

Atonement and the Cross of Christ

Atonement Announced

Lesson #5 for November 1, 2008

Scriptures: Genesis 3:15; 22:1-18; Exodus 32; 34:6-10; Daniel 9; Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

1. This lesson focuses on the various ways in which the coming of the Messiah and His “substitutionary sacrifice” were predicted in the Old Testament.
2. The plan of salvation was announced to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15. Some aspects of the atonement were demonstrated through Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22:1-18. After the children of Israel were “frightened to death” by God’s revelation of Himself on Mount Sinai, (Exodus 20:1-20) the children of Israel begged Moses to be their intercessor, or mediator. In his patient and humble way, Moses even offered to have his own name removed from the books of heaven to save the children of Israel. (Exodus 32:30-32) When God responded to Moses’ offer, Moses asked to see God. (Exodus 33:18) God placed Moses in a special niche in the rock and “passed His glory” before him. (Exodus 34:5-8) Isaiah’s prophecy as recorded in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 speaks of the Suffering Servant. While Jewish commentators have applied this passage to the Jewish nation as a whole, Christians have always applied it to Jesus Christ. In his prophecy in Daniel 9, Daniel actually predicted the precise time when the Messiah—Jesus—was to come. All those are Messianic “prophecies.”
3. What do you think Adam and Eve said to each other about God’s words (Genesis 3:15) after God left their presence? Were they surprised to see the winged serpent, then without wings crawling in the dust? How soon did they realize that the serpent could be dangerous? Did they immediately associate the serpent with evil? In what sense has Satan crushed the “heel” of humanity? In what sense has man struck at, or crushed, the “head” of the serpent? Do you think Adam and Eve regarded the plan of salvation as some sort of “ransom”?
4. Down through the generations, God has focused man’s attention on Mount Moriah. There, Abraham offered Isaac. There also, Solomon built the temple. There, Jesus was condemned to die.
5. Down through the time of the Old Testament, numerous symbols taught lessons about the plan of salvation. What are we supposed to learn from the sacrificial system? From the activities of the priest and the priesthood? And what about the king after the kingdom was established?
6. When God first tried to establish a covenant (agreement) with His people, (Exodus 19:8; 24:3,7) in just a few weeks, it was apparent that they were not capable of abiding by their promises. From many stories in the Old Testament, we come to realize that being forgiven does not remove the consequences.
7. Abraham was God’s friend. (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23) How does God treat His friends? Abraham did not trust God to protect him and his wife when they traveled to other kingdoms. Twice he lied, saying that his wife was his sister. Later, he decided God needed some help in fulfilling His promise of innumerable descendants, so he took Hagar and had Ishmael. Every time Abraham stumbled, Satan toured the universe and with great fanfare asked: “Is this the kind of person God claims as His friend? What a laughingstock he is!”

Finally, when Abraham was about 120 years old, he was asked to sacrifice the pride and joy of his heart—his son, Isaac. Was that a fair test? Remember that if Isaac were to die, all of God's promises to Abraham would apparently be null and void because they were to be fulfilled through Isaac! So Abraham was not just potentially losing a son! Should Abraham have told Sarah that he was going to sacrifice Isaac before he took Isaac and left home? Did God know in advance what Abraham was going to do? Compare the book of Job. God announced that Job was a righteous and perfect man before the story of the book began. What lessons should we learn from the experience of Abraham on Mount Moriah? Ultimately, God provided a "substitute." Did Abraham really need that substitute? Couldn't he have brought a lamb from home? Was "substitutionary atonement" the main lesson to be learned from that experience? (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 154,155)

The sacrifice required of Abraham was not alone for his own good, nor solely for the benefit of succeeding generations; but it was also for the instruction of the sinless intelligences of heaven and of other worlds. **The field of the controversy between Christ and Satan—the field on which the plan of redemption is wrought out—is the lesson book of the universe.** Because Abraham had [155] shown a lack of faith in God's promises, Satan had accused him before the angels and before God of having failed to comply with the conditions of the covenant, and as unworthy of its blessings. **God desired to prove the loyalty of His servant before all heaven, to demonstrate that nothing less than perfect obedience can be accepted, and to open more fully before them the plan of salvation.**

Heavenly beings were witnesses of the scene as the faith of Abraham and the submission of Isaac were tested. The trial was far more severe than that which had been brought upon Adam. Compliance with the prohibition laid upon our first parents involved no suffering, but the command to Abraham demanded the most agonizing sacrifice. **All heaven beheld with wonder and admiration Abraham's unfaltering obedience. All heaven applauded his fidelity. Satan's accusations were shown to be false. God declared to His servant, "Now I know that thou fearest God [notwithstanding Satan's charges], seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me." God's covenant, confirmed to Abraham by an oath before the intelligences of other worlds, testified that obedience will be rewarded.**

It had been difficult even for the angels to grasp the mystery of redemption—to comprehend that the Commander of heaven, the Son of God, must die for guilty man. When the command was given to Abraham to offer up his son, the interest of all heavenly beings was enlisted. With intense earnestness they watched each step in the fulfillment of this command. When to Isaac's question, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham made answer, "God will provide Himself a lamb;" and when the father's hand was stayed as he was about to slay his son, and the ram which God had provided was offered in the place of Isaac—then light was shed upon the mystery of redemption, and even the angels understood more clearly the wonderful provision that God had made for man's salvation. 1 Peter 1:12. {PP 154,155}

8. If you had been one of the angels watching Abraham, Isaac, and God on Mount Moriah, what would you have thought was the most important thing that happened? Was it that God provided an unexpected “substitute sacrifice”? Was it that the young Isaac accepted his father’s explanation and was ready to die? Was it that Abraham finally had reached the place where he was willing to give up what appeared to be his last hope of being the “father of the faithful” in order to explicitly obey God’s command? Or would it have been something else?
9. **If you had been Abraham, what would you have said was the main “growing point” in that whole experience? Was it that God told you not to bring a lamb because your son would be the sacrifice, and then that God offered a substitute? Or was it the three days and nights of continual communion with God—struggling to answer the question, “Why God would ask for the sacrifice of Isaac?” (PP 151) During those three days, Abraham decided that on the basis of God’s previous promises that God would either raise Isaac from the dead or God would provide a substitute. (Hebrews 11:19; 1 SP 100,101; PP 151,152) Which of those two aspects of the experience do you think had the largest impact upon Abraham?**

Could we experience something like what Abraham suffered in this story? Could we provide God with a victory in the great controversy? When God looks down at the end of time and points out His friends (the 144,000) and the universe sees what Satan is putting them through and that they are standing faithful and true, the angels will burst out with hallelujahs as they accompany Jesus to this earth! (Revelation 14:1-5; 19; 20:4-6) Abraham had direct communion with God and with angels who came to visit him. (Remember that Abraham had no Bible, no pastor, and no prophet to guide him.) Some would ask, “Why don’t God or some of His angels come and visit us today and give us guidance?” The answer must surely be that if God did that, Satan would immediately demand equal time and our condition would be even worse that it is now!

10. Read Exodus 32:7-10. Remember that God already knew that He was about to take Moses to heaven almost immediately after his death. In light of God’s future plans for Moses, what do you think was the purpose for that exchange? Do you think God was in doubt about what the response of Moses would be? Would God have offered to kill all the Israelites if He really thought Moses would agree? Did the future of the entire nation of Israel actually hang on the response of Moses at that time? God knew exactly what Moses was going to do and say, but the universe needed to see it! The issue in this instance, as is frequently the case, was the great controversy.
11. There is a major flaw in the common thinking about substitutionary sacrifices and the law. When an individual or even a corporation violates a civil law code and a judgment is brought against them, their insurance company may cover the damages. For example, if a person accidentally causes damage to another person’s property by the way he drives, the insurance company will pay for the damages. But, if that same individual commits a crime, for example, he murders someone with a shotgun, no payment by an insurance company would pay for his crime. **There is a clear distinction between the way we deal with breaking civil laws and breaking criminal laws. So, in terms of substitutionary atonement in Scripture or theology, we need to ask the question: Is breaking one of the commandments or sinning against God simply a violation of some civil code, or is it a criminal act? In the Old Testament**

in the books of Exodus and Leviticus, breaking every single one of the Ten Commandments is accompanied by a death penalty except the tenth (because one cannot prove in court that someone is being covetous)! (Numbers 15:32-36; www.theox.org > Teacher's Guides > The Law > Leviticus > Item #7) That would suggest that God regards sin as a criminal offense. Thus, to suggest that a substitute could die in our place is to suggest that sin is not so serious! Moses could not offer his life in the place of the children of Israel because that would make no real difference in their sinful lives. It was not just a matter that Moses' life was not of sufficient value to die in their place or pay the "penalty"! What is God supposed to do with someone who is determined to violate His law? Contrast the response of David when his sin was pointed out! (2 Samuel 12:1-15)

12. So, how was the issue of the sin of the children of Israel finally dealt with? (Exodus 34:6-10) The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* (for Tuesday, October 28) suggests:

The Lord revealed Himself to Moses as a forgiving God. This forgiveness is all-inclusive: "forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" (vs. 7, *NIV*). The Hebrew word translated "forgiving" literally means "bearing." The way God deals with our sin is by removing it from us and bearing it Himself. Moses could not do that; God had already decided that He would do it through His Servant. What Moses and the children of Israel needed was provided by God.

13. Is it possible to remove sins from one person and place them on another person or on a sacrificial animal? Christians have been counting on that for hundreds of years! What evidence could you provide for your answer? What would actually happen in such a transaction? Does the "sin-bearer" become guilty? Or is just the blame that is transferred? Does the offering of a sacrifice—even the offering of Christ Himself—change God's mind? (Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Malachi 3:6) Is that what needs to happen? Or does God need to change our way of thinking? How does God deal with our sins or our rebellion?

The story is told of a father whose teenage son was showing some signs of rebellion. The father went to the hardware store and bought a hammer, a large nail, and a 2X4 (a piece of lumber). He asked his son to take the hammer and pound the nail into the board. This, the boy did quickly. Then the father asked him to remove the nail; which he also did quickly. Then the father asked him to remove the hole in the board! And that demonstrates the trouble with sin. Even if it is "removed," it leaves a scar. Some sinners have become almost total scar tissue! The Holy Spirit can heal us, but it takes time and commitment for that to happen.

14. Is it primarily forgiveness that sinners need? Or, is it healing? Jesus forgave the men who were pounding nails into His hands! (Luke 23:34) And they had not even asked for it! God is forgiveness personified!

To restore in man the image of his Maker, to bring him back [16] to the perfection in which he was created, to promote the development of body, mind, and soul, that the divine purpose in his creation might be realized—this was to be the work of redemption. This is the object of education, the great object of life.
{*Education* 15,16}

15. The Greek word for "salvation" also means "healing." God wants to heal everyone. But, what does He do with those who refuse His healing? Does He condemn them? Does He torture

them forever? Does He destroy them? Or, is sin deadly all by itself so that all He does is to stand back and “let them go” and they cease to exist?

16. Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12. As we have noted before, the Jews regard this passage as referring to the Jewish nation as a whole. Christians clearly believe that it refers to Jesus Christ. Our *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* says, “The problem of sin was so serious [Could we say “deadly”?] that only the servant of the Lord could solve it.” This passage suggests that, at first, people looked on Jesus and were not even attracted to Him. They thought he was “stricken by God, smitten by him” (Isaiah 53:4, *NIV*) or “all the while we thought that his suffering was punishment sent by God.” (*GNB*)
17. Let us suppose that a father owns a farm that is infested with dangerous rodents. After consulting the experts, he determines that the best way to rid his farm of those rodents is by the use of poison. So, he purchases some poison and keeps it high up on a shelf in his garage. That same farmer has a young son who is very curious. So he takes him to the garage and says to the son, “Don’t ever touch that container of poison high up on the shelf.” A few weeks later he hears a crash in the garage, and he rushes out and sees that his son has been playing with the poison and has fallen onto the floor, apparently dying. Would it help for the father to grab a handful of poison and say, “Don’t worry! I’ll take the poison in your place”? As a result, there would be two dead people! So, we are left with this major dilemma: Is sin deadly? Or is it not? If sin itself is deadly, we need to get away from it, and we need to be healed. Substitution is not the final answer.

Jesus came and lived and died to give us the opportunity to choose. We can follow His example and do our best to live the kind of life that He lived, or we will die the death that He died. His death gives us the opportunity to choose life.

18. Read Daniel 9:7-11, 16-19, 24-27. Daniel was praying in Babylon. He was aware of the 70-year prophecy given by Jeremiah. And he realized that the prophecy was nearing completion. But he also realized that God’s people were far from giving up their sins. So, Daniel began to pray fervently to God for a solution. He pointed out to God that God’s reputation was at stake. God’s name was being “dragged in the dirt” because His city, Jerusalem, was in ruins. God’s people had managed to give God a “black eye.” And so, Daniel pleaded, “¹⁷Restore your Temple, which has been destroyed; restore it so that everyone will know that you are God. ¹⁸Listen to us, O God; look at us, and see the trouble we are in and the suffering of the city that bears your name.” (Daniel 9:17, 18, *GNB*) God responded by answering his questions. He promised that the answer would come in 490 years—during the final week of the 70-week prophecy. God knew not only how He was going to solve the sin problem but when!
19. Does God also know when the second coming will take place? What is He waiting for? Could we be part of the reason for the delay?

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