with some body parts missing. In February 2011, near Jos, Plateau State, an elderly couple was beheaded and their grandchildren were beaten to death in what police suspected to be ritual killing because the killers had left with the woman's head.

Ray, (2022) avers, that the number of people dying for others or killed for religious or other reasons are simply too many to count. However, one finds evidence of those who are killed because of someone's envy, jealousy, or ambition. Such victim may not be called human sacrifices, but in fact that is also a form of human sacrifice. If one is killed for the pursuit of power, money, wealth of any kind, love or jealousy, such one is clearly a sacrificial victim. The killer rightly or wrongly uses the victim in an attempt to obtain what he values most. Human sacrifices and their frequency are determined by general cultural and sub-cultural patterns obtaining within specific areas and by other factors such as country, region, state, social class, race, sex, age and even religious affiliations.

Sacrificing Children via Circumcision and for Medicine:

Thumbi (1990, p. 288) says “there are three cases known to him where lumbar youths murdered other young men. The cases were taken to court. They occurred in the year 1964, 1972 and 1973.” All these ritual killings took place in the same area, in connection with the peoples’ most sacred practices, (that is circumcision). The murderers were known initiates and their victims were small children. It is generally believed that in order to ensure success of such a ritual, one has to go outside one’s own ethnic group to secure a victim. Strangers travelling at night or alone in those areas are strongly warned to great care. In Botswana, according to Okpaku (1986) on a number of occasions, the disappearance of children on their way to and from school was reported. The general assumption was that they were being taken for medicinal purposes.

Sacrificing Humans for Political/Economic Reasons:

Within the year 1973 and somewhat in 1974, there were social unrests in Lesotho. In the process, some thirty souls were killed. Although this happened in the context of political upheaval, there were speculations that the victims might have been abducted for medicinal purposes to strengthen and fortify their sacrifices. It is known that human sacrifice for medicinal purposes constitute an old value among some people in the Sotho culture, (Zimmerli, 2022). The Muti in Swaziland has a practice where there is murder for the purpose of doctoring. This is mostly done to ensure either agricultural abundance or personal glorification. The local doctors could tell that one with certain specific skin pigmentation is suitable for the production of say, brown mealies if you want to be successful in your business or in life generally, an elderly lady would be suitable and so on, (Kuper cited in Akiiki, 1975). In Nigeria, so many are sacrificed on the political altar as a result of quest for power. They murder lives without conscience. The ritual act of sacrificing human beings for money is very rampant in Nigeria. Little ones are sacrificing their parents and relatives for money

Sacrificing Humans to Gain Freedom:

Sibani (2009) revealed that dying or being killed for love of husband, wife, children, country and freedom, seems to be a daily occurrence in the world. All along the course of African history, people have died or killed for various beliefs. In the category are to be found the Mau Mau of Kenya, Frelimo of Mozambique, the Biafra civil war victims, Ken Saro-Wiwa of Ogoni and eight other Ogonis brutally beheaded and thousands of freedom fighters in Southern Africa. In War, the

leader of the people urges them to sacrifice everything including their very dear lives, for whatever ideals. Such exercises can be described as human sacrifices. It is clear that men have a fierce determination to sacrifice and to be sacrificed.

Sacrificing Albinos to the gods:

According to Sibani (2009) human sacrifices take place almost daily somewhere in the world not only as offerings in the strictly religious sense, but in order to obtain purely material goals valued more highly than that which is offered. There is no gainsaying the fact that in Africa, the Albinos are referred to as blacks who lack pigmentations. Several parts of Africa have this kind of people killed and sacrificed to the gods of the land, because for them, they could see the feasibility of two blacks as co-parents begetting a white as snow child. The inalienable rights to life was denied those kids who could have contributed meaningful things to the society.

The Implications of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament Context

Human Sacrifice Presented as Burnt Offering to Molech:

This Kind of sacrifice is a perverted expression of religious devotion and means of seeking divine favour. According to Kalu (2022), it has been found in several primitive religions, as well as in heathenism of biblical times, such as in the case of the ammonites and Molech as contained in Lev 18:21: “you shall not give any of your children to devote them by fire to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord”. Chapter 20:2 of the same Leviticus has it that “Any man of the people of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, who gives any of his children to Molech shall be put to death; the people shall stone him with stone”. This was out rightly forbidden by God. The warning also went from the Phoenician to Baal Jeremiah 19:5 “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 same went to the house of Judah in Jeremiah 32:35;

They built the high places of Baal in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to offer up their sons and daughters to Molech, though I did not command them, nor did it enter into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.

Sacrificing Humans to Appease the gods:

Wycliffe Bible Dictionary (2000, p.1496) succinctly observed that “human sacrifice was often done in an endeavour to placate a god who was considered to be showing his anger in a particular

trial or danger.” Due to this, it was practiced by both the Israelites and the Canaanites. The Psalmist did say in Psalm 106:37-38: “They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughter, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood”.

Sacrificing Human as fulfillment of Vows Made:

Some of the Israelites adopted the practice of sacrificing sons and daughters. In history, at times people have made vows or promises to sacrifice humans and the classical example of this practice is that of Jephthah, the Gideadite (Judges 11:30). The text goes thus:

Lord, if thou wilt deliver the Ammonites into my hands, then the first creature that comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return from them in peace shall be the Lords; I will offer that as a whole-offering.

In the circumstances, his daughter was the one to meet him, and according to his vows, she had to be offered to the Lord (Judges 11:39). Much as possible people could made such vows to God or perhaps to lesser spirits. If people had reason to believe that the deity in question was angry, (even God himself), then they deemed it fit to appease the super natural powers before sharing food. In the history of the Jews, and the temple of Jerusalem, burnt offerings were rendered every morning, whereas meal offerings were made in the evenings. Additionally, they used to pour water and wine before God, and to anoint sacred stones with oil.

Sacrificing Humans to Avert a Siege:

A terrible example of this abominable act as stated by Sibani (2009) was seen when during a siege, Mesha, king of Moab, sacrificed his eldest son and heir apparent to the throne upon the city wall as a burnt offering. Israel and her allies withdrew in horror. 2 Kings 3: 26-27 says:

When the king of Moab saw that the battle was going against him, he took with him seven hundred swordsmen to break through, opposite the king of Edom; but they could not. Then he took his eldest son who was to reign in his stead and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall. And there came great wrath upon Israel; and they withdrew from him and returned to their own land

Ahaz, the king of Jerusalem used his sons as burnt offering (2 kings 16:3, 2 Chronicles 28:1-3). Manaseen was found in such an abominable act as contained in 2 kings 21:6, 2 Chronicles 33:6. It was clear that Josiah, a godly king who succeeded them made to pass through the fire to Molech

(2 Kings 23:10 cf: 2 Chronicles 34:4-5). Though no specific example is given of its occurrence after the division of the kingdom, still it is stated as a cause of their captivity. 2 Kings 17:17, recorded thus: “And they burned their sons and their daughters as offerings and used divination and sorcery, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger”. It is discovered that people were even practicing it at the time of the Babylonian Exile as witnessed by the prophets of that day (Jeremiah 7:31, 17:1-2, 19:5, 32:35; Ezekiel 16:21;20:31;23:37; cf. Isaiah 57:5). God clearly pronounced through Micah that the sacrifice of his firstborn would not atone for one’s sin (Micah 6:7-8).

The Act of Offering Isaac as True Test of Love for Yahweh

True faith demands a leap into the absurd and the acceptance of what goes contrary to our categories of reason. Budd (2022) pointed out here that the purpose why God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac to him is dual. (1) God wanted to test Abraham’s faith and (2) God also wanted to teach him that He did not want human sacrifice. Abraham believed that if he sacrificed Isaac, God can raise him because he was a child of promise. Hebrews 11:17, 19 says:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom it was said, through Isaac shall your descendants be named. He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. (Also see Gen 17:19)

Abraham believed strongly that God would supply a substitutionary sacrifice in place of his son. Isaac queried “Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham replied, “God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering” (Gen 22:7-8). Wycliffe Bible Dictionary (2000, pp. 1496-1497) succinctly put it: “That God did not intervene until Abraham raised the knife to slay his son only proves the extremity of God’s test on the one hand, and the perfection of Abraham’s obedience on the other”. Note, that Abraham’s faith rested on God’s direct revelation. Biblical faith is based upon reasonable evidence and not upon the ridiculous, absurd, contradictory, and paradoxical belief of heathens.

Recommendations

1. Since man cannot create life, the law via government intervention should prosecute anyone found culpable of sacrificing human beings to any deity.

2. Any religion found in the act of sacrificing human beings should be abolished and the priest and members prosecuted.

Conclusion

Sacrifice is a form of communication with the Supreme Deity or gods in biblical times and Africa respectively. The sanctity of human life is very important and should be respected. Humans should not be seen as an object of sacrifice. God does not take pleasure in seeing humans being sacrificed on the altar and He warned that blood should not be shed. In the case of Isaac, it was a test of Abraham's faith which God later substituted a ram for Isaac's life. Human sacrifice is on the increase on daily basis and a societal debacle which requires urgent attention and intervention by the law of the land or gods for appeasement or to attract benevolence. In every society, human sacrifice propels people to live in fear of the unknown and the supernatural forces believed to be thirsty for blood and human flesh.

The implication of human sacrifice in the Old Testament and African Traditional Religion call for serious debate and has been addressed in this paper. This reveals that there is lack of understanding on the importance of human life and how the powerful sacrifice the weak and disadvantaged ones for favour. It is diaphanous in Africa that humans do the bidding of divinities who lack the capability to create life but demand for its termination. Demanding factors for human sacrifice include political, cultural, religious, economic and social. The deformed, albinos, and in the early time twins as well as those who disobeyed/break divine laws were used for sacrifice. The government and our traditional authorities have the intervening responsibilities to curb these obnoxious cultural/religious practices in Africa to usher in a new era of worship.

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