



The Church of God International

HOME BIBLE

Study Course

13

Understanding Atonement

Doctrinal Statement:

In the mind of the follower of Christ, the act by which God and man are brought together in a personal relationship is atonement. The term is derived from Anglo-Saxon words meaning “making one,” hence “at-one-ment.” The great gulf, or alienation, that separates God and man needs to be overcome if human beings are to know God and experience fellowship and eternal life with Him. As a term expressing relationship, atonement is tied closely to other biblical terms such as reconciliation and forgiveness.

The need for man to receive atonement, or reconciliation, is paramount. This need exists because man’s nature is totally saturated with sin and guilt. The sinner who seeks salvation must bridge the great gulf between himself and God, which is impossible for him to do. But God Himself has provided a “new and living way.”

According to Jeremiah, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). Isaiah also stated, “All we like sheep have gone astray” (Isaiah 53:6). The apostle Paul describes all men as “enemies” of God (Romans 5:10) and hostile toward Him (8:7), and says that we “were alienated and enemies in [our] mind by wicked works” (Colossians 1:21).

We are Adam’s race; we are like him. “Therefore, just as one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12).

This sinfulness of man is a problem of great magnitude, and it is compounded by the holiness of God, who cannot look upon sin. God said, “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live” (Exodus 33:20). While man is extremely sinful, God is perfectly holy, and cannot look upon sin. Man can do nothing about this condition and therefore dreads God. Man is lost in a hopeless situation, standing under the dreadful judgment of God. Man by no means can justify himself or merit God’s concern.

Therefore, if man is to receive atonement, its initiation rests solely with God. The nature of that atonement is clearly illustrated in biblical history, which reveals the nature of both God and man.

“At-one-ment” for mankind will not be complete without the binding of “the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan”; he will be bound “for a thousand years” and cast into the “bottomless pit” at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, when the Kingdom of God

on earth is established (Revelation 20:1–3). However, at the end of the Millennium, Satan will be released from his imprisonment and will immediately set about to deceive the nations on earth at that time. Then Satan will be cast into the Lake of Fire, where the “beast and the false prophet” had been cast at the beginning of the Millennium (verses 7–10). Satan will no more trouble mankind. The way will be clear for the fullness of atonement to take place. God the Father Himself will come to dwell—to “tabernacle”—with men (21:3).

Some Final Words

Each passing day brings the world closer to the crossroads. And like the world, everyone, individually, will at some time or another approach their own personal crossroads. Civilization, left alone, will destroy itself if God fails to intervene! But God has no intentions of just standing by. God is going to intervene supernaturally in world affairs. And yes, He is going to intervene in the affairs of many individuals. The Scriptures say “many are called, but few chosen” (Matthew 20:16). The question now for many Bible students is this: Am I going to respond with obedience now to secure my eligibility to be chosen?

The apostle Peter made it abundantly clear that, of ourselves, we do not have the power to grow in virtue, so God makes it possible for us to be “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4) to keep us from sin and help us live for Him. When we submit to God by repenting of our carnal ways, and are baptized, we are given God’s Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands. Peter lists several of faith’s actions, such as learning to know God better, developing patience, doing God’s will (obedience), and loving others, to name a few. Peter goes on to say that faith is more than belief in facts; it must result in action—in this case, growth in Christian moral character and discipline. God gives us the enabling power when

we receive His Spirit. The responsibility of learning and growing in the grace of Jesus Christ is ours.

If we do these things we will make our “call and election sure” (verse 10).

Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement, or *Yom Kippur*, was a most important day, falling on the tenth day of the month of *Tishri* according to the Hebrew calendar, corresponding to our mid-September through mid-October.

On that day the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle (or Temple) to atone for the sins of all Israel. The basic idea of atonement is a “covering” of sin; the purpose is to accomplish reconciliation between man and God. In the New Testament, the Day of Atonement was referred to as “the Fast” (Acts 27:9).

In Leviticus 23, the only chapter of the Bible wherein all the festival days are summarized, we find the proclaiming of a “Day of Atonement.”

The seventh month of the Hebrew calendar represents, in type, the seventh thousand-year day of man’s time on earth. All those called out of the world and drawn to Jesus Christ are commanded to assemble on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:27). In the book of Numbers we find additional affirmation of this, including the exact day on which we are to meet (Numbers 29:7). The Feast of Trumpets was observed on the first day of *Tishri*, and on the tenth day of this same month the Day of Atonement was kept.

The holy days are times for God’s people to come together to celebrate and worship. An added benefit is gained from worshiping with other like-minded believers. It is uplifting also because our daily routine is changed, and no hard work is done. It gives us time for introspection and to check our faith. We learn lessons by considering our past so that we can press on into the future with our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ.

God “demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Therefore, God is not expecting too much of us when He asks us for our time and our life. We demonstrate our commitment to God when we give

something back. “For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Again, in Leviticus 23:27 and Numbers 29:7, we find that the Day of Atonement is a “holy convocation” (or commanded assembly), and we are to “afflict our souls” (or fast, without food or water). The word *afflict* comes from the Hebrew word *anah*, which means to depress, chasten, or humble. We find the word being used in Exodus 10:3, where God says to Pharaoh, “How long will you refuse to *humble* yourself before Me?”

When God led Israel in the wilderness for forty years, He did this to *humble* them through the circumstance of the times, allowing them to hunger (Deuteronomy 8:2-3).

Therefore, on the Day of Atonement we are to afflict (humble) ourselves by not eating or drinking (Psalm 35:13). When fasting, it is intended that we feel the pangs of hunger and thirst to help us realize our life is totally dependent on God, to show us how weak and small we are in comparison with our Creator.

In today’s world people only think of satisfying the cravings of the flesh. When they reach the point of satisfying all the lusts of the flesh, they then boast of “living the good life.” But in the end, such things do not satisfy our deepest feelings and longings. Real life, which only comes from our Creator, demands discipline, sacrifice, hard work, and a total commitment to God.

The Day of Atonement differs from the other holy days in that *absolutely no work* is to be done (Leviticus 23:30; 16:29; Numbers 29:7). The other holy days tell us “no manner of work” is to be done other than that which is necessary for preparing food for each individual (Exodus 12:16). However, on the Day of Atonement it is not necessary to even do the work of preparing food.

If, on the Day of Atonement, we will place ourselves in God’s hands, submitting to God, He will provide the spiritual food of atonement and understanding that we all need. It is far more beneficial than physical food. God the Father and Jesus Christ provide a spiritual feast of drinking in

of the Word of eternal life. Though the Day of Atonement is a day of fasting, it is also a day of great rejoicing!

The Hebrew term often translated “atone” has the fundamental meaning of “to wipe out,” “to erase,” “to cover,” or perhaps, more generally, “to remove.”

In the King James Version the word for “atone” is translated by such expressions as “to make atonement,” “forgive,” “appease,” “pacify,” “pardon,” “purge,” “put off,” and “reconcile.”

In the Old Testament, the means of atonement was accomplished by the sacrifice and offering up of the blood of an animal. We must remember: man, on his own, can do nothing. It is God who provides the sacrifice; man only performs the rite.

Since man can do absolutely nothing to atone for himself, it is God who must take the initiative, providing the gracious provision for sin (cf. Leviticus 17:11).

With the understanding we have now, we can understand how the Day of Atonement symbolizes God and man being reunited.

But God and His creation can never be *fully* “at one,” in full agreement, until Satan is put away forever in the Lake of Fire and the whole world repents. When that takes place, God will then dwell with Jesus Christ and mankind on earth. This will be the final fulfillment of perfect atonement—reconciliation with God. “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God” (Revelation 21:3).

Those who refuse to keep the Day of Atonement will not be allowed to remain among His people (Leviticus 23:29-30).

Notice that this law is for the foreigner of any race that comes among God’s people (verse 29).

Since we belong to God, we are spiritual Israelites. We must therefore keep this Day of Atonement (Romans 2:28-29; 11:17-18; Galatians 3:29).

In Leviticus 23:32, we find that the Day of Atonement begins at sunset on the ninth day of the month and ends on the tenth day at sunset. According to God’s true calendar, every day begins at the previous day’s sunset

(Genesis 1:5,8,13,19).

Review

1. *The Day of Atonement is kept on the tenth of Tishri of the Hebrew calendar.*
2. *The purpose of atonement is to accomplish reconciliation between God and man.*
3. *In the New Testament, the Day of Atonement was referred to as “the Fast.”*
4. *To afflict our souls is to fast by not drinking or eating.*
5. *The Day of Atonement is a commanded assembly.*
6. *Absolutely no work is to be done on the Day of Atonement.*
7. *Man can do nothing on his own.*
8. *We are spiritual Israelites.*
9. *Every day begins at the previous day’s sunset.*

Levitical Instructions

In Leviticus 16, we read the detailed instructions given to the Levitical Priesthood for the Day of Atonement.

On the Day of Atonement, no one was permitted to be in the Tabernacle (built by the children of Israel as a type of God’s house) except for the High Priest (Leviticus 16:17). This holy place within the veil was a type of the throne of God (Exodus 25:17–20).

The cover of the Ark of the Covenant was called the “mercy seat” (Exodus 25:17). “A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary” (Jeremiah 17:12).

The High Priest was allowed to enter only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, into the Holy of Holies—this typical throne room of God (Exodus 30:10; Leviticus 16:29,34). God’s very presence was there in the throne room, and no man can look upon His face and live (Exodus 33:20). God will not allow His throne to be profaned or disrespected.

On the Day of Atonement, Aaron the High Priest was instructed to “take from the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats as a sin offering” (Leviticus 16:5), both kids making up the one sin offering.

He was then to “present them before the LORD at the door of the tabernacle” (verse 7). The High Priest was further instructed to “cast lots for

the two goats: one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat [escape goat]” (verse 8).

If your Bible has marginal renderings, you might notice it gives the word *azazel* for “scapegoat.” The most probable rendering of *azazel* is “complete sending away,” “solitude.” The rendering of the passage would be “the one for the LORD and the other for an utter removal.”

Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible defines *azazel* as “goat of departure; the scapegoat”—that is, a goat that “goes away.”

Casting or drawing lots consisted of bits, or small tablets, of wood or stone, sometimes inscribed with the names of persons (in this case, goats). The bits or tablets were put into a receptacle or a garment, were shaken together, and then were cast. He whose lot first fell out was the one chosen.

The goat upon which the Lord’s lot fell was to be offered for a sin offering (verse 9). But the goat on which the lot fell to be the escape goat was to be presented alive before the Lord to make an atonement (verse 10).

The reason for the casting of lots is this: God does not allow men to determine how to worship Him in ritual or ceremony. A lot was a solemn appeal to God to decide a doubtful matter. By casting lots, it was determined which role each goat would play.

Aaron now was to take one of the goats of the sin offering, kill it, and sprinkle its blood on and before the mercy seat, making an atonement for the holy place because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel (verses 15–16).

After this He was to take the remaining live goat and “lay both his hands on [its] head..., confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man” (verses 21–22).

Clearly, the Day of Atonement annually symbolized for Israel the substitutionary sacrifice God provided for their sins, and the total removal of their guilt.

Obviously this ritual for the Israelites had to be repeated every

year. Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection replaced this system once and for all. At any time we can have our sins forgiven and receive the atonement by placing our faith and trust in Christ (Hebrews 10:1–18; Ephesians 2:8; Romans 5:11).

What we must understand and never forget is that Jesus Christ is the ultimate sin offering! He “bore our sins in His own body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24).

“He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities...He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:11–12).

Notice this glad release in David’s psalm of praise: “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12).

Jesus Christ, who was God Almighty of the Old Testament, removes our sins, having separated us from them, forgiving and forgetting them.

Romans 5:10 states, “For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His Life.”

Make no mistake! We have received the atonement—the reconciliation (Romans 5:11)—and God has “raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6). Therefore, “by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (verse 8). The fullness of this reconciliation takes place when God dwells with us. No matter how we describe what Christ has done by way of atonement, it remains for humanity to appropriate it by faith.

Review

1. *The High Priest was allowed to enter into the Holy Place only once each year.*
2. *The Holy Place was a type of the throne of God.*
3. *God’s presence was in the throne room.*
4. *The High Priest was instructed to*

take two goats of the congregation for the selection of a sin offering.

5. The High Priest was instructed to cast lots upon the goats.

6. By lot it was determined which goat was to be offered and which goat was to be the "escape goat," or goat of departure.

7. By casting lots it was determined which role each goat would play.

8. The goat upon which the Lord's lot fell was slain and its blood sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat and before the Mercy Seat, making Atonement for the Holy Place.

9. The High Priest then placed his hands upon the head of the live goat, confessing all of the iniquities, sins, and transgressions of the children of Israel over it.

10. The goat was then led away into the wilderness by an able man.

11. Jesus Christ bore our sins in His own body on the tree.

12. Jesus gave His life to pay the death penalty earned by our sins.

13. Jesus removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west.

14. We have received the Atonement.

Satan Bound a Thousand Years

In Revelation 20:1–2, we see an angel come down from heaven. He has the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He captures the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, binding him for a thousand years. The "thousand years" is what we call the Millennium.

So we see Satan cast into a pit and sealed up for the duration of the Millennium, and then he is allowed to be released for a little season (verse 3).

By comparing Revelation 18:2 with Isaiah 13:19–21, we see that all the demons are put in a place of restraint at the time of, and along with, the destruction of Babylon, where they can no longer influence mankind.

Even after mankind has experienced the terrible woes of Revelation 9, including the seven last plagues, which are the wrath of God poured out without mixture (mercy), humanity still refuses to repent (Revelation 16:11,21).

Humanity is so completely deceived by Satan the Devil that it will not repent and turn to God (12:9). Three unclean spirits come out of the

mouth of the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet. These unclean spirits go forth deceiving the world about the Second Coming of Christ (16:13–14). The Dragon is behind this great deception.

The world to come will not be ruled over by angels, fallen or otherwise (Hebrews 2:5).

The apostle Peter spoke of the last days, saying scoffers would come and continue to walk after their own lusts without fear of the Lord God. Peter said they are ignorant of the fact that the first earth perished in a flood, and that now the present "heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (2 Peter 3:3–7).

Paul tells us this new world to come will be ruled by the saints. They will even judge the angels (1 Corinthians 6:2–3).

Review

1. An angel with a key to the bottomless pit comes down from heaven.

2. This angel binds Satan with a symbolic chain, casting him into the bottomless pit.

3. Satan is bound for a thousand years.

4. Satan will be released for a little season after the thousand years.

5. The demons will be restrained along with the destruction of Babylon.

6. Even after the seven last plagues, mankind remains unrepentant.

7. The world is totally deceived by Satan the Devil.

8. Three unclean spirits come out of the mouth of the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet.

9. The unclean spirits deceive the world about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

10. The new world to come will not be put in subjection to the angels, but will be judged by the saints.

11. There will be scoffers in the last days.

Our High Priest

Jesus Christ is our perfect sinless High Priest. Unlike the Levitical High Priest in the Old Testament who could only enter into the Holy of Holies once each year on the Day of Atonement, Christ is in the presence of God at all times (Hebrews 5:5–6;

6:20; 7:26).

The book of Leviticus contains the ritualistic laws of animal sacrifices, meal and drink offerings, incense burnings, and various washings—all of which were required for the Levitical priests to perform. These things were called the "law of works" (Greek *ergon*, which means physical labor). In Galatians 3:19, Paul tells us this was the law that "was added because of transgressions, till the Seed [Christ] should come." This law of works foreshadowed Christ and was intended to lead Israel to Him. After the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, this law of works was not needed (Galatians 3:24–25).

The High Priest in the Old Testament was required to bathe and to wear special linen garments before going into God's presence (Leviticus 16:4; cf. Revelation 19:8).

In Leviticus 16:12–13, we see that the High Priest was to be surrounded by a cloud of incense when he went into the Holy Place. The incense is symbolic of the sweet-smelling odors which are the prayers of the saints. As incense arises from hot coals, so sweet-smelling prayers are to ascend like a cloud from the righteous (Revelation 5:8). The saints who love His appearing are praying for the coming of the kingdom when they shall reign on earth (2 Timothy 4:8).

On the Day of Atonement the High Priest in the Old Testament had to make a sin offering for himself, his house, and for the people, sprinkling the blood on the Mercy Seat (Leviticus 16:6,14,16).

Three items were kept inside the Ark of the Covenant: a golden urn filled with manna as a reminder of God's provision in the wilderness, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets on which God engraved the Ten Commandments with His own finger. The breaking of these laws made the sin offering necessary. The sacrificial blood was sprinkled on and before the cover to the Ark, symbolically "covering" broken law.

This ritualistic sprinkling of blood (sin offering) points directly to Christ (Romans 3:25; Revelation 5:9).

After the High Priest had completely purified himself, he was ready to go out and perform the duties of his office.

Next, the High Priest offered the goat upon which the Lord's lot fell as a sin offering for all the people (Leviticus 16:15). This goat represents Christ, who was slain for the sins of all the people and then assumed the office of High Priest (Hebrews 2:17).

In the book of Hebrews, we see a lucid picture of Jesus Christ and the heaven of God's throne being the unquestionable reality of which the Old Testament High Priest and physical Tabernacle only represented (9:23–24; 8:2–5). For a more thorough understanding, read Hebrews 9 and 10.

Therefore, we see in "reality" Jesus Christ entered behind the veil to the very throne of God in heaven (6:19,20; 8:1). It was His own blood that He presented as an offering for sin (9:12).

So Jesus Christ began to do behind the veil in heaven itself what the High Priest did in type only on the Day of Atonement (9:7; Leviticus 16:15–19).

Because we have a High Priest, Jesus Christ, who has passed into the heavens, we are encouraged to come boldly unto the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:14–16).

Also, we find Jesus has been making intercession for those who have come to God through faith in Him (Hebrews 7:25). He has been doing this for the last two thousand years because He is ever-living.

Another underlying reason for the Day of Atonement was that other offerings for sin could not provide for unknown (secret) sins. Because of such sins, the sanctuary, the land, and the nation remained ritually unclean. The Altar and the Mercy Seat were considered defiled because they were in the presence of the sinning Israelites. All through the year the sins of the Israelites were transferred to the Tabernacle and its fixtures. On the Day of Atonement, this giant burden of guilt was purged from the nation in order that God might continue to dwell in Israel. "But your iniquities have separated you from your god; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2).

Review

1. *Jesus is our perfect High Priest.*

2. *Christ is in the presence of God at all times.*

3. *The ritualistic laws were called the "law of works," which means physical labor.*

4. *This law of works was intended to lead Israel to Christ.*

5. *After the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, the ritualistic law of works was not needed.*

6. *Jesus Christ presented His own blood as an offering for sin behind the veil in heaven.*

7. *Jesus makes intercession for all who come to God through Him.*

8. *It is our sins and iniquities that separate us from God.*

Must the Church Fast Today?

The Day of Atonement was a day of cleansing and purifying. It was a time of emancipation and restoration—a day symbolizing release from bondage (Leviticus 25:1–9).

After seven seventh years were reached, totaling 49 years, the fiftieth year was heralded by the Trumpet of Jubilee. This year was set aside as belonging to the Lord. The word "Jubilee" simply means a "Ram's Horn."

This was not just a year of release from labor, nor just a year of rest, but this year belonged to the Lord. By this, God expressed His Lordship over earth and all creation which should be acknowledged by all His people by their obedience to all His commands.

Just as the seventh year, linked in Deuteronomy 31:9–13 with the reading of the law, expressed God's right to command obedience of His people, so the fiftieth year of Jubilee expressed His ownership of all people, land, and methods or means of production—and life itself.

During this year, those who had fallen on hard times were released from debts they were unable to pay. Those who, for lack of food and clothing, sold themselves into slavery, and those who lost inherited land through poverty, were released from slavery and had their land restored. This was a typical portrayal of man's future Atonement: release from the death penalty (Romans 6:23) and from the slavery to sin (verse 16; 7:14).

As we read before, our sins and iniquities have separated us from

God. And our sins have hidden His face from us, and He will not hear us (Isaiah 59:2).

If we do not confess our sins, or if we harbor certain sins in our heart, it is like building a wall and placing it between ourselves and God (Psalm 66:18).

Notice, we are commanded to "fast," or to abstain from food and drink. We are not to do any work at all; "it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings" (Leviticus 23:29–32).

Numerous scriptures show us that the act of fasting indicates sorrow because of sin (Ezra 10:6; Deuteronomy 9:8,9,18).

The biblical example indicates that spiritual fasting is to be accomplished by not drinking or eating (Exodus 34:28; Esther 4:16; Acts 9:9).

Romans 8:17 reminds us that if we expect to be glorified with Christ, we must also suffer with Him.

Jesus suffered great affliction for us (Isaiah 53:4,7). On the Day of Atonement we can be one with Him by submitting ourselves to the affliction of fasting. The Hebrew word *anah* used in Isaiah 53:4 is the same word used elsewhere for fasting.

Through fasting we become aware of just how carnal-minded we really are. With just a little hunger and thirst, we find out how much our thoughts are taken up with self.

"But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2).

Notice the record in the book of Psalms left by King David (Psalm 35:13; 109:24; 119:71).

Jesus taught that if we humble ourselves, then in due time we shall be exalted (Luke 14:11). Until we become humble, we cannot be acceptable to God (Luke 18:14).

The Pharisee did not go to the Temple to pray to God but to announce to all who could hear how good he was. When the tax collector went, he recognized himself as a sinful man, begging for mercy (Luke 18:11–13).

The Pharisee fasted so he would appear to God as suffering, thinking God would be pleased and look favorably upon him. That kind of fasting is

not the purpose of the Day of Atonement.

Godly humbling is repentance, which will lead to conversion. The converted person will admit that his ways are wrong and that his own human strength is minuscule. He will turn to God's ways, receiving the power of the Holy Spirit and living a life of obedience to God.

Review

1. *God selected the Day of Atonement as a time of release from bondage.*
2. *The fiftieth year was heralded by the Trumpet of Jubilee.*
3. *This year was set aside as belonging to the Lord.*
4. *Those who had sold themselves into slavery (bondage) were released.*
5. *Those who had lost inherited land had their land restored.*
6. *This year of release was a portrayal of man's future atonement: release from the death penalty and slavery to sin.*
7. *Fasting indicates sorrow because of sin.*
8. *To be exalted, we must first be humble.*
9. *Through fasting, we become aware of just how carnal-minded we are.*
10. *The converted person will confess that his ways are wrong, that he has little strength.*

Mercy Seat, Propitiation, Expiation, and the Wrath of God

The whole position of the human race was altered in its relationship to God by the atoning death of Christ for the world's sin. Whether men accept this marvelous blessing makes no difference (1 John 2:2). Jesus Christ is our "propitiation," delivering us from the wrath of God.

The Hebrew word translated "mercy seat" is technically best rendered as "propitiatory," a term signifying the removal of wrath. We see the significance of this found in the ceremony performed on the Day of Atonement, when blood was sprinkled by the High Priest on the Mercy Seat to make atonement for the sins of the people of Israel.

The Mercy Seat "propitiation" looks forward to Jesus, who is called a "propitiation" (Romans 3:25). This Greek term translated "propitiation" is the same Greek word used in the Septuagint version of Hebrews 9:5.

Translation from one language to another, such as Greek to English, can cause confusion for Bible students. One of the rules of Bible study is not to take things out of context. Just being aware of the problem will help a great deal.

One such problem is the words "expiation" and "propitiation" in relationship to the word "Atonement."

In the Scriptures, you will find that both expiation and propitiation are a part of God's atoning work. You will find that New Testament references to "expiation" have to do with the sacrifice of Christ for human sin. Christ's sacrifice both *propitiates* (turns away) the wrath of God and *expiates* (covers) human sin.

A helpful solution to the problem of relating expiation and propitiation is not to choose between them, for both terms are proper biblical concepts. For example, in Romans 3:25 we see both ideas in the context: "[W]hom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed." For other examples see Romans 1:18; 2:5,8; 3:5.

From this we see that the broader term "atoning sacrifice," which can include both ideas, is the better choice.

It will help to look at the wrath of God in relation to His forbearance, love, and readiness to forgive. First, God is patient. He has already given nearly six thousand years to man to come to repentance. The Hebrew word for "patient" is related to the word for "wrath," and means "length of wrath"—that is, God does not quickly become angry. He is long-suffering (Exodus 34:6).

Second, He is full of compassion and love, always faithful to His children (34:6).

Third, He is always ready to forgive those who sin against Him when they atone for and are cleansed from their sins (34:6).

In the New Testament, we see God's wrath in contrast to His grace, love, and forbearance (Matthew 3:7; Luke 21:23; John 3:36; Romans 1:18; Ephesians 5:6; Revelation 14:10).

Those who do not have faith in Christ remain in their sins and fall under the wrath of God. Those who believe in Him are delivered from God's wrath (Ephesians 2:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:10). However, the faithful are reminded that it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31), because God is a "consuming fire" (12:29).

We have already studied the good news that Jesus has come to deliver us from the wrath of God (Romans 5:9). We who have been delivered are reconciled with God and have received the Atonement (verses 10–11). We are no longer under condemnation (8:1).

To be sure, atonement is the whole message of the Bible: God in Christ is reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Review

1. *One rule of Bible study is to avoid taking things out of context.*
2. *References to "expiation" have to do with the sacrifices of Christ for human sin.*
3. *Both expiation and propitiation are a part of God's atoning work.*
4. *Propitiation turns away God's wrath by faith in Christ's blood.*
5. *Expiation covers human sin and brings remission of sins.*
6. *"Atoning sacrifice" includes both facets: propitiation and expiation.*
7. *Without faith in Christ, we remain in our sins.*
8. *God is patient, full of compassion and love.*
9. *God is always ready to forgive.*
10. *The Good News is, Jesus has come to deliver us from the wrath of God. Those delivered are reconciled with God and have received the Atonement.*

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13

Understanding Atonement

Test Yourself

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True or False Questions

1. The Day of Atonement is kept on the first of Tishri.
2. Atonement is to accomplish reconciliation between men.
3. "The Fast" is a way of referring to the day of Atonement in the New Testament.
4. We are not to eat or drink fluids on the Day of Atonement.
5. God does not command us to keep the Day of Atonement.
6. In the Bible, every day begins at the previous day's sunrise.
7. The High Priest could enter into the Holy of Holies at any time of year.
8. The Holy Place was typical of God's throne in heaven.
9. God's presence was never actually in the Tabernacle's Holy Place.
10. Two goats were taken from the congregation of Israel as a sin offering.
11. One goat was offered as a sin offering to the Lord, and the other goat was the goat of departure.
12. It was determined by lot which role each goat would portray.
13. The goat for the Lord was slain and its blood sprinkled on the Mercy Seat.
14. The goat for departure was led away into the wilderness by a fit man.
15. It is not possible for us to receive atonement yet.

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16. Satan will be bound for a hundred years.
17. Humanity totally repents when the plagues start to come.
18. The world to come will be better, when it is ruled by angels.
19. Unclean spirits will go forth deceiving mankind about Christ's return.
20. The saints shall rule in the new world to come.
21. Our High Priest is sinless and perfect.
22. We must keep the "law of works" to be saved.
23. Jesus presented His own blood as an offering in heaven behind the veil.
24. Sin never separates us from God.
25. God selected the Day of Atonement as a time of release from bondage.
26. Jubilee means a Ram's Horn.
27. Every five years the Trumpet of Jubilee was blown.
28. The year of Jubilee was set aside for the people.
29. Those who sold themselves into slavery were released.
30. Fasting never indicates sorrow for sin.
31. Fasting reminds us how essentially good we are inside.
32. Satan is bound in a bottomless pit for two thousand years.
33. Jesus Christ is our propitiation.
34. We have not received atonement yet.
35. Expiation and propitiation are a part of God's atoning work.
36. God is a wrathful God, and never forgiving.
37. God in Christ is reconciling the world unto Himself.
38. Jesus did not come to deliver us from the wrath of God.
39. Without faith in ourselves we will remain in our sins.
40. There will be scoffers in the last days.

Answers to True or False Questions: Score Yourself: Miss 0-3 = Excellent; Miss 4-6 = Good; Miss 7-9 = Fair

Answers: 1. False; 2. True; 3. True; 4. True; 5. False; 6. True; 7. False; 8. True; 9. False; 10. True; 11. True; 12. True; 13. True; 14. True; 15. False; 16. False; 17. False; 18. False; 19. True; 20. True; 21. True; 22. False; 23. True; 24. False; 25. True; 26. True; 27. True; 28. False; 29. True; 30. True; 31. False; 32. False; 33. True; 34. True; 35. False; 36. True; 37. True; 38. False; 39. False; 40. True.