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MINISTRIES

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Blood and Atonement

A common objection to Messianic and Christian theology as it concerns the doctrine of the atonement, is the assertion that the shedding of blood is not necessary for the forgiveness of sins. It's from that premise that the anti-missionaries argue that Messiah's death, which we believe makes atonement for human sin, is unnecessary. Thus, it is said that a person needs only to repent of their sins in order to obtain forgiveness from God. They don't need a Messiah who dies for them. But what do the Scriptures say?

First, we're going to focus on building a case from the Scriptures to prove the necessity of blood as it concerns atonement and forgiveness. After that we'll address the most common objections to this position. For additional information on this topic, we'd invite you to watch our teachings, [His Sacrifice](#) and [Why Yeshua is the Messiah](#).

Before we get into what is required for God's forgiveness, it's worthwhile to explore the biblical concept of sin.

In the *Tanakh*—that is, the Old Testament—several Hebrew words are used to represent the idea of sin. One such word is the verb *chata'*, and its corresponding noun, *chatat*, which basically means “to miss the mark.” Another word would be *avon*, often translated “transgression,” which expresses behavior that is opposed to what is right. As we study these words and their related forms, a clear picture develops—that is, sin is defined against a righteous standard.

That is why, in the *Brit Hadashah*—the New Testament—sin is clearly defined as transgressing God's holy Torah:

Romans 7:7

“What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’”

And 1 John 3:4 makes it very simple:

1 John 3:4

“Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.”

So God has a righteous standard as expressed in His commandments, and sin is failing to meet that standard. According to the testimony of Scripture, and what we know from our own lives, mankind has utterly failed to meet God’s standard, and we’ve all sinned. And according to Scripture, a payment is required for sin. This is clearly outlined in the very beginning of the Bible:

Genesis 2:16-17

“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, **for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.**’”

As we can see, the payment that God requires for sin is death. We all know the story from there: Adam and Eve did in fact fail to meet God’s standard. They disobeyed God’s commandment by eating from the tree of knowledge. They deserved death. Yet, it was in light of this event that we see God’s plan for redemption begin to unfold:

Genesis 2:16-17

“And the Lord God (YHWH Elohim) made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.”

From this passage, we see a foreshadowing of the biblical principle of substitutionary atonement. The death of an animal was necessary to make the skins that were used to clothe Adam and Eve. Thus, we see a hint that atonement—reconciliation between God and man—is on the basis of a life exchanged for a life.

This concept is even more clear as we examine the sacrificial system in the Torah. The entire foundation for the Levitical system is substitutionary atonement—that is, the guilty party is forgiven on the basis of the death of the animal:

Leviticus 17:11

“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.”

According to the Torah, the blood of the sacrifice had to be poured upon the altar in order that atonement could be accomplished. Again, the life of the animal served as payment for sin in order to redeem the life of the worshiper. In his commentary on Leviticus 17:11, a well-known Jewish commentator, Rashi, drives this point home:

For the life of the flesh of every creature, not only of animals brought as sacrifices, is dependent on its blood, and it is for this reason that I have placed it [on the altar] to make expiation for the life of man: let life come and expiate for life!

Many other passages in Leviticus and Numbers can be cited to support the fact that forgiveness of sins was accomplished via blood atonement. Just to give a few:

Leviticus 4:20

“...As he did with the bull of the sin offering, so shall he do with this. And the priest shall make

atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven.”

Leviticus 4:25,26

“Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar [...] So the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin, and he shall be forgiven.”

Leviticus 5:9,10

“And he shall sprinkle some of the blood of the sin offering on the side of the altar [...] And the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin that he has committed, and he shall be forgiven.”

As we can see, atonement was the means by which man received forgiveness for his sins, and the central part of atonement was sacrifice. Yom Kippur, the day of atonement, the highest holy day of the year, is centered around sacrifice in order to atone for the sins of God’s people. Many understand that the blood sacrifice is literally the entire point of the holy day!

Exodus 30:10

“Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year. With the blood of the sin offering of atonement he shall make atonement for it once in the year throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD (YHWH).

As we can see, sacrifice was a central piece of God’s revelation. To reject blood sacrifice is to reject a substantial chunk of the Torah. Semitic language scholar and theologian, Dr. Michael Brown, puts it well:

“If you will carefully study the Torah, the five books of Moses, you will see that there are more chapters devoted to the subject of sacrifices and offerings than to the subject of Sabbath observance, high holy days, idolatry, adultery, murder, and theft combined [...] Why so much detail, chapter after chapter, if they weren’t important to God?”

Dr. Michael Brown, Answering Your Toughest Questions, Episode 13

Indeed, blood sacrifice is so essential to the Torah that religious Jews pray daily that the Temple will be rebuilt in order that sacrifices can resume. It’s simply impossible to deny this.

Not only is the concept of substitutionary atonement clearly outlined in the sacrificial system of the Torah, but we get an even deeper revelation of God’s plan of redemption as we explore the atoning effect of the death of the righteous. In Numbers 35, we read about the one who commits manslaughter. According to Numbers 35:33, the land is polluted by the blood of the person killed, and the death of the manslayer—whether it was intentional or not—was required to make things right. But the passage says that the one who unintentionally kills someone is permitted to flee to a city of refuge where he must remain for the rest of his life...or until the death of the high priest:

Numbers 35:28

“For he must remain in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest, but after the death of the high priest the manslayer may return to the land of his possession”

As we can see, the death of the high priest would pay the price required and therefore serve as a substitute for the life of the manslayer so that he could be released. Again, life for life, an innocent party

paying the price so that the guilty party could be atoned for.

Perhaps the clearest example we have of the atoning affect of the death of the righteous is found in Isaiah 53. Isaiah speaks of a suffering servant. This servant is defined as righteous and innocent, and yet he takes the sins of Israel upon Himself:

Isaiah 53:5-6

[“But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord \(YHWH\) has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”](#)

Isaiah 53:11-12

[“Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”](#)

It’s beyond the scope of this teaching to prove the identity of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. If you want to learn how this is a clear prophecy fulfilled in Yeshua the Messiah, see our teachings, [“Why Yeshua is the Messiah,”](#) [“The Affliction of the Messiah”](#) and [“The 4th and 7th Day \(2 parts\).”](#)

The main point we’d like to stress right now is that the concept of substitutionary atonement—life for life—is most certainly a biblical concept, as we can see in Isaiah 53.

As we mentioned in the beginning of this teaching, perhaps the main objection to blood atonement is to argue that repentance alone is sufficient to obtain God’s forgiveness. But is that true? No, not at all.

For instance, repentance presupposes redemption, which is only by God’s work on the basis of atonement. Even the Hebrew word for repentance, *shuv*, means “*to return.*” But what do we return to? We return to the place of fellowship with God, which was afforded through atonement. Repentance is, of course, necessary, but by itself it is not sufficient to receive forgiveness and reconciliation with God. God’s justice demands life for life.

Another objection is that the prophets seem to repudiate sacrifices in several places. Passages like Isaiah 1:11 and Amos 5:22 are cited in which it is said that God does not delight in the blood of bulls and goats and that He’s sick of our sacrifices. But when we think through this objection, it quickly falls apart.

First, over and over again throughout the Torah, sacrifices and offerings are described as a “pleasing aroma” to God. Clearly God wasn’t against the idea of sacrifices themselves, otherwise they wouldn’t have been called a “pleasing aroma.”

Second, in a number of these same passages, Sabbaths and festivals are mentioned along with sacrifices. Are we to say that God is also against the Sabbath and biblical festivals that He commanded His people to observe? Of course not.

When we examine the context of these passages in the prophets, we see that what God was against was hypocrisy on the part of the people offering sacrifices. He was against insincere worship and persistent

sin on the part of the people. He wasn't against sacrifices.

After the anti-missionary is forced to concede that the Bible certainly teaches blood atonement, there are a few last ditch objections that he might resort to.

It is asserted that while blood is central to atonement according to the Scriptures, there are other means of atonement besides the shedding of blood. But the arguments in support of this assertion are greatly lacking.

For instance, let's look at one of the passages often cited in support of this belief:

Leviticus 5:11-13

“But if he cannot afford two turtledoves or two pigeons, then he shall bring as his offering for the sin that he has committed a tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering. He shall put on oil on it and shall put no frankincense on it, for it is a sin offering. And he shall bring it to the priest, and the priest shall take a handful of it as its memorial portion and burn this on the altar, on the Lord's food offerings; it is a sin offering. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin which he has committed in any one of these things, and he shall be forgiven. And the remainder shall be for the priest, as in the grain offering.”

From this passage it is argued that blood was not needed to make atonement in every case. If someone was too poor, they could simply bring flour for a sin offering. But something that is often overlooked—or deliberately ignored by the anti-missionaries—is the fact that the flour is placed “on the Lord's food offerings.” Thus, the poor person was able to participate in the atonement system by offering what he had, which was then joined with the blood sacrifices and burned on the altar. Nowhere does this passage indicate that the flour affects atonement apart from the shedding of blood.

Another passage often cited in support of the idea that atonement can be made apart from blood is in Exodus 30 regarding the Census Tax:

Exodus 30:14-16

“Everyone who is numbered in the census, from twenty years old and upward, shall give the Lord's offering. The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than the half shekel, when you give the Lord's offering to make atonement for your lives. You shall take the atonement money from the people of Israel and shall give it for the service of the tent of meeting, that it may bring the people of Israel to remembrance before the Lord, so as to make atonement for your lives.”

Is this passage teaching us that we can buy forgiveness? Because that's the implication if we read this as if it is referring to making atonement for sin, but obviously that would be absurd.

The Hebrew word translated “atonement” (*kippur*) in this passage does not always have the sense of covering sin. In fact, Exodus 30:14-16 doesn't speak of sin at all. Therefore, to use this passage to say that there are other means of atoning *for sin* is nothing other than an act of prooftexting—that is, taking an isolated, out-of-context quotation to make your case. This passage is speaking of soldiers paying the half shekel as a way to offer a ransom for their lives to express their relationship with God.

What about the city of Nineveh in the Book of Jonah? Someone might claim that God forgave the Ninevites on the basis of repentance without sacrifice. Thus, that would substantiate the objection that

blood sacrifice is unnecessary for forgiveness of sin.

Perhaps consider what Dr. Michael Brown says about this subject.

"Israel was called to be a priestly nation, and part of that calling included making intercession and atonement for the nations of the world. (Remember, this was an integral part of the priestly calling, therefore, as a priestly nation, Israel would make intercession and atonement for the world.) According to this concept, when a Gentile nation repented and turned to God, its repentance would be accepted in conjunction with the sacrifices and prayers offered up by the people of Israel. That's why the prophet Jonah called on the Ninevites to repent of their sins. Offering up sacrifices was Israel's job as a priestly nation. "Who says so?" you ask. Actually, the Talmudic rabbis say so. [In b. Sukkah 55b (see also Pesikta deRav Kahana, Buber edition, 193b–194a)] In such we read that the seventy bulls that were offered every year during the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot; see Num. 29:12–34) "were for the seventy nations," which Rashi explains to mean, "to make atonement for them, so that rain will fall throughout the world." In this context—and in light of the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E.—the Talmud records the words of Rabbi Yohannan: "Woe to the nations who destroyed without knowing what they were destroying. For when the Temple was standing, the altar made atonement for them. But now, who will make atonement for them?" Such a strong statement bears repeating: "When the Temple was standing, the altar made atonement for them." Blood sacrifices were indispensable."

"Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus: Vol. 2: Theological Objections, pg. 152-153"

This would demonstrate that nations still required blood sacrifices for atonement, it was simply the priests' responsibility in Israel to facilitate the blood sacrifices on the nations' behalf.

What about Isaiah 6:7? Does Isaiah 6:7 offer proof that blood atonement is not necessary?

Isaiah 6:7

And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."

How can this be reconciled?

Well, just look the previous verse, verse 6.

Isaiah 6:6

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar.

The burning coal came from the altar on which burnt offerings are performed. So this verse actually connects atonement right back to blood sacrifice. There is no mysterious source of atonement found here.

Over and over again, when the Scriptures speak of making atonement for sin, it is accomplished only by blood. God forgives us on the basis of the payment required for our sins—the life that was exchanged for our own; the death of the righteous that atones for our sin. Indeed, the Messiah's death redeems us and reconciles us to God, and the examples of blood atonement throughout the Torah serve as shadows of that reality. The question is, will you receive God's forgiveness that was provided for you by the blood of the lamb?

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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