

# Atonement

by G.W. North

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*Atonement is a provision for Israel only, introduced at Sinai with the law, providing coverage for specific sins, but not applicable to the Church.*

**Scripture:** Exodus 30:10, Leviticus 4:20, Leviticus 5:15, Leviticus 16:30, Matthew 26:28, John 1:29, Romans 3:25, Hebrews 9:7, Hebrews 9:22, 1 John 1:7

**Topics:** "Redemption", "Atonement"

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## Description

G.W. North emphasizes the distinction between redemption and atonement in his sermon, explaining that while redemption is foundational to both the Old and New Testaments, atonement is specific to the Old Testament and the Law given to Israel. He clarifies that atonement, which involved various sacrifices for different sins, was a temporary measure that provided coverage for sins of ignorance but did not address known sins, which required individual atonement. North highlights that the Day of Atonement was a significant event for Israel, covering a year's worth of unintentional sins, yet it was limited and retrospective in nature. He points out that the blood used for atonement was specifically chosen by God, with different sacrifices serving distinct purposes, underscoring the importance of understanding the unique role of Christ's sacrifice in the New Covenant. Ultimately, North calls for a deeper understanding of these concepts to appreciate the fullness of salvation offered through Jesus.

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## Transcript

The idea of redemption is first introduced into the Bible in the Old Testament, and is most basic of all to the salvation therein revealed. Unlike its companion truth Atonement, it is not exclusive to that covenant, but by Christ Jesus is basic also to the salvation God provides in the New Covenant. On no account must the blood of redemption be confused in our thinking with the blood of atonements; they are not the same. In the Old Testament different sacrifices had different meanings and were made for a variety of reasons, and their blood(s) effected different results.

In most cases the multiplicity of blood(s) and the reasons for which it was shed is answered in the New Testament by the blood of Christ, but not in every case. The reason for this is that atonement was never intended for, nor is it provided by God, for the Church. It is not a Church experience, therefore it is not a New Testament doctrine. The doctrine of the Atonement belongs exclusively to the Old Testament; it was an interim provision of God for Israel only; He introduced it to them at Sinai when He gave them the law. Atonement rightly belongs to law, it goes with its nature and partakes of its limitations.

Atonement perfectly fits in with the system of imputed righteousness which God instituted for Israel, for its stated purpose is to provide coverage. Upon the basis of the implied coverage afforded by a specific atonement made according to the Law of God, a man could find forgiveness for a particular sin and be justified in His sight. That is why the word is better used always in a plural sense - atonements. By its very nature this provision could only be most limited, very repetitive and entirely retrospective and retroactive; priests made an atonement only. The blood made atonement for the soul, but when shed it only made an atonement.

Beside personal atonements, Israel also kept an annual national atonement. This was completely retrospective in character. It was ordained of God to take place on the tenth day of the seventh month each year. We will not here examine the ordinance in detail, but notice the points relevant to our theme. The atonement made on that day was for the stated purpose of cleansing the people from all their sins before the Lord. It was comprehensive. As stated, it embraced all sins of a certain kind.

The writer to the Hebrews is most helpful here. Referring in chapter nine to the annual atonement, he plainly states that upon that occasion the offering was for the errors of the people. Of old in Israel these errors were not called errors but 'sins of ignorance'. The atonement was not instituted to deal with the sins of which the people were aware, but the sins of which they had no knowledge, either on the Day of Atonement or at the time when they were committed. A whole range of things is covered by this classification, all of which could be described as sins of omission or commission because of ignorance. These were all dealt with at once, a whole year's sins of ignorance were 'covered', atoned for, blotted out, in one day.

Sins of which the people had knowledge were not included in that particular atonement however. Everyone of these had to be atoned for individually, either as soon as it was committed or immediately it was recognised for what it was; refusal to do this meant excommunication from Israel, and forfeiture of life. In those days certain sins were entirely unforgivable. Careful reading in the book of Leviticus will be sufficient to inform the enquiring mind of all it should know about this.

It is a most comforting thought that errors are regarded as such by God, for few there are who would think they never made any mistakes. But it is the more sobering description given by God to Moses which more truly shows the nature of errors. Before the Lord they are sins. Before men and women they may truly be errors, but not in His eyes. He must deal with everything according to its intrinsic as well as its moral nature and manifestation and occurrence. So, although He did not impute sin to the person who did it in ignorance, or punish the people because of their errors, He nevertheless still regarded all these as sins. He did not overlook or excuse them, but kindly remembered all, appointing a day of special atonement that the offence they caused Him should be totally forgiven.

The element in which the atonement was effected was blood sprinkled upon the mercy seat by the high priest. But all blood was not the same blood; God neither regarded it as the same nor allowed it to be used for the same purposes. Special selection of animals and bloods was ordered by Him, each strictly legalised and appointed for and limited to specific purposes and ends. He did this because He was dealing with different kinds of sins.

On the Day of Atonement the blood which was ordained of God for these was goats' blood. Previously the same day the blood of a lamb, together with its body, had been offered upon the altar of burnt sacrifice. There was to be no mixture or confusion of bloods; God's selection for the atonement was deliberately not

lambs' blood. On that day, as on every other, no blood may be shed until the lambs' blood was shed: that blood must take precedence over all other blood(s). The blood of the lamb on the altar - the blood of the goat on the mercy seat. The Hebrews' letter is quite clear about this, 'the blood of bulls and of goats', it repeatedly says, adding nothing about the lamb. Taking note of this, we may well ask, 'why the difference and what is it?'

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