

# 100 BIBLE LESSONS

Give these lessons to people you visit, youth groups, hospital patients, church visitors and new members. Use them in Sunday School, bus ministry, jail services, nursing homes, Christian schools, small discussion groups and many other places. God's Word will answer your questions and help solve your problems.

## LESSON 13 – ATONEMENT

### INTRODUCTION

Notes taken from Lawrence Richards, Expository Dictionary of Bible Words, and New Testament Lesson Maker. Use for Bible Study purposes, not to be sold.

How can a sinful human being approach God? How do we deal with the sins and the failures that alienate us from Him? God's solution to this basic problem is pictured in the atoning sacrifices of the Old Testament. All those sacrifices picture what became a reality in the death of Jesus on Calvary.

#### I. ATONEMENT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

The Hebrew words universally translated "atonement" in modern English versions are intimately linked in the Bible with forgiveness of sin and with reconciliation to God. It is often said that the idea expressed is one found in a possibly related Arabic root that means "to cover or conceal." Atonement would then denote a covering that conceals a person's sin and makes it possible for him to approach God.

In the Old Testament, the primary connection of atonement was with sin, guilt, and forgiveness. Lev 14 makes it clear that this atoning sacrifice restored the guilty party or unclean object to harmonious relationship with God and the believing community. It is clear that atonement involves a sacrifice that in some significant and just way deals with guilt so that God extends forgiveness, reconciling the person or group to Himself.

#### II. ATONEMENT AND SACRIFICE .

In the Old Testament, atonement for sin is consistently linked with the sacrifice of some living animal.

Leviticus 17:11 teaches that the death of a sacrificial animal was required for atonement. The Israelites were told not to eat blood, "for," God told them, "the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."

The images in the Old Testament worship system, then, are quite plain. As soon as God introduced law (Ex 19-24), the reality of sin as law-breaking was established. Persons who broke the law became guilty before God (Ro 7:7-13). It thus became necessary for

God to deal with guilt, for implicit in the Old Testament notion of sin is not only guilt as personal responsibility for one's actions but also the conviction that God must act to punish sin.

With the establishment of the tabernacle, the sacrificial system, and the priesthood, atonement could be made after a person sinned, and the guilty individual could thus be restored to right relationship with God.

Old Testament atonement called for the life of an animal. The guilty party laid his hand on the head of the animal, identifying himself with it (Lev 4:4, 15, 24, 29). Then the animal was slain, symbolically taking the sinner's place. The imagery tells us that sin merits death but that God will accept another life in place of that of the sinner.

### III. THE DAY OF ATONEMENT.

Members of Israel's community could come to the tabernacle to seek forgiveness when they discovered they were guilty of some unintentional sin. But what could be done about intentional sins?

Lev 16 gives instructions for a special sacrifice to be offered just once a year, on the tenth day of the seventh month, Tishri. On that day, the high priest, following carefully the prescribed steps, brought the blood of the sacrifice into the inner room of the tabernacle and there sprinkled the blood on the cover of the ark. The sacrificed animal was a "sin offering for the people" (Lev 16:15) and is specifically said to have been "because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been" (16:16; cf. 16:21). That annual sacrifice, made before the Lord, was an "atonement . . . to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites" (16:34). Following it, Israel was told, "You will be clean from all your sins" (16:30).

The Old Testament sacrificial system made provision, then, for atonement of both unintentional and willful sins. It assured Israel that God could and would forgive sins when His people came to Him in the way he prescribed.

### IV. ATONEMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

"Atonement" translates the Greek words hilasterion (Ro 3:25; Heb 9:5), hilaskomai (Heb 2:17), and hilasmos (1 Jn 2:2; 4:10). When we look into New Testament passages themselves, we learn much about how the coming of Jesus filled the Old Testament sacrifices with special meaning.

In Ro 3:25, Paul raises a question: How can God justly have left past sins unpunished? The implication of this question is that sacrificial animals surely could not have fairly satisfied the justice of God. People and animals are of different orders and value. Yet from the beginning, God was willing to accept a person's faith in the place of righteousness, and, admittedly, this seems unfair. Paul's answer is that we can understand the fairness of it now that Jesus has been presented as "a sacrifice of

atonement." It is on the basis of the atonement Jesus accomplished that God is shown to have been just and fair in forgiving those who have faith.

Heb 2:17 argues that Jesus must have become a true human being to serve both as the High Priest who offered the atoning sacrifice to God and as the sacrifice itself. All the sacrifices offered in the Old Testament were "not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper" (9:9).

In fact, those repeated sacrifices only reminded Israel that they were sinners who constantly needed forgiveness. But these sacrifices have now been superseded by the single sacrifice of Jesus Christ Himself. This sacrifice does make the believer holy and takes away all sins (Heb 9:23-10:14).

John explores the meaning of Jesus' atonement for you and me as we live in this world and, at times, continue to fall into sin (1 Jn 1:8-9). When we come to God and confess our sins, he forgives and cleanses us, for Jesus, "the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 Jn 2:2), speaks up in our defense (1 Jn 2:1). The love that God has for us is fully and decisively seen in the fact that God "sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 Jn 4:10).

Each of the elements found in the Old Testament doctrine of atonement is present in the New Testament. Here too are guilty human beings who have sinned and deserve punishment. Here too is a sacrifice, provided by God. Here too is forgiveness for sins, won by identifying by faith with the atoning sacrifice. The wonder of the New Testament revelation is that at last we see the glory of God's eternal plan. He has Himself in Christ chosen to become the sacrifice through which humanity can be released from the grip of sin and death.

## V. JESUS' DEATH AS ATONEMENT.

The teaching of the New Testament corresponds, as reality does to shadow, with the practices of the Old Testament. By faith the sinner, guilty and deserving punishment, identifies with the one who died as a sacrifice in place of the sinner. That sacrifice, which is ordained by God, is accepted by God, and the sinner is pronounced forgiven.

The symbolism as well as the direct teaching of the New Testament shows that Jesus did take our place on the cross and died there as our substitute. United now with Jesus by faith, we are considered both to have died with Him and now to be raised to new life with Him (Ro 6:1-10).

## CONCLUSION

The Old Testament shows us that atonement calls for a sacrifice: a life given for our life. The guilty must come in God's prescribed way, trusting God to accept the substitute that He Himself has ordained and trusting Him to extend the promised forgiveness. The New Testament shows us that the sacrificial practices ordained in the Old Testament were

instructive: they foreshadowed the death of Jesus on Calvary and prepared us to understand the meaning of that death.

Jesus died as the Lamb of God, as our substitute, and it is on the basis of His shed blood that God offers full and free forgiveness to all who accept Him by faith.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

Read Hebrews 10:1-18 and answer the following questions.

1. How is the Law compared to the new covenant brought by Christ? ([10:1](#))
2. In what way was the Law of Moses glaringly inadequate? ([10:1-2](#))
3. How did the author of Hebrews show that the Law was inadequate? ([10:2](#))
4. What function did the annual sacrifices serve? Why? ([10:3-4](#))
5. How successful were animal sacrifices under the old covenant? ([10:4](#))
6. Why wasn't God pleased with the sacrifices and offerings of the old covenant? ([10:5-6](#))
7. What was the attitude of Christ when He came into the world? ([10:7](#))
8. What evidence of the futility and emptiness of the old covenant did the author cite? ([10:8](#))
9. If God neither desired nor was pleased with old covenant sacrifices, why did the Israelites make them? ([10:8](#))
10. What role does a believer play in earning God's approval? ([10:9-14](#))
11. What did Christ's single act of dying accomplish for those who would trust in Him? ([10:14](#))
12. How did the new covenant change the way God motivates His people to live for Him? ([10:16](#))
13. What effect did the sacrifice of Christ have on the way God views our sins? ([10:17](#))
14. Why are additional sacrifices for sin unnecessary? ([10:18](#))