

THE  
COVENANT  
OF  
ATONEMENT

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Crossroads Full Gospel  
International Ministries

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# CONTENTS

THE COVENANT OF ATONEMENT.....	1
THE COVENANT OF ATONEMENT.....	3
APPLYING OLD TESTAMENT TEACHING TO TODAY .....	13

# THE COVENANT OF ATONEMENT

**Through sinning, Adam** placed himself and all his offspring in a position which can be likened to that of a criminal. So when Adam separated himself from God by choosing a different path to the one which God had originally given him, he lost the rights heaven had to offer.

Adam would have fully realized who God was, for he communicated with Him on a daily basis, face to face, as we learned previously.

God told Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil - but Adam disobeyed God, and in so doing, showed that he was really saying, “No, I’m going to do it my way.” Adam, knowing what God had said, chose to self-rule, as most people in the world are doing today.

**Adam chose to go his own way** and so depart from the Light of God. In doing so he broke the original perfect bond which man enjoyed with God. Mankind was created by God with a will, and the nature of the will is choice - to choose one way or another. Adam, of his own free will, chose rebellion, and as a consequence plunged himself, along with the rest of mankind, into spiritual darkness and thus spiritual death.

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***“ . . . Through sinning, Adam placed himself and all his offspring in a position which can be likened to that of a criminal. . . ”***

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**To illustrate this** point let us consider a man who is born in a free country, and so has freedom of choice. This person is able to go where he pleases and to take advantage of the rights and privileges which his society has to offer. Under what circumstances can he lose these rights? He can lose them when he breaks society’s laws, for then society will justifiably take these rights and privileges from him.

For example, if a person stole one million dollars from a bank, what would he be doing? He would be saying by this action, “I don’t want to abide by what is legal and lawful, I want to do things my way. I do not want to conform to the confines of society’s laws.”

In doing this, he is really saying, “I am a law unto myself. I want to separate myself. I will not live within the boundaries imposed by society’s laws.”

Society would then say, “Because you have done this, you will be placed into the confines of a cell where you can do all you like by yourself. We will segregate you from society, the very thing from which you have chosen to cut yourself off.”

**The law is there to protect us** from individuals who would try to abuse our rights or take them from us. It accommodates criminals who want to separate themselves from society by not conforming to its laws and standards.

In the same way that people choose to cut themselves off from society by disobeying its laws, Adam also chose to cut himself off from God’s society by disobeying God’s commandment. And just as a well ordered society has no choice but to remove the guilty from its presence, God had no choice but to remove Adam from His presence (for Adam had rebelled and was tainted with death).

**When Adam, as federal head of mankind,** chose to disregard God’s boundaries by obeying the devil, mankind was put behind spiritual bars, which meant being separated from God’s society.

Adam and all his offspring lost the right to live in the law of eternal life with God, just as criminals lose the right to live in society once they break the law. The spiritual bars which were then placed in front of mankind separated people from the love of God in a spiritual sense.

**So in our physical conception,** we were born into a state of sin, born behind bars in a prison of death - for all have sinned and are deprived of God’s saving presence.

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***“ . . . Adam and all his offspring lost the right to live in the law of eternal life with God, just as criminals lose the right to live in society once they break the law . . . ”***

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**Today, however, God in His mercy and grace** has set forth a blood Covenant with mankind, to protect those who come under this Covenant from the evil one and to bring them out from under the curse that was placed upon mankind through Adam's disobedience.

### **THE COVENANT OF ATONEMENT**

*Background Reading: Leviticus Ch.16; Hebrews 9:1-10*

Sin could not be pardoned without an atonement - some means of redressing the wrong which had been done. It had to be an atonement, however, which would satisfy the courts of perfect justice.

**Shortly after Adam's Fall,** God introduced a Covenant which was brought into effect through the shedding of the blood of an animal:

***GENESIS 3:21 Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them.***

**The main reason God did this** was not to make clothing for Adam and Eve, but to shed the blood of an innocent sacrifice for their sins. This first blood Covenant was prompted by God's love for man and was instigated because of Adam's sin. We can see through scripture that such blood sacrifices were an integral part of the relationship of the Old Testament patriarchs to God, for blood sacrifices indicate the existence of a blood Covenant between God and man. The purpose of this Covenant was to keep eternal death (and thus hell - Lower Hades) at bay, by preventing the sins of the people who lived according to that Covenant being held against them. As we read in Hebrews 9:22, “. . . without the shedding of

*blood there is no remission (forgiveness of sins).” We call this agreement between God and man the Covenant of Atonement. This Covenant with its blood sacrifices pointed towards the Cross, where the sinless sacrifice would be offered - not to keep death at bay, but to redeem man from the power of death.*

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***“ . . . This first blood Covenant was prompted by God’s love for man and was instigated because of Adam’s sin. . . ”***

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Wiersbe comments on the limitations of the atonement sacrifices outlined in Leviticus:

*“Leviticus is a book of sacrifice and blood, themes that are repulsive to modern minds. People today want a “bloodless religion,” salvation without sacrifice, yet this is impossible. Leviticus 16 is perhaps the key chapter of the book, and Chapter 17 makes it clear that the shed blood is what takes care of the sin problem (17:11). The word “atonement” means “to cover”; it is used about forty-five times in the book. The blood of the OT sacrifices could never take away sin (Hebrews 10:1-18). This was accomplished by the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The blood of the OT sacrifices could only cover sin and point ahead to the Savior whose death would finish the work of redemption. By itself, the bringing of sacrifices could never save the sinner. There had to be faith in God’s Word, for it is faith that saves the soul. David knew that sacrifices alone could never take away his sins (Psalm 51:16-17); the prophets also made this clear (Isaiah 1:11-24). However, when the sinner came with a contrite heart, putting faith in God’s Word, then his sacrifice was acceptable to God (see Cain and Abel, Genesis 4:1-5).*

*Leviticus presents many pictures of Christ and His work of redemption on the cross. The five sacrifices (as outlined in Leviticus) illustrate various aspects of His Person and work, and the Day of Atonement beautifully pictures His death on the cross.”<sup>1</sup>*

(underlines and bracketed phrase added)

The reason for the blood sacrifices under the Levitical Law is further explained:

“The word atonement means covering. Under the Mosaic system, the person offering an animal sacrifice was simply covering his sin by means of a blood atonement, averting God’s divine anger and punishment. It was Christ’s death on the cross, not the Levitical sacrifice, that made it possible for a person’s sin to be taken away.”  
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(underlines added)

We see examples of the blood sacrifices involved in the Covenant of Atonement throughout the Old Testament. The operation of the Covenant of Atonement is seen in the lives of:

1. Adam (Genesis 3:21).
2. Abel (Genesis 4:4).
3. Noah (Genesis 6:18, 8:20).
4. Abraham (Genesis 15:9-18, 17:7, 22:13).
5. Job (Job 1:5).

**The Covenant of Atonement**, however, was only explained in detail when it was revealed in its entirety to Moses (Exodus 24:4-8). To this prophet on Mt. Sinai, the Lord revealed the detailed laws of the blood sacrifices. Moses then delivered these laws to the people.

Through Moses, God gave details of all the laws and ceremonies necessary to keep the nation of Israel spiritually clean and holy unto Himself - that is as far as this was possible. His primary reason for doing this was so that He could bring the Saviour into the world through this chosen nation. The Covenant of Atonement in the Old Testament foreshadowed that which was to come. As such it contained many detailed physical type-patterns of the spiritual truths which were to be revealed in the Covenant of Redemption, namely the Cross of Calvary, and the sinless Lamb of God on that Cross shedding His Blood for man.



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***“. . . Leviticus is a book of sacrifice and blood, themes that are repulsive to modern minds. People today want a “bloodless religion,” salvation without sacrifice, yet this is impossible. . . ”***

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The way God dealt with the sins of Israel can be seen in this light:

*“The Old Testament says that the blood of the sacrifice is given to make atonement. What does “atonement” mean? The Hebrew words translated atonement in English versions are kippur (noun) and kapar (verb). The root occurs about 150 times in the Old Testament, and is intimately linked with forgiveness of sin and with reconciliation to God.*

*Many believe the root idea is “to cover” or “to conceal.” If so, atonement suggests a covering that conceals a person’s sin and makes it possible for him to approach God. Certainly this is the role that atonement played in the Old Testament system. . . . Leviticus 16 gives detailed instructions for a special sacrifice to be offered once a year, on the tenth day of the seventh month. On that day the whole community of Israel was to gather at the tabernacle (and later, the temple) to fast and to pray. The high priest followed carefully prescribed steps and entered the inner room of the tabernacle, bringing the blood of a sacrificed animal. There he sprinkled the blood on the cover of the ark, called the mercy seat. This animal was a “sin offering for the people” (16:15).”<sup>3</sup>*

The tenth day of the seventh month was the Day of Atonement, now called Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish religious calendar. In Leviticus we find the five Levitical offerings which demonstrated how provision was to be made so that the people’s sins could be dealt with, day by day. Then on the Day of Atonement, particular sacrifices were carried out on behalf of the whole nation so that the sins of ignorance committed by the nation of Israel for that year could be addressed. The Day of Atonement was a national day of fasting and repentance.

***HEBREWS 9:7 But into the second (second room in the Tabernacle which was the Holy of Holies) went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people***

One writer comments concerning this day:

*“The phrase, “Once every year,” pertaining to the Great Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:14; 23:27), tells us several things. They are as follows:*

*1. As is obvious, the way was not open for all to enter. Not even the Priests could enter, save only the High Priest.*

*2. He could only enter on one particular day each year, the Great Day of Atonement.*

*3. The very fact that he had to keep entering each year, testifies that whatever sacrifices had been previously offered, did not suffice, and because they could not suffice. The blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin.*

*4. The very fact that this arrangement was made, which as is obvious was imperfect, tells us that it was only temporary.*

#### **BLOOD**

*The phrase, “Not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people,” presents him going in twice on this one day.*

*Some say he actually entered three times on this day, the first time with Incense, then with the Blood of the bullock which atoned for his own sins and those of his house, and finally with the blood of the goat for the sins of the people.*

*The word “errors” is the translation of “agnoema,” and means “a sin committed through ignorance or thoughtlessness.”*

*Whenever a known sin was committed, each Israelite was to journey to the Tabernacle, or Temple for that matter, and offer up the proper sacrifice, according to the sin committed. Actually, there were five different types of Sacrifices, “the Whole Burnt-Offering, the Sin-Offering, the Trespass-Offering, the Peace-Offering, and the Thank-Offering.” Of course, Jesus fulfilled by His one offering of Himself, all five Sacrifices.*

*However, even for the few who tried to be diligent in their service to the Lord, still there were sins of ignorance or thoughtlessness committed, which required this one great Sacrifice each year.”<sup>4</sup>*

(underlines added)

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***“...The blood of the OT sacrifices could only cover sin and point ahead to the Saviour whose death would finish the work of redemption. . .”***

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**Under the Old Covenant** (Covenant of Atonement) a Tabernacle was built. This Tabernacle contained two main sections which were separated by a veil. The first room was called the Holy Place. The second room was called the Holy of Holies (the Most Holy Place) and represented the true Holy of Holies in heaven (which is the throneroom of God) - as relating to His presence. The earthly Holy of Holies housed the presence of God, even though God's presence was only there in a limited way, and the veil represented the separation between God and man. The second room, the Holy of Holies, was used for the offering of the blood of the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement.

The blood sacrifices were carried out to atone for, or cover, the sins of the people who lived under the Old Covenant. The reason God instituted the animal sacrifices was to keep eternal spiritual death at bay - for those whose earthly life had finished.

On the Day of Atonement, only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and not without the atoning blood. And if he went into the Most Holy Place in an unclean state, he would be struck dead. Only he, however, was able to undertake the role of mediator between God and the people.

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***“...On the Day of Atonement, only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and not without the atoning blood. And if he went into the Most Holy Place in an unclean state, he would be struck dead. . .”***

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**Note:** There were bells sewn around the hem of the High Priest's garments so that when he ministered in the Most Holy Place, the sound of the bells would be heard (Exodus 28:33-35). Jewish tradition tells us that the High Priest also had a length of rope tied to his ankle so that if he happened to die in the Most Holy Place, as evidenced by the silence of the bells, his body could be dragged out by the people waiting outside.

***HEBREWS 9:7 But into the second (room, the Holy of Holies) went the High Priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people***

**The blood sacrifices were necessary** because the way into the true "Most Holy Place" (the throneroom of God) had not yet been made.

***HEBREWS 9:8 The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place (in heaven) had not yet been made as long as the first tabernacle was still standing.***

***HEBREWS 9:9 This is an illustration (type-pattern) for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience (take away the sin) of the worshipper.***

***HEBREWS 9:10 They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings - external regulations applying until the time of the new order.***

In Wuest's Word Studies, he explains these three verses as follows:

*"(9:8) The writer states that the Holy Spirit is both the divine Author of the Levitical system of worship and its interpreter. The first tabernacle is the Holy Place. As long as that part of the Levitical institution was still in effect, Israel was to understand that the way into the presence of God had not yet been opened. The division of the tabernacle into the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies showed the*

limitations of the Levitical system, and kept the people from coming directly to God. The Holy Place barred both priests and people from the Holy of Holies.

When the new order of things was brought into being by the death of Messiah on the Cross, thus fulfilling the typical sacrifices, God rent the inner veil of the temple which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, making of the two rooms, one. There was, therefore, no more "within the veil." This was God's object lesson to the Aaronic priesthood that its ministry was now over, that the temple was to be closed, that a new Priest had arisen after the order of Melchisedec. But, Israel in its apostasy, repaired the veil, kept on offering sacrifices, until God in His wrath, sent Rome to destroy the city of Jerusalem and scatter His chosen people to the ends of the Roman empire.

The way into the Holiest of all, into heaven itself and the presence of God, had been opened at the Cross. God made it impossible for the high priest in Israel to enter within the veil, all of which was enough to show Israel that the true High Priest, the Messiah, had entered the heavenly Holy of Holies, and that the earthly one was to be a thing of the past.

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*Translation. The Holy Spirit all the while making this plain, that not yet was made actual the road into the Holiest while still the first tabernacle had standing (i.e., remained a recognized institution).*

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(9:9) .... These gifts and sacrifices could not make the worshipper perfect so far as his conscience was concerned. The word "perfect" is *teleios* (τελειος) which does not mean sinless, but complete, finished. The word described that which needed nothing to make it what it should be, complete. The Levitical ritual as such did not touch the conscience. No ritual in itself ever does. There was nothing in it that could deal with conscience. Only the working of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God and the efficacy of the blood of the Messiah could do that. The Holy Spirit did in Old Testament times deal as He does today with the consciences of men, but the salvation which He applied under the Levitical system found its source in the New Testament Sacrifice, the Lord Jesus. Therefore, while operating under the jurisdiction of the First Testament, God

*was giving salvation to the First Testament believer by virtue of that which was accomplished through the New Testament. Since the First Testament could not do that which the New Testament did, it was set aside in favor of the New Testament. And this is the argument of the Book of Hebrews.*

*Translation. Which (tabernacle) was of such a nature as to be an explanation for the ensuing time, according to which both gifts and sacrifices are being offered which are not able to make complete the one who offers them, so far as the conscience is concerned.*

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*(9:10) .... The word translated “reformation” is interesting and important. It is diorthosis (διορθωσις), from the verb diorthoo (διορθωο). The word means in its physical sense the making straight, the restoring to its natural and normal condition, something which in some way protrudes or has gotten out of line, as for instance broken or misshapen limbs. It means “to set things to rights.” In the LXX it is used of mending one’s ways (Jeremiah 7:3, 5), and of setting up or establishing (Isaiah 16:5). The word in its context here means “to bring matters to a satisfactory state.” It refers to the introduction of the New Testament which latter displaces the First Testament. The First Testament never was satisfactory, so far as offering a sacrifice that could pay for sin was concerned. It could not actually in itself save the believer.*

*Translation. Which (the Levitical system) had its basis only in food and drink and various washings, ordinances befitting human beings, enjoined until the time of bringing matters to a satisfactory state.”*

*(underlines added)*

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***“ . . . The way into the Holiest of all, into heaven itself and the presence of God, had been opened at the Cross. . . . ”***

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**The Old Testament Covenant** could only provide for the atonement of the sins of the people who lived according to that covenant.

In this context, the word “atone” means “to cover over until full payment can be made.”

“to atone” = “to cover”

**The atoning sacrifices**, both those made day by day as well as the Day of Atonement sacrifices, were not sufficient to take away sin - for they needed to be continually repeated. This showed that no power over sin was gained, only a covering of the people’s sin, by the grace of God, until the Saviour came. He would not only bring redemption but even power over sin!

***HEBREWS 10:3 But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.***

***HEBREWS 10:4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.***

**Under the Levitical, God-given system, the blood of bulls and goats** only covered man’s sin, and this is why people under the Old Covenant could not enter heaven after they died. Indeed John 3:13 tells us:

***JOHN 3:13 And no man (before the Resurrection of Jesus) has ascended up to heaven, but He (Jesus) that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven.***

**If people remained faithful to God** under the Old Covenant, when they died they went to a place which we know as Abraham’s Bosom, a waiting or holding place.

***LUKE 16:22 And it came to pass, that the beggar (a person under the Old Covenant) died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s Bosom (a holding place): the rich man (a person not under the Old Covenant = a heathen) also died, and was buried;***

***LUKE 16:23 And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.***

The Old Covenant Saints waited in this holding place until blood of sufficient worth could be shed to wash away their sins, not just cover them over. Then power over sin could also be gained.

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*“. . .The atoning sacrifices showed that no power over sin was gained, only a covering of the people’s sin, by the grace of God, until the Saviour came. He would not only bring redemption but even power over sin. . .”*

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## APPLYING OLD TESTAMENT TEACHING TO TODAY

As we have learned, a key to understanding Old Testament teaching is:

**the Old Testament has many physical type-patterns of spiritual truths that we can apply today.**

The books of the Old Testament as well as the books of the New Testament contain the principles of God by which we are to live today. Therefore both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant constitute the written Word of God.

**There are many physical type-patterns** in the Old Testament which can help us understand what is happening spiritually today.

As we have learned, in Old Testament times there was a place on earth called the Holy of Holies where once a year the High Priest went alone with blood (Hebrews 9:1-10) to obtain atonement for the sins of his people.

**This Holy of Holies on earth** was a physical type-pattern of the “*Most Holy Place*” in heaven, which is the throneroom of God. The heavenly “Holy of Holies” was not accessible to man until Jesus died and rose from the dead. It was then that Jesus, as our High Priest, entered the heavenly tabernacle by His own Blood, so that mankind could be redeemed and cleansed from all sin.



**It took the sacrifice of Jesus** to open up the way for man to enter the true “Holy of Holies” - the throneroom of God. The physical Holy of Holies on earth became obsolete (was no longer used by God) when the veil in the temple was torn in two by God’s power (Mark 15:38). The tearing of the veil announced the end of animal sacrifices for the purpose of Atonement. The Lamb of God was sacrificed once only, and His Blood was sufficient to pay for the sin of the whole world (Hebrews 10:12) and release man from his prison to serve a mighty and loving Saviour.

May you have the victory in Christ. Amen!

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- 1 Wiersbe, W.W., Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (Lev.1:1).
- 2 Israel My Glory, Vol.56, No 3.
- 3 Richards, L., The Teacher's Commentary. Includes index. (Le 18:1).
- 4 S.B.C. Vol.21, Hebrews, pg.492.
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