

The Tabernacle



Purpose of the Tabernacle

Exodus 25:8-9: “Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.” (NIV)

Exodus 29:43-46: “There [at the entrance] I will meet with the Israelites, and the place will be consecrated¹ by my glory. So I will consecrate the Tent of Meeting and the altar ... Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God.” (NIV)

Exodus 40:34: *After the tabernacle was completed*, “the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.” (NIV)



Purpose of the Sacrificial System

The various offerings and sacrifices had various purposes. The sacrifices offered on the Day of Atonement were especially significant. The ritual is described in Leviticus 16, and summarized in verses 32–34.

Leviticus 16:32-34: “The ... high priest is to make atonement. He is to put on the sacred linen garments and make atonement for the Most Holy Place, for the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and for the priests and all the people of the community. This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites.” (NIV)

Hebrews 9:22: “The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” (NIV)

Hebrews 10:1-4: “The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near in worship. If it could, would they not stop being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” (NIV)

Hebrews 9:11-12: “When [Jesus] Christ came as high priest ... he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made... He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.” (NIV)



Hebrews 10:19-22: “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” (NIV)

¹ “consecrated” – set apart as holy; made sacred. In Exodus 25:8, “sanctuary” means a place that is consecrated.

Atonement

What is 'atonement?'



“Atonement”² brings reconciliation between God and sinful humans. Atonement requires the death of an acceptable substitute (one without defect) so that sinful man or woman can have life and fellowship with God.³

Why is 'atonement' needed? Why must an acceptable substitute die?

- Because all people are sinners.
 - 📖 “there is no one who does not sin” (*1 Kings 8:46, NIV*)
 - 📖 “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (*Romans 3:23, NIV*)
- The holy God cannot tolerate sin; sin separates us from God.
 - 📖 “Lord...you cannot tolerate wrong” (*Habakkuk 1:12-13, NIV*)
 - 📖 “your iniquities have separated you from God” (*Isaiah 59:2, NIV*)
- Death is the necessary result of sin.
 - 📖 “The soul who sins is the one who will die” (*Ezekiel 18:20, NIV*)
 - 📖 “the wages of sin is death” (*Romans 6:23, NIV*)
- God must punish sin; forgiveness requires the death of an acceptable substitute.
 - 📖 “God...does not leave the guilty unpunished” (*Exodus 34:6-7, NIV*)
 - 📖 “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (*Hebrews 9:22, NIV*)

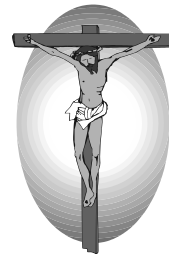
In the Old Covenant (Old Testament), particular animals could qualify as acceptable substitutes, but only partially and temporarily, for their purpose was to point toward the Ultimate Substitute.



- 📖 “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (*Hebrews 10:4, NIV*)
- 📖 “The law [including the sacrifices] is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves” (*Hebrews 10:1, NIV*)

Jesus Christ is the ultimate and final acceptable substitute. Only the Ultimate Sacrifice could really take away sins.

- † “John saw Jesus... and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” (*John 1:29, NIV*)
- † “For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (*1 Corinthians 5:7*)
- † “For you know that it was not with perishable things... that you were redeemed... but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (*1 Peter 1:18-19, NIV*)
- † “Jesus Christ...is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for our sins but also for the sins of the whole world.” (*1 John 2:1-2, NIV*)



² The exact meaning of the Hebrew word for “atonement” (*kippūr*) is disputed. However, it is reasonable to say that “atonement” is “at-one-ment” - “a making of one”. Atonement brings reconciliation (restored relationship) between God and man. This requires a “ransom” (*kōper*) - in particular, the “payment” of an acceptable substitute’s life.

³ While there are a few examples of atonement without the sacrifice of life (Leviticus 5:11; Numbers 16:46; 31:50), the general rule was that atonement had to be effected by the “shedding of blood” (Hebrews 9:22).

Discussion Questions

1. Read Exodus 25:8-9, 29:43-46, and 40:34. Based on these passages, what was the primary purpose of the tabernacle?⁴
2. The tabernacle was a portable structure, especially designed for Israel's movements. The tabernacle was later superseded by the temple, which was a permanent structure following the general pattern of the tabernacle. However, neither the tabernacle nor temple exists today. So where does God "dwell" with us today? Where can we meet Him?

📖 "The Word became flesh and 'made his dwelling' (*more literally* 'pitched his tabernacle') among us. We have beheld his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (*John 1:14, NIV; also see John 2:19-21; Revelation 21:22*).⁵



📖 "Don't you know that you yourselves [as the church] are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? (*1 Corinthians 3:16, NIV*). "Do you not know that your [own] body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" (*6:19, NIV*).⁶

3. Read Leviticus 16:32-34. The purpose of these sacrifices was to "make atonement" for all the sins of the Israelites. What does "making atonement" mean? What was necessary for making atonement? Why was this required? (See top half of page 2.)

4. Read Hebrews 10:1-4 and 9:11-12. Since *all* people are sinners (*Romans 3:10-18, 23*), atonement is necessary for all people. What was the ultimate purpose of the Old Testament sacrificial system?⁷ (Also see the bottom half of page 2.)



5. How can we "meet" God and experience His presence? Read Hebrews 10:19-22. How do we enter into the presence of God? What should our attitude be?⁸

Reflection/Application

- Do you need to trust in Jesus Christ so you can enter into a relationship with God? As a Christian, are you "meeting" with God with a heart of humility and dedication to Him?

⁴ The word "tabernacle" (*Heb. miškān*) means "dwelling place." The Bible says that God is spirit and is omnipresent (everywhere present), but He chooses to make His presence known in a special way at particular times and places. Since the garden of Eden was lost because of man's Fall, God established the tabernacle as a new meeting place.

⁵ The "Word" is Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate revelation of God. Colossians 1:19 says, "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him." So if we want to meet with God, we go to Jesus. If we go to Jesus, if we become united with him through faith, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and God dwells in us!

⁶ Of course, being God's "temple" should greatly affect the believer's attitude in the church and use of his/her body!

⁷ The Old Testament sacrificial system points to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Animal sacrifices could never take away sins (Hebrews 10:4). Jesus is the ultimate "high priest" who entered the heavenly Most Holy Place and offered Himself as the final, ultimate sacrifice (Hebrews 9:11-12). He is both "high priest" and the "lamb of God."

⁸ The way into the "Most Holy Place" (the presence of God) is through faith in Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate High Priest and sacrifice. This was symbolized when Christ died on the cross. At the moment of Christ's death, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). If we have received Christ, we can draw near to God with full assurance of faith, because we approach God on the basis of Christ's righteousness. He paid for our sins, so we are forgiven, and we are able to approach the holy God. As Christians, we need to approach God with a "sincere heart" – humble, repentant, consecrated (dedicated) to God. The picture of the tabernacle is helpful. Of course, the believer's full realization of God's presence is future, when we see Him "face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12) and "see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). This is God's promise for the believer, but it is future (Revelation 21:3).