

Atonement¹ in Symbols (Word-Pictures): Part 1



SABBATH—NOVEMBER 1

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Genesis 3:21; Genesis 4:3–5; Leviticus 17:11; Romans 3:23; Ephesians 2:11–13; 1 Peter 1:18, 19.

MEMORY VERSE: “The blood of Christ set you free from an empty way of life. That way of life was handed down to you by your own people long ago. You know that you were not bought with things that can pass away, like silver and gold. Instead, you were bought by the priceless blood of Christ. He is a perfect lamb. He doesn't [does not] have any flaws at all” (1 Peter 1:18, 19, NlrV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: To show how the Old Testament sacrificial system² pointed to the sacrifice (death on the cross) of Christ.

IN THE BIBLE THE SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM WAS ESTABLISHED TO SHOW HOW GOD WAS GOING TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF SIN. At the center of the service was the blood of the sacrificial³ animal. The life of the animal was poured out so that the life of the repentant⁴ sinner could be saved. The animal was a symbol of Jesus, who would give His life in place of ours.

Repentant sinners brought their sacrifices (animals) to the Lord. By doing this, they were confessing that they were sinners who deserved death. But they also were showing faith. How? They trusted that the Lord would give them forgiveness by accepting the life of the sacrificial victim in their place. Accepting responsibility for our sin is necessary. (This is known as repentance and confession.) Only those who know they are sinners will experience cleansing. They are the ones who humbly find in Christ the Lamb of God.

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

2. 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.

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

4. repentant—being sorry for your sins and turning away from sinning.

SUNDAY—NOVEMBER 2**ATONEMENT AND ANIMAL SACRIFICES⁵ (Genesis 3:21)**

How far back can we find the beginning of animal sacrifice in the Bible? Read Genesis 3:21; Genesis 4:3–5.

In the Bible, the sacrificial animal and the repentant sinner who brought it were so closely tied together that the life of the animal stood for the life of the person. And the animal's blood became atonement (forgiveness and cleansing) (Leviticus 17:11).

What is the important message of Leviticus 17:11 to us?

The meaning of symbols is found in the biblical sacrificial system. First, the death of an animal stood for the death of the person. For this reason the sacrificial act was an act of salvation.⁶ It was an example of God's grace⁷ and love. God was willing to accept the death of another living thing to save the life of humans (men, women, and children) and to continue fellowshiping with the humans. Second, the Bible says that the life of an animal could not really atone (forgive) for the life of a sinner. So, the death of sacrificial animals had a symbolic⁸ meaning only. It pointed

beyond itself to the death of the Seed of the woman, Jesus. Jesus was the One who would give His life as a ransom⁹ in place of many (Mark 10:45). Third, the killing of the sacrificial animal also showed how serious sin is and how expensive forgiveness is.



The death of the animal for a person pointed to the death of Jesus for our sins.

As soon as sin entered into the world, God set up a sacrificial system. This system had these symbolic and teaching tools. The first sacrifice that Adam and Eve offered was a wonderful example of hope in the coming Savior.

How seriously do you take the problem of sin? The answer can be found by how you answer the next question: How much suffering do

5. sacrifices—gifts and offerings given to God.

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

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

8. symbolic—when one thing has the power to stand for, or mean the same thing as, something else.

9. ransom—money paid for the return of a kidnapped (stolen) person. Jesus' death paid the ransom for our freedom from sin and Satan.

you put yourself through trying to overcome it? Read 1 Peter 4:1.

MONDAY—NOVEMBER 3

SIN AND IMPURITY¹⁰ (Leviticus 12)

The book of Leviticus explains clearly the problem of sin and impurity. But it focuses on the topic of purity/impurity or contamination¹¹/purification.¹² Impurity is as damaging to the covenant relationship¹³ as sin itself. The instructions (rules) about impurity encouraged the Israelites to avoid anything that could make them impure (not clean). The laws about purification showed how they could be made pure before the Lord.

There are several causes of impurity. Some cannot be avoided. For example, there is the contamination that a woman gets during childbirth (Leviticus 12). In this case the contamination is the result of the blood that comes with the childbirth (Leviticus 12:4, 5, 7; read also Leviticus 15:19–30 for another kind of uncleanness [not being pure or clean]). A man who has blood coming out of him was unclean (Leviticus 15:1–15; read also verses 16–18).

In those cases the person was a carrier who spread uncleanness (dis-

ease). So, he or she was not allowed to touch anybody else or any holy thing. Clearly, washing and quarantine¹⁴ suggests a rule for health reasons. But there was also a religious side to the rule. The impure person was not allowed to fellowship with other people. He or she also was not allowed to enter the sanctuary.¹⁵ So “impurity” becomes a symbol to show a person’s separation from God and others. In fact, impurity is often connected with death. It also is connected with dead bodies (Numbers 6:6, 7, 11), diseases (Leviticus 13, 14), blood discharge (a way of letting life run away), and the coming out of semen,¹⁶ which is the “seed” of life. The leper was totally impure and thought of as dead (Numbers 12:9–12).



In Bible times, the leper was thought of as one who was dead.

10. impurity—not pure or clean.

11. contamination—a process (method or way) of being made unclean, dirty, soiled, stained, or impure by coming into contact with something that is foul (evil) or unclean.

12. purification—the method of making something or someone pure or clean.

13. covenant relationship—a promise or agreement between God and His people. God continues to bless us as long as we remain faithful to Him.

14. quarantine—the practice of putting a sick person in a separate place away from other people who are well. This is to prevent other people from getting sick and to help stop the spread of the disease.

15. sanctuary—the home of God on earth in early Bible times where the high priest offered prayers and the blood of animals to God for the sins of the people of Israel.

16. semen—white fluid coming out of the male’s sexual organ.

The impure person was connected with death and could be removed from that place only through a cleansing ritual (service). If not, he or she permanently would be separated from God and the rest of the people of God (Leviticus 15:31). The Bible idea of impurity (sin) shows that humans are almost always contaminated (not pure or clean), living in an environment that is unclean. They need cleansing so that they can be free to pray to the Lord. This cleansing was possible only through the blood of the sacrificial animal (Leviticus 12:8).

The language of impurity is not used in Ephesians 2:11–13. But, how is the idea, as explained above, present in these verses? What kind of “impurity” do we face today? How can we be cleansed of it?

TUESDAY—NOVEMBER 4

THE SACRIFICES (Leviticus 4:3, 13, 22, 27)

What do Leviticus 4:3, 13, 22, and 27 tell us about sin and about who needs atonement for their sin? Read also Romans 3:23; Romans 5:12.

First, the type of animal brought as a sin offering depended on how much a person could afford (Leviticus 5:7–12). This showed that the Lord knew that some people had less money than others. This should tell us one important point: Salvation through Christ is for all people, no matter how

rich or poor they are in the world.

Second, the sacrificial animal was expected to be unblemished (perfect), healthy, and without physical flaws (Leviticus 4:3). The sinner was imperfect, but the sacrificial animal that represented the Lamb of God was perfect.



The sinner was not perfect. But the animal that was to be killed in the place of the sinner had to be without blemish, like Jesus.

What important part of Jesus was symbolized in those perfect sacrifices that 1 Peter 1:18, 19 talks about? And why is that part so important to us and the plan of salvation? Romans 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15.

Another important point to remember: The sin offering atones for both kinds of sin—knowingly and unknowingly done (Leviticus 5:1–5) and for ritual impurity (Leviticus 12:6, 7). What is the moral lesson for us? It is that there was no sin that God could not forgive if the sinner repented from it.

It is easy, at times, to doubt our salvation. Maybe at times it is even good to question how we stand with God. After all, there will be those who thought they were saved but will not be in the end (Matthew 7:22, 23). How can we find the assurance¹⁷ we need, but without becoming too bold at the same time?

WEDNESDAY—NOVEMBER 5

REMOVAL OF SIN/IMPURITY (Leviticus 4:5–7)

What roles (duties) did the priest and the sinner have in the sacrifices shown in Leviticus 4:5–7 and Leviticus 4:28–31?

Several rituals (services) are important when trying to understand the sacrificial offerings. The repentant sinner was to bring the sacrificial animal to the sanctuary. Then the sinner placed a hand on the head of the animal and leaned on it. In the daily sacrifices the laying on of hands¹⁸ was connected with the wording, “The Lord will accept it [sacrificial animal] in place of him [the sinner]” (Leviticus 1:4, NIV). This shows that the sinner fully is connected with the sacrificial animal. The sacrificial animal was at that moment standing for him or her before God and accepting the sin of the person.

The sacrificial animal was com-

monly killed by the person. But there were exceptions (Leviticus 1:14, 15; Leviticus 5:8). This sacrificial act was especially meaningful when repentant sinners found themselves guilty and separated from God. Because they had broken their promise to God, sinners were heading toward death. But that death was done to the sacrificial animal, not to the repentant sinner. His life was then excused and saved by God. Sin and penalty cannot be separated from each other. The transfer of the one suggests the transfer of the other. This found its fulfillment in Christ’s death on the cross. Our sin was transferred to Him on the cross, where He died the death that should have been ours.



Our sin was placed on Jesus, on the cross where He died the death that should have been ours.

17. assurance—faith in the sure promise of God.

18. laying on of hands—when ministers (pastors) or elders (church leaders) put their hands upon new ministers or Bible workers, or even the sick, for special blessings and for power to do God’s work.

The laying on of hands and the death of the animal were not the only rituals in the sanctuary service. Another ritual was the bringing of the blood into the sanctuary. Through this ritual sin was brought into the sanctuary. In some cases the blood was sprinkled inside the tabernacle (tent) (Leviticus 4:6). At other times it was put on the horns of the altar of sacrifices (verse 30). When sin was not taken inside the sanctuary this way, sin was transferred to it through the priest. In those situations, the priest had to eat the flesh of the sin offering. In this way he was accepting the sin of the people in his own person (Leviticus 10:17). God was accepting responsibility for the sin of repentant sinners. This pointed to Christ's work as our High Priest in heaven.

Think through the meaning of these sacrifices and what they were pointing to: Christ dying in our place for our sins. How should His death influence¹⁹ our daily life? More important, how does that death influence your own daily life?

THURSDAY—NOVEMBER 6

OTHER SACRIFICES (Leviticus 1:3–9)

What was the purpose of the burnt offering? Leviticus 1:3–9; Leviticus 22:17–22.

In Leviticus the burnt offering is an atoning sacrifice. Because the sacrifice was totally burned on the altar and was accepted for the person, it showed total holiness to the Lord. It also was offered as a thanksgiving or freewill offering (Leviticus 22:17–22). The thanksgiving offering was brought after a vow was fulfilled to show appreciation (thanks) to the Lord. In other words the freewill offering showed personal devotion, thanksgiving, and joy.

What was the purpose of the peace/fellowship offering of Leviticus 7:12, 16?

The peace offering could be offered as a thanksgiving offering or a freewill offering (Leviticus 7:12, 15, 16). This suggests that the sacrificial act was a joyful event (1 Samuel 11:14, 15; 1 Kings 8:62, 63). This means that the Lord gave back the flesh of the sacrifice to the worshiper to eat it with relatives and friends in His presence (Deuteronomy 12:17, 18). This also shows that the sacrifice strengthened the covenant relation through fellowship with God and other Israelites (Deuteronomy 27:7; 1 Kings 8:63).

What was the purpose of the meal offering of Leviticus 2:1–10?

The meal offering was from the fruits of the land. This helped people to recognize God's kind watchcare over His people. Everything belonged

¹⁹ influence—to have power, or an effect, over persons or things.

to God. But He asked that a small part of it be brought by the people to show Him their thankful spirit (Deuteronomy 26:9, 10). It came with the “salt of the covenant” (Leviticus 2:13, NIV). Salt was used in the Near East as an aid to help food last longer. So, salt was the right symbol for the strong connection between God and His people in their covenant relationship (2 Chronicles 13:5). The offering was an example of the person’s willingness to continue the covenant relationship with the Lord.

In the Old Testament we find so many different offerings with many purposes. But in the New Testament we find only one single sacrifice. What does that suggest about the importance of Christ’s sacrifice? What assurance can you take for yourself from this one sacrifice?

FRIDAY—NOVEMBER 7

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “God spoke to the serpent [Satan]. He said, ‘I will put hatred between you and the woman. Your children and her children will be enemies’ (Genesis 3:15, NIV). Since then, Satan had known that he did not hold full control over the world. . . . With great interest Satan watched the sacrifices offered by Adam and his sons. In these ceremonies²⁰ he

noticed a symbol of connection between earth and heaven. Satan tried to block this connection between God and men. He falsified God and twisted the rites (services) that pointed to the Savior. Men were led to fear God as One who would delight to destroy them. The sacrifices that should have shown His love were offered only to make Him less angry.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 115.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ According to the Ellen G. White quote above, Satan twisted the meaning of the sacrifice. In what ways could we be in danger of twisting the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice? What are some opinions of the Cross that twist its meaning?
- ❷ We do not have daily physical reminders of the cost of sin as the Israelites did. We do not see animals sacrificed daily as the Israelites did. But in what ways can we remember the death of Jesus so that we never forget what Christ has done to give us the hope of eternal life?
- ❸ Explain how you can make everything you have holy for the Lord. What does that mean? And how can you do it?

²⁰ ceremonies—special acts or services that involve doing certain things in a very particular way for an important reason.