

## Atonement

The study of atonement has become complicated because most writers of dictionaries and commentaries have described the process of presenting the atonement sacrifices rather than explaining the result of the sacrifices. Leviticus 16 describes the Levitical High Priest presenting the blood of a bull for himself (V 6) and releasing a goat (V 10) for the people. These animals could not please God, and He expresses it this way. *"What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats"* (Isaiah 1:11). In addition, the weakness of the sacrifices is pronounced by the Hebrew writer, *"For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins"* (Hebrews 10:4).

So, if the blood of the atonement sacrifices could not take away sin, what did they accomplish? As the Hebrew word *kāphar* implies, atonement was a temporary covering up of the people's sins. When we think of something being covered up, it is the facts of the subject or issue being suppressed. For Israel, their sins were before God, but in atonement, they were covered until the next Day of Atonement, when the sacrifices had to be made again. The fact that they were guilty and deserved punishment remained until the perfect sacrifice of the Lamb that God supplied could be offered.

Many scholars have explained the actions of Leviticus 16 as "Rolling Forward" the sins of the people. But that does not satisfy the basic need to pacify or satisfy God for sinning against Him. The idea of temporarily covering up sin so that it was not held against the sinner until the Messiah came explains the result of atonement. The people were still guilty, but the promise of complete justification gave hope of complete forgiveness of sin.

In addition to the sacrifices made on the day of atonement, all sin offerings provided atonement to the individual making the burnt offering for their sins. The one making the offering, "Shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf" (Leviticus 1:4). The act of laying hands on the offering is a sharing of responsibility, the life of the sacrifice for the life of the sinner. And like the Day of Atonement for all Israel, the guilt would remain with the person, the sins temporarily covered by the sacrifice of an animal, while waiting for the Messiah. All unintentional sins of the people, a group of people, and for an individual Are found in (Numbers 15:22-31). In each case, the instruction included the words, *"The priest shall make atonement before the LORD."*

In the Old Testament, we also see the need for atonement outside of the law of Moses. From the book of Job, we understood the need for atonement as we read of Job's actions toward God for his children. *"His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When the days of feasting had completed their cycle, Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts"* (Job 1:4-5). Acting as a mediator priest, Job was called by God to intercede for the three friends and the false things they said about God (Job 42:7-9).

The concept of atonement is not needed in the New Testament, although the word has been used by translators in Romans 5:11, where reconciliation is better. The word John and the Hebrew writer use for the forgiveness and forgetting of sins is propitiation. Referring to Christ, John writes, "He

Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). The word "propitiation" carries the meaning of a complete satisfaction of all debts owed. Christ's death on the cross was the total redemptive value of all sins committed, from Adam's until the end of time. Christ's blood bought all sins temporarily covered by the blood of animals and will never be remembered again.

For the Christian, the Hebrew writer says, "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:17). Looking at the two concepts together, atonement and propitiation, the Holy Spirit says "Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, (Hebrews 10:11-12). "And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more" (Hebrews 10:15-17).