

COMMUNITY ADULT BIBLE STUDY
REASONS FOR OUR HOPE
Lesson Three

ATONEMENT
THE ETERNAL PURPOSE OF GOD

Introduction. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden, God's attribute of holiness made it impossible for Him to continue having fellowship with them or to allow them to remain in the garden. Once they disobeyed He was bound to keep His promise that they were condemned to die. *Adam could not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.* (Gen. 3:22) God was not caught unaware by Adam's sin but allowed it for a purpose that He had designed before the foundation of the world. It would be called His "teleological design" or purpose to reconcile men and women to Himself, not as created earthly beings, but literally as eternal sons and daughters born of His Spirit; with Christ being the first born of this new creation. The plan was to justify a new birth and salvation for all who are willing to place their faith in Christ as their savior. The remarkable feature of His eternal purpose was that it was conceived before the world began.

God has saved us and called us to a holy life-not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ before the beginning of time. (2 Tim. 1:9)

You were redeemed.....by the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the foundation of the world and revealed in these last times for your sakes. (1 Peter 1:20)

I. RECONCILIATION (AT-ONE-MENT)

To point the way to His eternal atonement sacrifice, God gave Moses a series of sacrifices that would enable the people to worship Him and regain His favor when they sinned. These sacrifices were shadows of what was to come. The word "atonement" , according to Webster is , "to make amends for an offense; to be reconciled, to be brought into unity or at-one-ment with the one offended" and was descriptive of the accomplishment of Christ's sacrifice. The early sacrifices were temporary coverings for sin and appeals for merciful forgiveness. Christ's sacrifice provided a true atonement (reconciliation) and made peace with God eternally. After Christ's death and the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, the early shadows of His atoning sacrifice ceased to be offered by the nation as a whole. ***The real atonement had been completed.*** (Telos)

Leviticus was intended as a guide book for the Levite priests in offering those early sacrifices designed to insure an ongoing relationship with God. They were not once for all but had to be offered repeatedly in order for the offender to be cleansed and forgiven. They were called sin offerings. The sin offerings (more than one kind) were mandatory as a means of regaining God's favor. Since they were seeking mercy and forgiveness, translators of the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) used the Greek word "hilasterion= mercy seat" to describe them. Only the mandatory sin offerings will concern us in this lesson along with the special offerings required for the annual Day of Atonement. (Lev. 4:1-6:30; 16:1ff).

A. Old Testament Shadows

Space will cause us to be selective but we will follow an unfolding of God's plan chronologically. From scripture we learn that before the foundation of the world, God decreed a means by which His personal relationship could be restored without violating His just and holy nature (Eph. 1:4; Titus 1:2). Obedience played a major role in God's plan of restoration (Rom.1:2-5; 3:25-26).

1. God's Provision of a Sacrifice.The first call to obedience involving a sacrifice occurs in Gen. 22:2 when God spoke to Abraham, the man He called to become the father of many nations, "*Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.*" If you are familiar with the history of Abraham, you know how dear this son was to him. It was a test of his obedience and trust in God. As they approached the place of sacrifice, young Isaac asked his father, "*Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?*" Abraham passed his test of faith when he answered, "God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering."

Abraham believed God's promise to give him offspring as numerous as the sands of the desert. His son was a vital part of that promise. Abraham went so far as to raise the knife over him. He did not know how God would save Isaac but He trusted Him to bring the boy back to life, if necessary. An angel of the Lord stopped him and commended him for his faith. Because of his faith he was credited with righteousness (Gen. 15:6). Abraham saw a ram caught in a thicket and sacrificed it instead. Abraham called the place, *The Lord Will Provide.* (Gen. 22:14). New concepts were introduced in this early experience; the idea of appeasement

or man's sacrifice, of a vicarious substitute to save life, and belief in God's power to provide.

2. God's Passover Lamb in Egypt.

Another significant use of a special sacrifice is found in Exodus 12. God introduced the idea of a Passover Lamb that would protect His people from the death angel on the night before He freed them from slavery in Egypt. The blood of a sacrificial lamb was to be placed on the sides and top of the door as a sign for the death angel to "pass over" that house on the night that God took the lives of all the first born in Egypt. The blood of the lamb would vicariously save the first born in that house. The people were told to repeat this sacrifice each year as a memorial of God's saving grace. It is still one of the most sacred events of the year for Jews. Paul referred to Jesus as the "Passover Lamb" for believers (1 Cor. 5:7). The reminder to Jews to keep the memory of that night alive was replicated in Jesus asking that the Last Supper be observed as a memorial for what He was about to do (1 Cor.11:25). The concepts of a vicarious suffering (shedding of blood) for salvation and redemption from bondage are seen in the first Passover and later in the death of Christ.

3. The Priest's Role on The Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:1-34).

Annually on this day, the high priest was to make atonement for his own sins before he entered into the Most Holy Place. After that he was to take two male goats and use them in making atonement for the nation. The one chosen by lot to be sacrificed was slain and the blood taken before the Lord as a sin offering. The priest then placed his hands on the one chosen as a scapegoat and imputed the sins of all the people upon the goat's head. The scapegoat, carrying the sins of the people was taken to a desolate place and released. God ordained it to be a Sabbath Day, the tenth day of the seventh month and to be remembered as the Day of Atonement.

The Hebrew word for this goat was azazel (uh-zay-zuhl) or "complete removal." It is not difficult to see this as symbolic of Jesus dying and shedding His blood in his human nature and in His divine nature bearing away the sins of the offenders as God's scapegoat (Isa. 53:12) (Jn 1:29). As the children of Israel continued to rebel and began to worship idols, GOD, The Holy One of Israel, began to speak through His prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel revealing more about His foreordained intentions. He said through His prophets, See, I

am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland(Is.43:19).

B. Prophetic Announcements. Peter wrote concerning this salvation, that the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that follow (1 Pet.1:10-11).

1. A Chosen One. Through the prophet Isaiah God introduced His Chosen One who was to suffer and die as a substitute sacrifice for the sins of Israel and all the world. It was to Isaiah that the Lord introduced His chosen one as one who would be part of a (new) covenant to Israel and a light to the Gentiles. (Isa. 42:1-9). His chosen one would be a vicarious suffering servant upon whom would be placed the sins of the whole world. By his wounds men would be healed (forgiven). This added the element of suffering required for atonement. The suffering was not to be done by human effort but by God's suffering servant: His own Son (Isa. 53, Jn 3:16). The suffering of His death on the cross fulfilled the law and prophecy in scripture.

2. A New Covenant. Isaiah was given a promise that introduced the pre-ordained plan: "From now on I will tell you of new things, of hidden things, unknown to you." (Is. 48:6) God gave Jeremiah the promise of a New Covenant with His people in which there would be a way for their sins to be removed and remembered no more. He was preparing to offer His own Son as a sacrifice to expiate sin and bring about reconciliation (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-28). After Israel had forsaken God's first covenant, He revealed a new covenant that would reconcile them. This covenant was based on better promises (Heb. 8:6). God had planned to take upon Himself the responsibility of restoring His people. This new covenant was based upon what He was going to do (I will) and not man's efforts to keep the Law (Jer.31). The LORD told Ezekiel that it was not for Israel's sake that He would restore them but for the sake of His Holy name- so the world would know that He was God. He promised that in the process He would cleanse them from all their sins and give them a new heart. He promised that He would place His Spirit within them so they would all know Him personally (Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36:26). The new feature was: God's Spirit living within the believer. The true concept of atonement (at-one-ment) slowly unfolded.

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STUDY QUESTIONS

Review by reading the notes:

1. What advantage is it to be reconciled to God from the notes?
2. In what way was the Passover Lamb a picture of Christ?
3. In what way was Christ's sacrifice for you greater than the blood of an animal sacrifice?

Shadows of the atonement found fulfillment in the New Testament.

4. What was the revelation given to each of the following? (Give the name(s) and what was told to them.)
 - a. Matt. 1:20-23
 - b. Luke 2:8
 - c. Matt. 2:2
 - d. Luke 2:25-32
 - e. Luke 2:36-38

Stretch Question. (Use other scripture to prove your answer)

5. What was John the Baptist's statement about Jesus that foretold His part in God's plan? (John 1:29-34). How would the Jewish mind interpret that?
6. Written after Jesus' death and resurrection, what was the Apostle John's picture of Jesus in I John 2:2?
7. Peter wrote this description of Jesus as the one who fulfilled God's eternal purpose. Write down what these words mean to you. (I Peter 1:18-21).
8. Jesus provided the way for us to be at-one with God. Explain that from these verses. (John 1:4-12; John 3:6-7; I John 3:1; Romans 8:16).

Stretch Question. (Use other scripture to back up your answer)

9. What is the difference between Adam's relationship with God and yours, as a Christian?
10. Read John 19:28-30. What is finished?