

The theological concept of 'Atonement' marks Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as the ultimate atonement. Beginning this week we'll be looking in depth at the sacrificial understanding of atonement in the bible. Are you sacrificing this Lent?

Monday -- In the Old Testament, atonement refers to the process God established whereby humans could make an offering to God to restore fellowship with God. Such offerings, including both live and dead animals, incense, and money, were required to remove the bad effects of human sin. Not surprisingly, the atoning power of Christ's death is often expressed in terms drawn from Old Testament sacrificial practices. Thus, Christ's death is called a "*sacrifice for sins*" (*Heb. 10:12*) and a "*sacrifice to God*" (*Eph. 5:2*). Christ is variously identified with the Passover lamb (*1 Cor. 5:7*), the sacrifice which initiates the new covenant (*Luke 22:20*), and the sin offering (*Heb. 9:14, 25-28*).

Tuesday -- The only fast day stipulated in the Mosaic law was the annual day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), observed on the tenth day of Tishri (September-October) at the conclusion of ten days of penitence. The day of Atonement was the only day of the year that the priest entered the holy of holies to make sin offerings for himself, his family, and the "assembly of Israel." After making these offerings, the nation's sins were symbolically laid on the scapegoat "Azazel" that was released into the wilderness to die. While atonement in the Old Testament most frequently refers to humans offering sacrifices to God for their wrongdoing, several references are made to God making atonement. In *Psalms 78:38*, the Hebrew for "atoned for" is used where the KJV translates "forgave" as is also true in *Deuteronomy 21:8*. Because God "atones for" or "covers" human sin, atonement is best understood as expiation, that is removing the barrier that sin creates rather than propitiation or appeasing an angry God.

Wednesday -- The basic Greek word for atonement is *katallasso*, usually translated "to reconcile," and the corresponding noun, *katallage*, meaning "reconciliation." The basic meaning is to establish friendship. This is used in human relationships in *1 Corinthians 7:11*, referring to the restoration of relationship between an estranged husband and wife. Paul used the term in reference to Christ's work of salvation in *Romans 5:10-11; 11:15; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20*. The Greek term *hilaskomai*, means "to forgive" or "show mercy."

Thursday -- The focal point of God's atoning work is Christ's death on the cross. Paul wrote that "*when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son*" (*Rom. 5:10*). These words not only define the meaning of atonement, they reveal the heart of the gospel as well. The primacy of the cross is emphasized throughout the New Testament. At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus was identified as "*the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world*" (*John 1:29*). The purpose of His coming was "*to give his life a ransom for many*" (*Mark 10:45*).

Friday -- The relation of the cross to forgiveness of sins was implicit in the earliest Christian preaching (*Acts 2:21; 3:6, 19; 4:13; 5:31; 8:35; 10:43*). Paul proclaimed that "*Christ died for our sins*" (*1 Cor. 15:3*), that He was a "*propitiation*" (*Rom. 3:25 KJV*; "*sacrifice of atonement*," NRSV, NIV; "*expiation*," RSV).