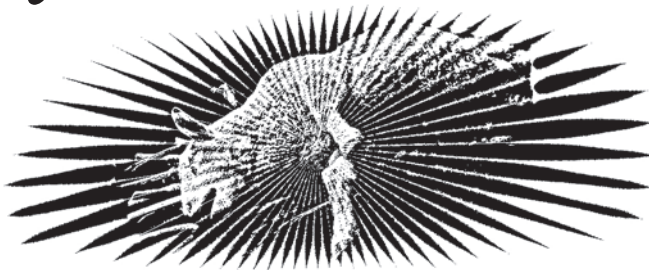


Atonement *in* Symbols: Part 2



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Leviticus 16, Num. 18:1–8, Pss. 28:2, 132:7, 138:2.*

Memory Text: “ ‘Let us go to his [God’s] dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool’ ” (*Psalms 132:7, NIV*).

Key Thought: To look at the atoning work of Christ as revealed particularly in the Day of Atonement sanctuary service.

The Israelite sanctuary was cleansed once a year from the sin and impurities of Israel, which were transferred there through the daily sacrifices. The yearly ritual symbolically represented the time when God, from His heavenly dwelling place, would bring an end to the problem of sin and restore the whole universe to its original harmony.

During this week, we will study not only the symbolic meaning of the Day of Atonement but also how the Israelite sanctuary pointed to God’s heavenly dwelling, the throne room of the universe.

We will also discuss the priests in the Old Testament and how their work of mediation prefigured the work of Christ as our Mediator and Intercessor in the heavenly sanctuary.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 15.*

Sanctuary and Atonement

What do the following verses teach us about the role of the sanctuary in the experience and life of the Israelites? *Exod. 25:8, 22; 29:42, 43; Pss. 28:2; 132:7; 138:2.*

The Israelite sacrificial system was centered on and operated within the sanctuary, the earthly dwelling of God. It was the center of life and of holiness in Israel. Within that unique space God dealt with the problem of sin. He commanded the Israelites to build an altar in the courtyard of the sanctuary, and it was upon this altar that the sacrificial blood was placed in order to make atonement for the people (*Lev. 17:11*). Blood, as a tangible expression of life, belonged to God, and it was to be returned to Him there, on the altar.

In the plan of salvation, the life of the animal stood for the life of the repentant sinner, and God would accept the death of the innocent animal in place of the sinner's death. The altar was a symbol of God's presence (*Ps. 43:4*), and by accepting the sacrifice, God was assuming responsibility for the sin of the person. In other words, the Lord was telling the Israelites, "If you have sinned and want to get rid of this enslaving power, bring it to Me, to My dwelling place, and I will take care of it. Bring it to Me!" The Israelites left the sanctuary blessed by the Lord and justified by His grace (*Pss. 24:3–5, 118:26*).

All this was symbolic of the work of Jesus, our real High Priest. The heavenly sanctuary is the dwelling of God within the cosmos and the place from which He rules as King of the universe; it's also the place in which the sin problem is being resolved. The cross was the altar on which the sacrifice was offered for us. Today God says to us, "If you want freedom from sin, and forgiveness of sin, come to the altar of sacrifice where My Son paid the penalty for your sins!"

Someone asked a friend, "How can I know what God is really like?" The person responded, "Look at Jesus on the cross, dying for the sins of the world." How does the Cross tell us what God is really like? What comfort and hope can you draw for yourself from that revelation of God?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Psalm 132:7*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: As sinners, we needed a blood transfusion.

Feel: The enormity of being at one (atonement) with God.

Do: Feel more appalled at the sin problem in our lives.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Atonement in the Sanctuary (*Leviticus 16*)

A What attributes of the sanctuary services during the Day of Atonement do you find comforting? Disturbing? Why?

B What implications does the sanctuary's being the center of life in Israel have for us today? Explain your answer.

II. Priestly Duties (*Exod. 28:9–12, 29; Num. 27:21; 28:3–8; Deut. 1:5–9; 4:25, 26, 34, 35*)

A How important was the role of the priest carrying out the daily duties at the temple?

B What is the importance of having a priest in our own home?

C Do we feel enough horror at the sin in our lives?

III. Day of Atonement (*Leviticus 16*)

A Should the Day of Atonement have been a day of rejoicing or one of terror for the Israelites? In the busyness of life, how do we keep a focus on Christ as our High Priest? If we lose that focus, what do we risk?

B Purging of sins is necessary to be at peace with God. What keeps us from remembering that sense of peace and being drawn to sin again?

▶ **Summary:** The Day of Atonement is something positive. It is the beginning of an eternity with God.

Priestly Work and Atonement

Why was it necessary to have a priesthood who operated in His temple? *Num. 18:1–8*.

The fundamental work of the priests was to mediate between God and the people. The priests represented God before the people in their teaching ministry (*Deut. 33:10*). Closely related to that work was the priestly duty of revealing God's will to those who sought divine guidance (*Num. 27:21*). The priests also functioned as judges in the sanctuary. In fact, the highest tribunal of the land operated at the central sanctuary (*Deut. 17:8–13, 21:5*). They were especially responsible for blessing the people (*Deut. 10:8, 21:5*). They represented the people before God. In their representative role they took the people with them to the presence of the Lord (*Exod. 28:9–12, 29*).

Their role as mediators was particularly visible during the daily services. They were in charge of the altar of the burnt offering and were to keep the sacred fire burning on it, removing the ashes and bringing new wood (*Lev. 6:10–13*). They placed a burnt offering on that altar in the morning and then another in the evening (*Num. 28:3–8*). During daily services the high priest went into the Holy Place to dress the lampstand and to burn incense before the Lord (*Exod. 30:7, 8*). Also, whenever an Israelite brought a sacrifice, the priests sacrificed it on his or her behalf to make atonement for the sinner (*Lev. 1:5–9; 4:25, 26, 34, 35*).

The priest's role of mediator served at least three main purposes. First, it suggested that despite the fundamental distance between God and humans, there was a way to close the gap. Second, it revealed God's desire to be with His people. It manifested God's love seeking a way to become accessible to them, despite their sin. Third, from the perspective of the Israelites, the priesthood gave them access to the Holy One of Israel and the opportunity to be cleansed from sin and impurity. The priestly mediators were always available in order to make it possible for the people to approach God and find grace and mercy.

The whole system, of course, pointed to the ultimate Mediator between God and humans, the Servant of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Through the work of Christ we are part of the “royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:9). What is your role in that priesthood? How can you function as “priest” for other people?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Symbols may mean different things to different people. The fourth of July is America's Independence Day. It is also the day England lost one of her colonies. Christmas is a celebration of the birth of Jesus for Christians; for non-Christians it is just a family holiday. It is a matter of perspective. A flag may be a symbol of liberty to one and a symbol of repression to another. Symbols are like shadows. They are a likeness, a reminder, an aid to understanding, but they are not the reality. God understood the need for symbols for us as individuals and collectively. Symbols are a way of engaging us, getting our attention, helping us gain a better understanding of God, and drawing us into a closer relationship with Him. Jesus is presented to us in Scripture under a whole spectrum of symbols: Rock, Shepherd, Way, Door, Light, etc.

Ask the class to read the description of the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 23:26–32. Compare this with how Moses describes the way the other festivals should be celebrated (*Lev. 23:8, 14, 21, 25, 36*). What does this tell you about the significance of the Day of Atonement?


► **STEP 2—Explore**

Bible Commentary

Exodus 30:10, Leviticus 16, 23:27–32, and Numbers 29:7–11 list the sacrifices offered on the Day of Atonement: daily burnt offering; bullock for a sin offering and ram for a burnt offering for the priest; two goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering for the people; and for the day, one bullock, one ram, seven lambs, for a burnt offering, and one kid for a sin offering.

The Old Testament sacrificial system and the Day of Atonement all pointed to Jesus' death and the benefits and implications of it for the sinner. Look at the implications of Jesus' sacrifice in the following texts:

- *Heb. 9:14*—Serve the living God
- *Heb. 10:10*—Made holy

CONTINUED 

Day of Atonement: Part 1

The Day of Atonement ritual illustrated the final resolution of the sin problem, the consummation of the salvation as experienced through the daily services. The whole tabernacle was to be cleansed, the Holy and Most Holy Places. They needed cleansing because of the “uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been” (*Lev. 16:16, NIV*). These sins had been transferred to the divine dwelling through the sacrifices brought by repentant sinners. During the Day of Atonement the tabernacle was restored to its original pristine cleanliness and holiness. On that day, once a year, there was a fragment of space that, like the Garden of Eden, was free from the presence of sin and impurity. This “return” to Eden, celebrated at the end of the year, provided a fresh beginning for the people of Israel. It pointed to a new beginning of cosmic proportions (*compare Dan. 8:14*).

Read specifically Leviticus 16:16, 17, 21, 30, 33, 34. What specific emphasis can you find there? Whose sins are being dealt with on that day, in contrast to the daily ritual? *Lev. 1:1–4*.

The texts indicate the all-encompassing nature of the cleansing, because *all* the sins of *all* the people were dealt with. It was a corporate act, dealing with Israel as a whole. This was God’s final disposition of the sin problem in Israel for that year, and it prefigured the final disposition of sin at the end of time (*Heb. 9:28*).

What did God expect from His people during that day? *Lev. 23:26–31*.

However much the Day of Atonement was a corporate event, involving the whole nation, each individual had a role to play in giving himself or herself over to the Lord completely. Those who were not found resting in the Lord and humbling themselves before Him were to be “cut off from his people” (*Lev. 23:29, NIV*). However harsh that sounds, the point is to emphasize how solemn the work of salvation was. The passage is, among other things, promoting perseverance in one’s walk with the Lord.

How, in a sense, are we to “afflict” our souls on a daily basis? What does that mean? See *Matt. 16:24, 25; Rom. 6:1–13; Heb. 12:4*.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

- *Heb. 10:19–25*—Confidence to approach God; cleansed from a guilty conscience; hope
- *1 John 1:7, 9*—Walk in the light; cleansed from sin
- *Titus 2:14*—Purified and redeemed

Ask the class to reflect on how this differs from what happened on the annual Day of Atonement. Remember there is a difference and a distinction between the daily services and the once-a-year service of the Day of Atonement.

Mediator. In the Old Testament the priest modeled the role of mediator for the sinner during the year. On the Day of Atonement the high priest and the ritual involved drew out the awesome reality of what is involved in the plan of salvation. In the sanctuary service we have a model of the reality of the atonement. In the yearly services emphasis is laid upon two things:

(1) Where responsibility for sin lies;

(2) Why are some people lost? God in Christ has made provision for the salvation of all (*John 3:16, 17*).

The term *mediator* is used only six times in the New Testament, and in four cases it refers to Jesus. In Hebrews 8:6 we are told that Jesus' ministry and mediation are superior, as they are built on a new covenant. Hebrews 9:15 further explains the implications of Jesus' mediation.

Ask the class to reflect on how the assurance that Jesus is an unfailing Mediator illustrates that He can save us completely (*see Heb. 7:24, 25*). The mediation of the high priest on the Day of Atonement addresses responsibility for sin. In what ways can we gain strength and confidence from Jesus' mediation? Why do we still need Jesus as our Mediator? Wasn't everything finished at the cross?

Look at a major theme of the book of Hebrews. It centers on Jesus as our heavenly High Priest. Jesus is in heaven, doing something for us now. This is a central truth in the plan of salvation.

Why do you think many Christians know so little about it, considering the importance it is given in the book of Hebrews? Why do we as Adventists place a lot of importance on the theme of Jesus as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary?

Day of Atonement: Part 2

Read the scapegoat ritual as found in Leviticus 16:20–22. What is taught by this ritual? Focus especially on the fate of that animal as compared to all the others used in the service.

The “scapegoat” (Heb. *azazel*) is not a means of atonement but a vehicle through which sin and impurity are carried to the wilderness. How do we know this?

First, the transfer 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 slaughtered, and therefore no blood is available for atonement. Third, although it “carries/bears” the sins of the people, that does not mean that it carries them vicariously, as in the sense of a substitute, like Jesus. In this case the context shows that the verb means “to carry” to another place, i.e., “the wilderness” (*Lev. 16:22, NASB*). When the same verb is used to describe the work of the Servant of the Lord, it stands alone: “he bare the sins of many” (*Isa. 53:12*). He is not carrying them anywhere, but assuming responsibility for them Himself and, through that act, forgiving us. That is what atonement is, and that’s not what the scapegoat does.

Instead, the scapegoat ritual is an elimination rite; in other words, the scapegoat is a means of eliminating or removing from the camp of Israel something that should not be there—sin and impurity.


During the Day of Atonement there was a confrontation between the Lord and another power. The goat for the Lord represented God; the goat for *azazel* represented the opposing power, a demon, the ultimate source of sin and impurity. By sending the sins of the people to *azazel* through the goat, this power was being named as the originator of sin. God had accepted the sin and impurity of His people in order to atone for them and to forgive their sins, but that did not mean that He was the originator of evil. The Day of Atonement announced in symbols the final victory of holiness and purity over the forces of sin, impurity, and evil. It anticipated the moment when the charges raised by Lucifer in heaven will be once and for all resolved, and Lucifer will have to assume responsibility for originating sin. Through this ritual God was instilling hope in His people by pointing to a future in which, through the power of Christ, a new creation will come into existence, one free from death and pain, free from the power of sin (*Rev. 21:3, 4*).

Learning Cycle CONTINUED► **STEP 3—Practice****Thought Questions:**

1 On page 757 of *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen G. White describes events at the temple in Jerusalem as Jesus cries out “It is finished” and dies on the cross. The inner veil of the temple is torn from top to bottom, revealing the Most Holy Place to the people. “The priest is about to slay the victim; but the knife drops from his nerveless hand, and the lamb escapes. Type has met antitype in the death of God’s Son. The great sacrifice has been made. The way into the holiest is laid open. A new and living way is prepared for all. No longer need sinful, sorrowing humanity await the coming of the high priest. Henceforth the Saviour was to officiate as priest and advocate in the heaven of heavens.” What does this great hope and promise mean to us as sinners in need of grace?

Some people believe that one day the temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt and animal sacrifices resumed. Even if this were to happen, why would those rituals be meaningless in terms of human salvation?

2 The Old Testament system was horrific in that the sinner actively participated in the death of a living creature. Because of the death of Jesus, we do not endure that horrible ritual. Imagine that each time you sinned you had to go out and kill an innocent animal. Is there a risk that we take the sacrifice of Jesus for granted? What do we need to do to ensure that we appreciate our need of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice and to daily come to Him?

CONTINUED 

Atonement: What Is It?

Which ideas are associated with the verb *to make atonement* in the following passages? *Lev. 4:31; 16:18, 19, 30; 17:11.*

In Leviticus, though the priests officiate in the atoning rituals as mediators, they are not the ones who atone for sin. After the ritual is performed, God grants the forgiveness (*Lev. 4:26*; the passive form of the verb implies that God is the One who forgives). Atonement is something that God performs for His people. He is the One who “make[s] atonement for his land and people” (*Deut. 32:43, NIV; also Pss. 65:3, 79:9*). Through atonement, God allows His love to flow to sinners.

The Hebrew verb translated “to make atonement” in Leviticus (Heb. *kipper*) expresses the idea of wiping off or purging. Atonement is made for the tabernacle, the altar, the horns of the altar, meaning that they are purged, cleansed from the defilement of sin and impurity. The implication is that through atonement they are restored to the original condition, one free from defilement. When applied to repentant sinners, the verb still retains the idea of cleansing from sin or impurity.

Because the cleansing takes place through the blood of a sacrificial animal, atonement also can express the idea of ransoming. Freeing a person from sin is done at the cost of the blood/life of the sacrificial victim (*Lev. 17:11*). It was offered in place of the sinner, substituting for him or her, and therefore it ransomed the life of the person (*see Matt. 20:28, 1 Tim. 2:6*).

The verb *to make atonement* also is employed in Leviticus in a variety of rituals, making it impossible to conclude that it designates a single act. That is, atonement is a process rather than something that happens at a single point in time. The whole sanctuary activity throughout the year was understood as atonement; from the daily sacrifices (*Lev. 5:10*) to the Day of Atonement (*Lev. 16:34*), and all the rituals in between. In other words, atonement was the totality of the cleansing action of God for Israel all year, including the sacrificial act, the mediation of the priest, and the final disposal of sin and impurity during the Day of Atonement. Thus was typified as the all-inclusive nature of the work of atonement that Christ is doing for us.

Only God could atone for sin, and it took the life of Christ to do it. What should that tell us about how bad sin must be? Why, then, don't we abhor sin more than we do? How does the practice of sin deaden our abhorrence of it?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

3 How does the knowledge of symbols of the atonement in the Old Testament help us to better understand the reality of the New Testament and the crucial truths it teaches us about the plan of redemption? Ask class members to share which symbols mean the most to them and why.

4 The role of the priests in the Old Testament was that of mediator. This role has now been superseded by the role of Christ in heaven. Discuss the similarities and differences between the role of the modern-day pastor and the priest. (See *Mal. 3:7*, *2 Corinthians 5*.) How does the individual's role fit into this picture (*1 Pet. 2:9*)?

► **STEP 4**—Apply

Toward the end of World War II a photographer captured five marines and a Navy corpsman raising the American flag at the Battle of Iwo Jima. The picture made the soldiers instant heroes and an emotive symbol that in time spawned a best-selling book and blockbuster movie, *Flags of Our Fathers*. It was a symbol for a specific time. The symbols of the Old Testament sanctuary were appropriate for that time and people. Although we still appreciate them and can learn the lessons from them, they are not the kind of symbols that we would choose today. Challenge the class to think of new symbols that will help them explain Jesus' sacrifice to people they meet.

Ask the class to prayerfully consider Ellen White's challenge on page 83 of *The Desire of Ages* during the week ahead: "It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ."

Further Study: “Since Satan is the originator of sin, the direct instigator of all the sins that caused the death of the Son of God, justice demands that Satan shall suffer the final punishment. Christ’s work for the redemption of men and the purification of the universe from sin will be closed by the removal of sin from the heavenly sanctuary and the placing of these sins upon Satan, who will bear the final penalty. So in the typical service, the yearly round of ministration closed with the purification of the sanctuary, and the confessing of the sins on the head of the scapegoat.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 358.

“Blood and life are associated as lexical pairs and thus understood as parallel in meaning in . . . Hebrew. Because of this close association blood is considered the source of life, and because blood represents life (Gen. 9:4, Deut. 12:23), it may expiate for life. Because the life of a creature is in the blood, blood makes atonement for one’s life. One life is sacrificed for another. The shedding of substitutionary blood on the altar makes atonement, since the blood of the innocent victim was given for the life of the one who has sinned.”—Mark F. Rooker, *The New American Commentary: Leviticus*, vol. 3A (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2000), p. 236.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Review the process of atonement and cleansing in the earthly sanctuary and then compare it to how, in reality, Christ destroys our sin without destroying us, as well.
- 2 Many people find it hard to understand why innocent animals had to die in order to make a point about sin. What’s the important lesson from these deaths for us? What should it tell us about the nature of sin?
- 3 All during the week we talked about “cleansing” from sin. What does that mean on a practical level; that is, in the life of someone who claims the blood of Christ? *1 John 1:7*. What does it mean to be cleansed of sin?
- 4 Take your answer to Monday’s final question and bring it to class on Sabbath. Compare responses. How can we, both as individuals and as a church, better fulfill our role as “priests”?

Summary: The Day of Atonement was the consummation of the daily cleansing of the Israelites from sin. It illustrated the time the cleansing power of the sacrificial death of Christ would be consummated through a work of judgment.