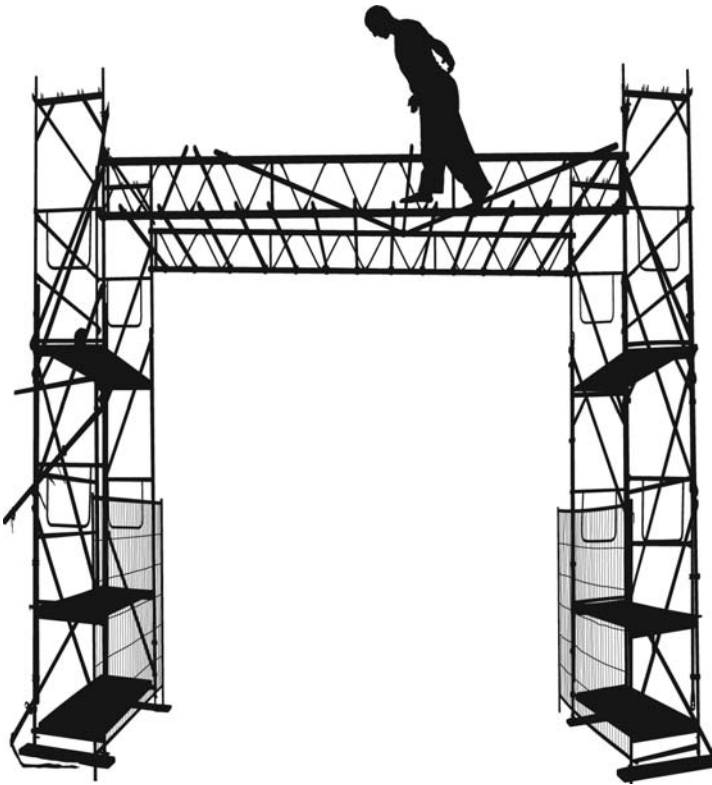


Atonement in Symbols— Part Two



“Let us go to his dwelling place;
let us worship at his footstool” (Ps. 132:7, NIV).

Send to/Erase!

INTRODUCTION

Lev. 16:21

Cell phones and salvation! Can you see any connection? Abhilasha, a young Indian college girl, did. In the past, she scoffed when people told her that even a whispered prayer can reach God in an instant. She dismissed prayer as a psychological tool meant to soothe frayed and uneducated nerves. Then the cell phone came to India, and she saw how easy it was for her to talk to her sister in the United States with the mere click of a few buttons. This set her wondering. If a mobile phone can be so effective, what about the technology of God? After all, the cell works on the radio energy created by God. *If God alters the laws of radio energy, all cells would go dead*, she thought.

Do you think it's easier today to understand the atonement than ever before? Or harder? God has a wonderful technology to transfer our sinfulness to the heavenly sanctuary. This can be done only by the merits of Jesus' shed blood. For centuries God has been transferring people's sins to the heavenly sanctuary. The sanctuary is fully loaded!

However, God has a wonderful way by which, on the day of atonement, He will empty the sanctuary of

God has a wonderful technology to transfer our sinfulness to the heavenly sanctuary.

all sins and put them on the devil, the originator of sin. In other words, God will erase the sin problem altogether. Mind you, computer generation, this is not merely the record of sin (or what we call folders or zip files) being transferred. What is being taken away, or transferred, is the actual sinfulness, the disease that caused the sin or the root.

In simple terms, *atonement* means "at-one-ment." The sin problem caused a division between God and humans. So they become incompatible. Bringing them together again is the basic purpose of the atonement. God stated this idea by saying, "And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Exod. 25:8, NKJV).

In the Old Testament, God gave us various symbols to help us understand the atonement. Those symbols have passed away. But their educational value remains. Sin is a very complex, deeply rooted problem, for which humans cannot devise a solution. Only God can. The sanctuary symbolizes His way of putting an end to the sin problem. The Old Testament sanctuary service pointed to the real sanctuary in heaven where Jesus is pleading on our behalf to get our sin problem erased. The price paid for erasing our sins was the Crucifixion, the blood, the life of Jesus Christ, the only Son of God.

LOGOS

Leviticus 16; Num. 18:1–8; Ps. 28:2; 132:7; 138:2

The High Priest's Preparation (Lev. 16:1–4; Num. 18:1–8)

The preparation by the high priest for the Day of Atonement was intense. He had to wash not merely his hands and feet, but his entire body in order to be personally pure while interceding for the people (Lev. 16:4). In addition, he was to wear specific clothing made of plain white linen. "As in the typical service the high priest laid aside his pontifical robes and officiated in the white linen dress of an ordinary priest; so Christ laid aside His royal robes and garbed Himself with humanity and offered sacrifice, Himself the priest, Himself the victim. As the high priest, after performing his service in the holy of holies, came forth to the waiting congregation in his pontifical robes; so Christ will come the second time, clothed in garments of whitest white, 'so as no fuller on earth can white them.' Mark 9:3."

The Order of Service (Lev. 16:5–22)

Two young goats were brought to the entrance of the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. Lots were cast. See Leviticus 16:8. The goat chosen as the Lord's was slain as a sin offering. After that, and to make the atonement complete, its blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat of the Most Holy Place, the altar of incense in

The Day of Atonement represented the three phases of the final judgment.

the Holy Place, and in the court.

The second goat was called the scapegoat, and was brought into the service after the atonement for the sanctuary was finished. The high priest then put his hands on the head of this goat and confessed the sins of all Israel, thus " 'putting them on the head of the goat' " (Lev. 16:21, NKJV). Thereafter, the goat was led into the wilderness, where it was released (verses 21, 22).

The Meaning of the Scapegoat (Lev. 16:10)

There is no unanimity among theologians regarding the meaning of the scapegoat, mainly because "most versions leave the Hebrew word for scapegoat, 'azazel, untranslated. . . . Many modern scholars hold, with the Jews, that Azazel denotes a personal, wicked, superhuman spirit, and nearly all agree that its root

meaning is ‘one who removes,’ ‘a remover,’ specifically, one who removes ‘by a series of acts.’”²

“‘The [scape] goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness’” (Lev. 16:22, NKJV). “Now as they watched the scapegoat depart they witnessed the last act in the drama—Satan, with all the sins he had instigated returned ‘upon his own head’ (Ps. 7:16), going off to his doom.”³

The Symbolism of the Day of Atonement (Ps. 28:2; 132:7; 138:2)

On the first day of the seventh month came the blowing of trumpets, which was to call Israel to the Day of Atonement ten days later (Num. 29:1). The intervening nine days became days of heart searching.

“The Day of Atonement portrayed the three phases of the final judgment:

“a. The removal of sins from the sanctuary relates to the first, or pre-Advent, investigative phase of the judgment. It ‘focuses on the names recorded in the Book of Life just as the Day of Atonement focused on the removal of the confessed sins’ of the penitent from the sanctuary. False believers will be sifted out; the faith of true believers and their union with Christ will be reaffirmed before the loyal universe, and the records of their sins will be blotted out.’”

“b. The banishment of the scapegoat to the wilderness symbolizes Satan’s millennial imprisonment on this desolated earth, which begins at the Second Advent and coincides with the second phase of the final judgment, which takes place in heaven (Rev. 20:4; 1 Cor. 6:1–3). . . .

“c. The clean camp symbolizes the results of the third, or executive, phase of the judgment, when fire destroys the wicked and cleanses the earth (Rev. 20:11–15; Matt. 25:31–46; 2 Pet. 3:7–13.)”⁴

After the judgment is finalized, God’s name, His loving-kindness, and His truth (Ps. 138:2) will be revealed in its full form.

REACT

How might you use the services of the sanctuary system, especially the Day of Atonement, as a starting point to share the plan of salvation with a non-Adventist?

1. *The Acts of Apostles*, p. 33.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 775.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 778.

4. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*, 1988 edition, p. 319.

Trinity in Atonement

TESTIMONY

Ps. 138:2

If Christ is a true revelation of God's character, and if God's plan of redemption in Christ truly consists of our salvation, then we must address the question: Who are God and Christ? How are they able to achieve salvation for sinful humans?

The following points help us in understanding atonement:

First, we must realize the identity of the incarnate, crucified, and risen Lord Jesus Christ as the second person of the Trinity.

Second, Jesus' crucifixion is not primarily the punishment of sin, but the removal of sin. Similarly, Jesus' resurrection and ascension are essential to atonement because it is God's intention in Christ to transform and recreate our fallen human nature, thereby allowing us to participate in the resurrected life of His Son.

Third, grace is mediated to redeemed human beings in a Trinitarian manner, from God the Father, through the intercession of the risen Christ, and by the agency of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit who makes the humanity of the risen Christ

present to us remakes our humanity in the divine image.

**"Let not a semblance of
pride or self-importance be
cherished."**

"Those who have Christ abiding in the heart will work the works of Christ. Such are entitled to all the promises of His Word. Becoming one with Christ, they do the will of

God, and exhibit the riches of His grace. . . . The servants of God will sing: 'I will praise thee with my whole heart: before the gods will I sing praise unto thee. I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy loving-kindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name. . . .' Then let not a semblance of pride or self-importance be cherished, for it will crowd Jesus out of the heart, and the vacuum will be filled with the attributes of Satan."^{*}

REACT

1. God can literally put a full stop to sin within a fraction of a second. Why then does He allow sin to continue? Why should the role of atonement be included in your answer?

2. Why do pride and self-importance "crowd Jesus out of the heart"?

^{*}"The True Church," *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 1, 1913.

An All-inclusive "Holy" and "Royal" Priesthood

EVIDENCE

1 Pet. 2:9, 10

If you happen to visit an Adventist church in an Indian village, you probably would find people's footwear placed outside the entrance of the church. However, you may not see a similar sight in a city church in India. The difference is mainly due to varying concepts involving the "holiness" of a church building. Read Matthew 18:20. Because the Lord is in the midst of them, people living in rural India remove their shoes before they enter church as a sign of respect for God.

There was a unique expectation connected to any priest who entered the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement. This was where God placed a special holiness, and people were concerned that nothing should go amiss whenever a priest entered it. On this most holy day, the high priest, after offering incense in the Holy of Holies, paused for a moment to say a short prayer before returning to the courtyard, where the people were waiting. The Mishnah states, "He did not make the prayer long so as not to frighten Israel" (Yoma 5:1).

The sanctuary was considered holy because of God's presence in it and because it represented Christ and His salvation. Likewise, Jesus came to dwell amongst us. "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matt. 1:23).

This was where God placed
a special holiness.

As believers, we often doubt the faithfulness of the people participating in worship services. This is because we expect them to be holy. Due to this thinking, many church members around the world are in dispute with one another. We must remember, however, that we "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

But the good news is that we "are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that [we] may proclaim the praises of Him who called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9, NKJV).

REACT

If God's presence makes a place holy, and if we invite God to be with our families, with our school, or with our place of work, then does that make these places holy? Explain. What implications does our answer have to how we treat our families, schools, and work?

Making Atonement Work for You

HOW-TO

Ps. 85:10; Heb. 10:19–22

How can we experience a Day of Atonement thousands of years after the ancient Hebrews lived it? Here are some suggestions:

Set Time for Introspection. Just before the Day of Atonement, the Jews had ten days for intense self-examination and repentance, beginning with the Feast of Trumpets. These days were known as “Days of Awe,” or “Days of Repentance.” These holy days were a time for people to carefully evaluate their lives, to verify if the sins which had been confessed and atoned for during the previous year had also been forsaken. If not, God granted these ten days as a last opportunity to confess and forsake any remaining sin. Similarly, we also need to examine our lives before probation closes.

Plead mercy by Jesus’ blood. Sin disqualified the congregation to approach the

Holy of Holies, except through a go-between, the high priest, who typified Jesus Christ our High Priest. The high priest’s only claim to holiness was the innocent victims’ blood which was to be applied to the mercy seat. Likewise, Jesus’ blood is our only claim to forgiveness (Heb. 9:22). Centuries later, we can still experience the cleansing power of

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His blood and mercy.

Stay constantly warned of the evil one. Our High Priest Jesus is also the sacrificial victim, slain since the foundation of the world, and who offered up Himself for our sins once and for all (Heb. 4:14; 7:27; 8:1; 9:12–15, 25, 26, 28; 10:10), thereby making obsolete the shadow—the annual, ceremonial sacrifice—and giving us “confidence to enter the Most Holy Place . . . through the curtain, . . . his body” (Heb. 10:19, 20).

One of the most interesting features of Yom Kippur was the lottery that selected two goats—one symbolizing the Lord and the other symbolizing Satan, who because he is the root of all evil, owns all of the people’s guilt. This goat was led to the wilderness, where it was abandoned. Likewise, we must stay constantly warned of the evil one, shun him, and abandon him completely.

Recognizing the Immense Power of the Blood

OPINION

Ps. 132:7

Satan may whisper, "You are too great a sinner for Christ to save." While you acknowledge that you are indeed sinful and unworthy, you may meet the tempter with the cry, "By virtue of the atonement, I claim Christ as my Savior. I trust not to my own merits, but to the precious blood of Jesus, which cleanses me."¹ "Christ's atonement includes the whole human family. No one, high or low, rich or poor, free or bond, has been left out of the plan of redemption. 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. . . .' This is the great practical lesson which is to be thoroughly and intelligently learned."²

Jesus was made a sin offering for us. How beautifully this was illustrated in the ancient sanctuary service! The victim was brought to be slain. Then the blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat. This mercy seat was none other than the sacred cover or lid of the ark which contained the tables of the law and other sacred memorials of God's ancient mercies. There they were, in that Most Holy Place, where no one but the high priest was allowed. And he entered only once a year, on the great Day of Atonement. On this eventful day, the sacred rites of the sanctuary culminated in highest solemnity. By sacrificing a young bullock for his own sins, the high

It was as if the whole world had been standing around the base of Calvary.

priest initiated the services. Two goats were brought forward. One goat was driven into the wilderness to signify how God removes our sins as far as the east is from the west. The other goat was slain, and its blood borne by the high priest into the Most Holy Place to be sprinkled upon the mercy seat. Meanwhile, the vast congregation stood outside expecting forgiveness through the shed blood, which symbolized the shed blood of the coming Redeemer.

It was as if the whole world had been standing around the base of Calvary, confessing their sins, while Jesus bore His cross to the summit, to hang thereon, and bleed and die for our sins.

1. *The Sanctified Life*, p. 90.

2. *Battle Creek Letters*, p. 39.

Christ Our Salvation

EXPLORATION

Ps. 132:7

CONCLUDE

Sin caused a rift between God and humanity. The Day of Atonement shows us God's plan to eradicate sin forever by creating a bridge over that rift. Atonement, then and now, begins with a time for introspection, an evaluation of our sinfulness and our need for Christ. It continues with our acceptance of cleansing through Christ's blood and His promise of protection from the evil one. Christ took the sins of the world on His shoulders so we all can have salvation. Even more than that hope, He invites us to open our hearts now to His life-changing power.

CONSIDER

- Making a model of the sanctuary as described in the Old Testament, along with the special elements involved in the Day of Atonement sanctuary service.
- Setting aside a time for introspection and heart searching, just like the Israelites did before the Day of Atonement (Num. 29:1–7). Ask God for forgiveness from your sins and for life transformation.
- Memorizing a scriptural reference from this lesson that was particularly meaningful to you.
- Composing song lyrics that express God's atonement power at work in our world right now.
- Observing goats on a farm or at a zoo to try to help you better visualize the two goats on the Day of Atonement service and what they represent (Leviticus 9). If you do not live near a farm or a zoo, study about goats at the library on the Internet. What are their unique characteristics, etc?

CONNECT

The Desire of Ages, pp. 19–26.

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 1, Leviticus, chap. 16, pp. 770–780.

Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, pp. 61–69.