

Atonement

What is 'atonement?'



“Atonement”¹ 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.²

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*)



¹ 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.

² 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).