

Atonement

What is “atonement?”



‘Atonement’¹ brings reconciliation (restored relationship) between God and sinful humans. Atonement generally requires the death of an acceptable substitute so that sinful people 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)
 - 📖 “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)
- God cannot tolerate sin; sin separates us from God.
 - 📖 “LORD...you cannot tolerate wrongdoing” (Habakkuk 1:12-13, NIV)
 - 📖 “your iniquities have separated you from your God” (Isaiah 59:2, NIV)
- Death is the necessary result of sin
 - 📖 “The one who sins is the one who will die” (Ezekiel 18:20, NIV)
 - 📖 “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23)
- God must punish sin; forgiveness requires the death of an acceptable substitute.
 - 📖 “God...does not leave the guilty unpunished” (Exodus 34:6-7)
 - 📖 “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22)

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 humans. 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*).