

Atonement¹ in Symbols (Word-Pictures): Part 2



SABBATH—NOVEMBER 8

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Leviticus 16; Numbers 18:1–8; Psalm 28:2; Psalm 132:7; Psalm 138:2.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Let us go to the Lord’s house. Let us worship at his feet’ ” (Psalm 132:7, NlrV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: To look at the atoning (forgiving and cleansing) work of Christ as shown in the Day of Atonement sanctuary service.²

THE ISRAELITE SANCTUARY (THE HOME OF GOD ON EARTH IN EARLY BIBLE TIMES) was cleansed once a year from the sins of Israel. These sins were transferred (brought) there through the daily sacrifices.³ The yearly ritual (service) showed, as a symbol, the time when God would bring an end to the problem of sin and restore the whole universe⁴ to its original peace and unity.

During this week, we will study the meaning of the Day of Atonement.⁵

1. atonement—the forgiveness and cleansing we receive by faith through Jesus’ sacrifice (death) on the cross.

2. Day of Atonement sanctuary service—an event that took place once a year in which the Jewish sanctuary (house of God on earth) was cleansed (made clean) of sin. Day of Atonement services represented a final removal of sin and a completely restored relationship with God.

3. daily sacrifices—the act of sacrificing (putting to death) animals each day for forgiveness of the sins of the people of Israel. This was done by the priests in the sanctuary (the home of God on earth) in early Bible times.

4. universe—all the matter (things), light, and energy (forces in nature that do work) that have been discovered (found) or that we know of.

5. Day of Atonement—an event that took place once a year when the earthly sanctuary (the home of God on earth) was cleansed (made clean) by the High Priest. Day of Atonement services symbolized (stood for) cleansing from sin and a renewed relationship with God.

SUNDAY—NOVEMBER 9**SANCTUARY AND ATONEMENT**
(Exodus 25:8, 22)

What do Exodus 25:8, 22; Exodus 29:42, 43; Psalm 28:2; Psalm 132:7; and Psalm 138:2 teach us about the importance of the sanctuary in the experience and life of the Israelites?

The Israelite sacrificial system⁶ was a very important part of the sanctuary, the earthly home of God. It was the center of life and of holiness in Israel. Within that special space God dealt with the problem of sin. He commanded the Israelites to build an altar⁷ in the courtyard of the sanctuary. The sacrificial⁸ blood was put upon this altar to make atonement for the people (Leviticus 17:11). Blood, as a symbol of life, belonged to God. And it was to be returned to Him there, on the altar.

In the plan of salvation,⁹ the life of the animal stood for the life of the repentant¹⁰ sinner. God would accept the death of the innocent animal instead of the sinner. The altar was a symbol of God's presence (Psalm 43:4). By accepting the sacrifice, God was accepting responsibility for the sin of the person. In other words, the



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Lord was telling the Israelites, "If you have sinned and want to get rid of its power over you, bring it to Me. And I will take care of it. Bring it to Me!" The Israelites left the sanctuary blessed by the Lord. And they were made righteous (holy) by His grace¹¹ (Psalm 24:3–5; Psalm 118:26).

All this symbolized the work of Jesus, our real High Priest.

Someone asked a friend, "How can I know what God really is like?" The person answered, "Look at Jesus on the cross. He was dying for the sins of the world." How does the Cross tell us what God really is like? What comfort and hope can you get from God's example?

6. sacrificial system—in the Jewish sanctuary service, animals were sacrificed (put to death) so that the people of Israel could receive forgiveness of sins. This service helped point people to the future sacrifice (death) of Jesus Christ on the cross for their sins.

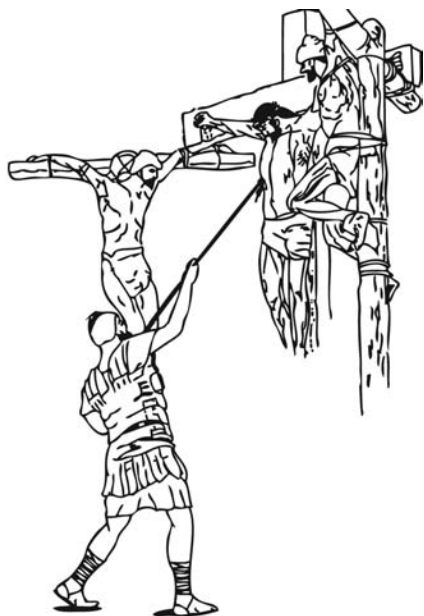
7. altar—a structure that is raised off the ground or a place on which sacrifices (gifts to God) are made or incense (sweet-smelling perfume) is burned.

8. sacrificial—having to do with an animal, gift, or offering that is given up to get something else that is wanted.

9. plan of salvation—what God has done and is doing to save us from sin.

10. repentant—being sorry for your sins and turning away from sin.

11. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.



The cross was the altar on which the blood payment for our sins was made.

MONDAY—NOVEMBER 10

PRIESTLY WORK AND ATONEMENT (Numbers 18:1–8)

Why was it necessary in Numbers 18:1–8 to have priests who worked in God’s temple?

The important work of the priests was to be mediators¹² between God and the people.

The priests’ work as mediators clearly was seen during the daily services. They were in charge of the altar of the burnt offering. They were to keep the sacred fire burning on it. They were to remove the ashes and

bring new wood (Leviticus 6:10–13). They placed a burnt offering on that altar in the morning and then another in the evening (Numbers 28:3–8). During daily services, the high priest went into the holy place to take care of the lampstand and to burn incense¹³ before the Lord (Exodus 30:7, 8). Also, every time an Israelite brought a sacrifice,¹⁴ the priests sacrificed (put to death) it for him or her to make atonement for the sinner (Leviticus 1:5–9; Leviticus 4:25, 26, 34, 35).



The high priest burned incense each day in the holy place. The smoke stood for the prayers of the people rising to God.

The work of the priest as a mediator served three main purposes. First, it showed that there was a wide separation between God and humans (men, women, and children). But there was a way to close the gap. Second, it showed God’s desire to be with His people. It was an example of

12. mediators—priests who served as “peacemakers” between God and His people.

13. incense—sweet-smelling perfume given off by certain spices when burned. The smoke and the sweet smell of the incense represented the prayers of God’s people rising to Him in heaven.

14. sacrifice—the act of giving up something or someone of value, such as a life, to save or to help save someone or something.

God's love. He tried to come closer to His people who were sinners. Third, from the people's point of view, the priests gave them an opportunity (a chance) to be closer to the Holy One and to be cleansed (set free) from sin. The priestly mediators were always there to help the people reach God and find grace and mercy.

The whole system pointed to the greatest Mediator between God and humans, Jesus Christ.

Through the work of Christ we are "royal priests" (1 Peter 2:9, NIV). What is your work as a "spiritual" priest? How can you work as a "priest" for other people?

TUESDAY—NOVEMBER 11

DAY OF ATONEMENT: PART 1 (Leviticus 16:16, 17, 21, 30, 33, 34)

The Day of Atonement service showed the final answer to the sin problem. It was an example of receiving salvation¹⁵ through the daily services. The whole tabernacle (tent) was to be cleansed. In the tabernacle were the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. They needed cleansing because "the people of Israel are not 'clean.' They have not obeyed me. They have also committed (done) other sins" (Leviticus 16:16, NIV). These sins had been moved to God's dwelling place (home) in the tabernacle through the sacrifices brought by repentant sinners. During the Day of Atonement the tabernacle was

restored to its original cleanliness and holiness. On that day, once a year, there was a space that was free from sin. Celebrated at the end of the year, the Day of Atonement gave a fresh start to the people of Israel.

What important point is made in Leviticus 16:16, 17, 21, 30, 33, and 34? Whose sins are being dealt with on that day?

The verses show the all-around nature of the cleansing. This is because *all* the sins of *all* the people were dealt with. This was God's final answer to the sin problem in Israel for that year. It also symbolized the final answer to sin at the end of time (Hebrews 9:28).

According to Leviticus 23:26–31, what did God expect from His people during the Day of Atonement?

The Day of Atonement was a group event, involving the whole nation. But each person had a part to do by giving himself or herself over to the Lord completely. Those who were not with the Lord were to be "cut off from his people" (Leviticus 23:29, NIV). This may sound terrible. But the point is to show how serious the work of salvation is. These verses are encouraging people always to be faithful in their walk with the Lord.

How are we to dedicate our souls to God on a daily basis? What does that mean? Read

15. salvation—God's plan of saving sinners from eternal (without end) death.

Matthew 16:24, 25; Romans 6:1–13; and Hebrews 12:4.

WEDNESDAY—NOVEMBER 12

DAY OF ATONEMENT: PART 2 (Leviticus 16:20–22)

Read about the scapegoat service¹⁶ in Leviticus 16:20–22. How is the fate of the scapegoat¹⁷ different from the fate of all the others used in the service?

The “scapegoat” (Hebrew *azazel*) is not a way of receiving atonement (forgiveness and cleansing). It is a tool through which sin and impurity (not being clean) are carried to the wilderness. How do we know this?

First, the transfer (move) of sin and impurity to this animal takes place after the high priest finished the work of atonement in the sanctuary. Second, the goat is not offered as a sacrifice. It is not killed. So, there is no blood for atonement. Third, the goat “carries” the sins of the people. But that does not mean that the goat carries them as a substitute¹⁸ like Jesus does for us. In this case the verb¹⁹ *carries* means to carry to another place. This place is “the wilderness”

(Leviticus 16:22, NASB). When the same verb (*carries* or *bears*) is used to describe the work of the Servant of the Lord, it stands alone: “He [Jesus] bare [accepted] the sins of many” (Isaiah 53:12). He is not carrying them anywhere. But He is accepting responsibility for them. Through that act, He forgives us. That is what atonement is. But that is not what the scapegoat does.

Instead, the scapegoat service is a removal service. The scapegoat is a way of removing sin and impurity (not being clean) from the camp of Israel, things that should not be there.



The scapegoat *carries* the sins of the people into the wilderness.

16. scapegoat service—two goats were chosen for the Day of Atonement service. One was called the Lord’s goat. It was slain for forgiveness of the people’s sins. The sins were then transferred (moved) to the second goat, called the scapegoat, to be carried away from the Israelite camp. The scapegoat would die in a far-off place in the wilderness.

17. scapegoat—the animal (goat) used in the Day of Atonement service. The forgiven sins of God’s people were transferred (placed on) the scapegoat who then carried them away in the wilderness, where it would die. The scapegoat represented Satan and shows how God will finally deal with all sin.

18. substitute—someone or something that takes the place of another person or thing.

19. verb—a word that shows action.

During the Day of Atonement there was a challenge between the Lord and another power. The goat for the Lord represented God. The goat for Azazel²⁰ represented a demon who was responsible for sin and impurity. The sins of the people were sent to Azazel through the goat. This act pointed to the demon as the author (starter) of sin. God had accepted the sin and impurity of His people in order to atone²¹ for them and to forgive their sins. But that did not mean evil started with God. The Day of Atonement announced in symbols the final victory²² of holiness and purity over sin, impurity, and evil. It foresaw the moment when the charges²³ raised against God by Lucifer in heaven will be solved forever. And Lucifer will have to accept responsibility for starting sin. Through this service God was putting hope in His people by pointing to a future when a new heaven and earth would come into life by the power of Christ. This new earth would be free from death and pain, free from the power of sin (Revelation 21:3, 4).

THURSDAY—NOVEMBER 13

ATONEMENT: WHAT IS IT? (Leviticus 4:31)

Which ideas are connected with the verb *to make atonement* in

Leviticus 4:31; Leviticus 16:18, 19, 30; and Leviticus 17:11?

In Leviticus, the priests lead in the atoning services as mediators. But they are not the ones who atone for sin. After the service is done, God gives the forgiveness (Leviticus 4:26; the verb in this verse suggests that God is the one who forgives). Atonement is something that God does for His people. He is the one who “wipe[s] away the sin of his land and people” (Deuteronomy 32:43, NIV; read also Psalm 65:3; Psalm 79:9). Through atonement, God lets His love flow to sinners.

The Hebrew verb that means “to make atonement” in Leviticus (Hebrew *kipper*) explains the idea of wiping off or cleansing. Atonement is made for the tabernacle, the altar, and the horns²⁴ of the altar. It means they are cleansed from sin and impurity that pollute the sanctuary. The suggestion is that through atonement the sanctuary is restored to the original way it was before the stain of sin. With repentant sinners, the verb *to make atonement* still keeps the idea of cleansing from sin or impurity.

The cleansing takes place through the blood of a sacrificial animal. For this reason, atonement also can suggest the idea of ransoming.²⁵ Freeing a person from sin is done at the cost

20. Azazel—a Hebrew word that is used in Leviticus 16:8, 10, 26 that means “scapegoat” or “the goat sent away.”

21. atone—to pay the price for our sins by dying in our place.

22. victory—the act of winning the battle over, or winning the struggle against, something.

23. charges—words that blame a person for doing something.

24. horns (of the altar)—corner pieces (often in the shape of animal horns) that were attached to the altar.

25. ransoming—freeing a person from the slavery of sin. Jesus bought our freedom from sin with His blood. The price of our freedom, our ransom, was His death.

of the blood/life of the sacrificial animal (Leviticus 17:11). It was offered in place of the sinner. The animal took the place of him or her.

Atonement was an ongoing service rather than something that happens at a single point in time. Atonement involved the whole sanctuary activity throughout the year—from the daily sacrifices (Leviticus 5:10) to the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:34) and all the services in between. In other words, atonement covered all of the cleansing action of God for Israel all year. It included the sacrificial act, the priestly work, and the final removal of sin and impurity during the Day of Atonement. This symbolized the work of atonement that Christ is doing for us.

Only God could atone for sin. It took the life of Christ to do it. What should that tell us about how bad sin must be? So, why do we not hate sin more than we do? How does the practice of sin dull our hatred of sin?

FRIDAY—NOVEMBER 14

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Satan is the cause of all the sins that caused the death of the Son of God. So justice demands that Satan shall suffer the final punishment. Christ works for the salvation of men and the cleansing of the universe from sin. His work will be closed by the removal of sin from the

heavenly sanctuary²⁶. And these sins will be placed upon Satan. Satan will be forced to accept the final penalty. So in the sanctuary service, the year of priestly work closed with the sanctuary made pure. And the sins of the people were confessed on the head of the scapegoat.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*,²⁷ page 358.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Review how atonement and cleansing in the earthly sanctuary worked. Then compare²⁸ them to how Christ destroys our sin without destroying us.
- ② Many people find it hard to understand why innocent animals had to die for sin. What is the important lesson from these deaths for us? What should it tell us about how terrible sin is?
- ③ All during the week we talked about “cleansing” from sin. What does that mean in the life of someone who claims the blood of Christ in 1 John 1:7? What does it mean to be cleansed of sin?
- ④ Answer Monday’s final question and bring it to class on Sabbath. Compare answers. How can we, both as individuals and as a group, better do our work as “priests”?

26. heavenly sanctuary—the place in heaven where Jesus works as our High Priest before the throne of God.

27. patriarchs and prophets—patriarchs were leaders of God’s people in early Bible times, such as Abraham and Isaac, or other leaders of Israel, such as Moses. Prophets are men or women sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

28. compare—to show how two things are the same.