

53. H. E. Guillebaud (*Why the Cross?* 2nd ed. [London: InterVarsity Fellowship, 1946], 145) explicitly repudiates the phrase "God punished Christ." Similarly, Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 150–51. There is a difference between saying that God in his Son, Jesus Christ, bore the penalty of human sin and saying that God punished him.

54. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2:16:11, trans. H. Beveridge (London: J. Clarke, 1953), 1.444.

55. For a fuller treatment of the issues discussed in this chapter, see I. H. Marshall, *Aspects of the Atonement: Cross and Resurrection in the Reconciling of God and Humanity* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007).

## chapter four

# atonement in the old testament

christopher j. h. wright

## Introduction

This essay is a broad reflection on how the Old Testament portrays what has gone wrong in human life and what it means for people and situations to be "put right". Atonement language is one part of this "putting right", but not the most prominent over all sections of the canonical traditions. Furthermore, this essay will cover a broad sweep of material in different parts of the Old Testament canon, and this necessarily means that it will lack exegetical or reflective depth. My hope, however, in offering this sketch is that it will motivate readers to explore specific themes or textual fields in greater depth for themselves.

## The Problem

How does the Old Testament describe the human predicament? We need more than a simple word study on the various Hebrew terms for sin (though that is itself a significant and enlightening study). Broadly, the Old Testament portrays our predicament in terms of the following:

1. *A relationship that has been broken: the relational aspect.* The first account of trouble between God and humanity is described in relational terms. In the narratives of Genesis 2–3, it is the relationship between the man, the woman and God that is questioned and then spoiled. Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, relational metaphors for sin and its effects include adultery and other strong pictures of betrayal and ingratitude within a relationship that was meant to be built on love, trust, loyalty and commitment.

2. *The disturbance of shalom: the social aspect.* The narratives of Genesis 4–11 describe inter-human disorder at every level: envy, violence, murder, corruption, vengeance, arrogance. The rest of the Old Testament adds to this list all the other social sins of greed, injustice, socio-economic oppression, abuse of the poor, abuse of women and so on. In relation to these, one could add the ecological dimension, since our relationship with the earth is spoiled and the *shalom* that we should enjoy in our created environment is disturbed. The earth itself suffers because of human sin.

3. *Rebellion against authority: the covenantal aspect.* This aspect comes to prominence in relation to Israel. The first great apostasy of Israel after the exodus resulted in broken tablets of the law (Exodus 32–34). Sin among the redeemed people of God is portrayed, especially in the prophets, as disloyalty to the covenant Lord. This constitutes both apostasy and idolatry (cf. Jer. 2:13).

4. *Guilt that necessitates punishment: the legal aspect.* As early as Deuteronomy 32, the metaphor of the law court is used to portray the sin of Israel. Yahweh is the judge of Israel, the defendant. Forensic metaphors are used. This way of describing sin is also common in the prophets, using the language of offence, transgression, guilt and retributive justice.

5. *Uncleanness and pollution: the ritual aspect.* Here, sin is portrayed as dirt and defilement and includes “abomination” language. This more ritual way of viewing the effects of sin is not confined to the priestly materials of Leviticus, however. Ezekiel, who came from a priestly family, found many ways to communicate the disgusting, filthy nature of sin (e.g., Ezek. 4:12, 36:16–17). Using ritual metaphors, of course, did not mean he viewed sin as merely ritual. Ezekiel uses priestly language, but the evils he refers to are a comprehensive and devastating description of personal and social wickedness (cf. ch. 22).

6. *Shame and disgrace on oneself and/or on God: the emotional aspect.* The initial reaction to sin in the garden of Eden was the desire to hide and be covered. Sin produces shame in the presence of others and God. When sin advances, even the shame response is squashed, as Jeremiah observed when he spoke about people who could no longer blush (Jer. 6:15). Sin not only brings shame and disgrace on oneself; when it takes root and bears fruit among God’s people, it results in shame and disgrace on God. Ezekiel called this the profaning of God’s name among the nations (Ezek. 36:16ff.).

7. *An accumulating burden: the historical aspect.* The narratives of the Old Testament, from Genesis 4 onwards, show the accumulating effects of sin. Each generation builds on the sinful proclivities of the previous one. The sin of the

Canaanites, for example, is recognized in Genesis 15:16 as not yet having reached its full extent. Several generations later, it is cited as justifying the judgment of God by the agency of the Israelites (Deut. 9:4–6; Lev. 18:24–28). The book of Judges embodies this message, and the interpretation of the exile in the Deuteronomistic history is a vivid portrayal of the accumulating historical weight of sin.

8. *Death: the final aspect.* The threat for disobedience in Eden was death, and indeed death invades human life soon after. But death also invades life long before we physically die, through the spoiling effects of disease, broken relationships, suffering, oppression and so on. The language of life and death, blessing and curse, destruction and blotting out is the constant accompaniment of the threats and the promises of the covenant relationship (cf. Deuteronomy passim, but especially ch. 30). Not surprisingly, Ezekiel, who graphically portrayed the death of exile, saw that the only solution lay in the resurrecting power of the Spirit of Yahweh.

Sin, then, in its broad Old Testament perspective, has a devastatingly wide range of effects. It breaks our relationship with God, one another and the earth; it disturbs our peace; it makes us rebels against God’s authority; it makes us guilty in God’s court; it makes us dirty in God’s presence; it brings shame on ourselves and others; it blights us from the past and already poisons the future; it ultimately leads us to destruction and death.

## The Patriarchs

How are things “put right” in Genesis? After the fall, the rest of Genesis shows a variety of ways in which God and human beings are involved in putting things right – whether in an immediate crisis or in longer-term hope and expectation. Some of these are as follows:

1. *By divine grace (Gen. 8:21).* The flood narrative begins and ends with God’s grace. Noah “found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Gen. 6:8). The story then proceeds through divine rescue, covenant promise and human responsive sacrifice. Initially, Noah does nothing but obey God’s instructions. The saving work is entirely of God. The later act of sacrifice, however, is integrally connected to averting God’s wrath (the “soothing aroma” that is characteristic of the effects of sacrifice in Leviticus) and the covenantal promise for the future that embraces all life on earth (8:20–22).

2. *By divine promise of blessing (Gen. 12:1–3).* In the context of the nations’ rebellious arrogance in Genesis 10 and 11, the promise of God to bless all the nations through Abraham and his descendants is very good

news indeed. Putting things right for humanity will depend on God's will to bless, and in this text, God's blessing is anticipated to be individual, familial, national and global.

3. *By faith (Gen. 15:6)*. God's promise must be met by human faith, which is exactly Abraham's response. The text explicitly declares that God counts this as righteousness for him. This verse stands as a key principle in later biblical theology of justification by grace through faith.

4. *By doing righteousness and justice (Gen. 18:19)*. The ethical dimension of the required human response is here articulated through divine soliloquy about the purpose of God himself. God reminds himself that his long-term goal is to bring about what he had promised Abraham; namely, the blessing of all nations. To that end, he had chosen Abraham. And to that end, Abraham and his household after him were to be a community that would "keep the way of the LORD" by "doing righteousness and justice".

5. *By prayer (Gen. 18; 20:17)*. Abraham's remarkable intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah did not achieve the salvation of the cities. But God's rescue of Lot and his family is explicitly put down to God's remembering Abraham (Gen. 19:29). The reader is also taught to believe, with Abraham, that any putting right of things on earth depends on the twin foundational assumptions that Yahweh is "Judge of all the earth" and that he will always "do justice" (Gen. 18:25). Though counted righteous by God for his faith, Abraham was still a sinner, and several narratives feature his fallenness. But even as such, he proves the power of prayer in putting things right for a pagan king whom he had deceived (Gen. 20:17).

6. *By obedience (Gen. 22; 26:4-5)*. The culmination of the Abraham narratives comes in the profound story of the binding of Isaac. This test of obedience climaxes in the strongest and fullest affirmation by God of his promise to Abraham and his intention to bless the nations through him. It now takes the form of an oath on God's own self. And it explicitly links the promise to the proven obedience of Abraham, referring to this at the beginning and end of the promise (Gen. 22:15-18). The final phrase is unequivocal: "through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me." So as we put together the whole narrative of Abraham, it affirms the integral nature of grace and promise, faith and obedience. The concluding phrase cannot be construed as making God's promise or Abraham's salvation conditional on works. The point is rather that God sovereignly builds Abraham's obedience, as demonstrating the reality of his faith, into the outworking of his own gracious promise to bless humanity.

Apart from Genesis 8:21, although the patriarchs build altars, there is no clear picture of *sacrificial* atonement as a response to sin.

## The Passover

In Israel's theology, the Passover was a blood rite initially connected with the exodus. Our theological interpretation of it must be closely connected to the exodus, which stands as the Old Testament model *par excellence* of Yahweh's acting in redemption to put things right. At least three key elements are involved in Passover ritual and theology.<sup>1</sup>

① *Protection from wrath and destruction*. Though the vocabulary of atonement is not present, the sacrifice of a lamb is the central element. The blood ritual had an apotropaic force in protecting the Hebrew families from the wrath of the destroyer of the firstborn throughout the land. The effect of blood sacrifice in the averting of judgment is clear.

② *Liberation from oppression*. Every celebration of the Passover focuses on the deliverance of the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt. This happened according to God's promise and entirely by God's action. The whole focus is on the work of God in redemption. But because this was entirely an act of God, it required an appropriate human response, as was built into the whole covenantal nature of the relationship. One dimension of this follows immediately:

③ *Consecration to Yahweh*. Those whom God had redeemed from death were to regard themselves as now wholly consecrated to him. In the exodus, Yahweh was not so much liberating slaves from Pharaoh as reclaiming his own worshipers. The sacrifice of all firstborn animals and the redemption of firstborn sons was explicitly to remind the Israelites that every future generation belonged to Yahweh in perpetuity (Exod. 13:1-16). This is then carried forward into the demand that Israel should live in practical ethical holiness. So the Passover speaks not only of Yahweh's redemptive commitment to Israel, as demonstrated in history, but also of Israel's ethical commitment to Yahweh, to be demonstrated in life (cf. Exod. 19:6). The same dynamic is reflected in the combination of Passover and holiness imagery in 1 Peter 1-2, and in Paul's ethical use of the Passover tradition in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8.

## The Great Apostasy

Exodus 32-34 records the great apostasy of the golden calf during Moses' absence on Mount Sinai. The situation was exceedingly serious, since God

threatened immediate destruction of the whole people (Exod. 32:9–10). Moses recalls the event with horror, even forty years later, saying that God had been “angry enough to destroy you” (Deut. 9:18–19, in a context that anticipated God’s destruction of the nations in Canaan). How could such an awful breach in the covenant relationship be put right? The narrative highlights several factors.

① *Intercessory prayer.* The passionate prayer of Moses (Exod. 32:11–14, recalled in Deut. 9:25–29) appealed to three things:

- *God’s covenant promise to Abraham.* God could not destroy Israel without breaking that promise and thereby acting inconsistently with his own character and being.
- *God’s Sinai covenant with Israel.* This is seen in the reminder that Israel is “your people whom you brought up from Egypt”.
- *God’s name and reputation among the surrounding nations.* What would they think of a God who rescues his people only to destroy them a few months later?

The implication of this prayer is that putting things right depends entirely on God’s character, promises and name. This dynamic is reflected in the prophets when God declares that his future saving acts will be “for my own sake” (e.g., Isa. 43:25; Ezek. 36:16–32).

② *Punishment.* The people were spared from immediate destruction, but they did not go unpunished. This is seen in the slaughter of some by the Levites, the outbreak of plague, and the grinding of the golden idol to be drunk by the people (though the Deuteronomic recollection adds the detail that it was flushed away in a stream; very likely both elements were involved – one punitive, the other purgative).

③ *Atonement.* Interestingly, on this occasion, the vocabulary of atonement is used. Thus, in Exodus 32:30, Moses says to the people, “You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement [*kipper*] for your sin.” While the predominant use of the *kipper* language comes in the context of the blood sacrifices in Leviticus, it is striking that Moses does *not* offer any sacrifice in seeking to avert God’s threatened judgment, except for the remarkable self-offering that he proposes in 32:32. Rather he turns to prayer, and that indeed is atoningly effective. Perhaps there is some anticipation here of Psalm 51:16–17, that actually no sacrifice that Moses could offer could possibly have been adequate or appropriate.

The only hope lay in a “broken and contrite heart” and in the character and promises of God.

④ *The character of Yahweh.* In the context of God’s withdrawal of the threat of judgment, restored commitment to go with the people, and a renewed covenant, Moses asks to know Yahweh even more closely. Yahweh’s response takes the form of a revelation of his own name that becomes a key text throughout the rest of the Old Testament: “And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation’” (Exod. 34:6–7). The paradox inherent in this self-description, that Yahweh is characterized by compassion, grace, love and faithfulness, and yet does not let sin go unpunished, is only finally resolved on the cross.

## The Priests and the Levitical System

The language and concept of atonement abound in Leviticus, and we need to consider two main aspects of it: the connection with the sacrifices, and the Day of Atonement.

### The Sacrifices

#### The Meaning of *Kipper*

There has been a prolonged debate over the best translation for the root *kpr* in its common piel form, *kipper*.<sup>2</sup> Apart from a much less likely meaning, derived from an Arabic cognate, “to cover over”, there are two main candidates.

1. *To ransom.* In Exodus 30:11–16, money is taken as “atonement” or “ransom” for the lives of Israelites counted in the census. And in Numbers 35:29–34, no ransom is allowed in exchange for the life of a convicted murderer. This also seems to be the likely meaning in Leviticus 17:11, where the blood of an animal is said to be its *nephesh*, or “life”, which “God has given to make atonement” – that is, as a ransom, or exchange, for the one who sacrifices it.

The exact same Hebrew form is used in Exodus 30:16 and Leviticus 17:11 – “to *kipper* for your lives”. That is, the money

(Exodus 30) or the animal blood (Leviticus 17) is an exchange, an equivalence, that provides a substitute for the life of the Israelite (in a census or as a sacrificing worshiper).

2. *To wipe clean* (with an Akkadian cognate). In Jeremiah 18:23, *kipper* is parallel to "blot out" (when Jeremiah prays that God will *not* do this with the sins of his persecutors). And this seems to be the commonest sense in Leviticus, where the word is frequently used in the rituals of purging or cleansing though the manipulation of the blood of sacrifice.

Perhaps either meaning is possible, depending on the context, though probably the second is commonest. Sacrificial blood is the instrument of cleansing, which thus effects what is necessary for sin to be forgiven and wrath averted.

### "Soothing Aroma"

Gordon Wenham argues cogently that "soothing aroma" is a highly significant phrase which indicates that sacrifice effects a change in God's attitude towards the worshiper. That is to say, this metaphor expresses a propitiatory, as well as an expiatory, function. Yes, sacrifice expiates; it cleanses away the sins and offences for which it is offered. But it does so precisely in order to avert the wrath that those sins and offences would otherwise inevitably incur. Two text groups make this meaning clear.

1. *Genesis 8:21*: this is the first use of the phrase in the Hebrew Bible, and it refers to Noah's burnt offering. Wenham notes that the soothing aroma of that sacrifice did not, of course, prevent the flood, nor was it the instrument of saving Noah. However, it did precipitate *God's* benevolent and covenantal response that he would "never again destroy" the earth. There is a strong contrast with *Genesis 6:5*, where the same description of endemic human sin is found. The change between God's words and acts in 6:5 and in 8:21 is integrally connected to Noah's sacrifice as a "soothing aroma" and God's response to it.
2. *Leviticus 1:9; 2:2; 3:5; 4:31*: with reference to the burnt part of the respective sacrifices that are prescribed in these chapters. In all cases, the phrase "a soothing aroma" is closely linked to the declaration of *atonement* (i.e., the effect on the sin, offence, or

uncleanness: it has been wiped away) and to the declaration of *forgiveness* (i.e., the effect on the sinner-worshiper).

All this matches the theology of *Leviticus 17:11*. What happens in sacrifice is God-given ("I have given it to you"), but it is also God-affecting. Putting things right, then, includes both a God-orientated and a human-orientated dimension. Sacrifice both cleanses the worshiper and "soothes" the wrath of God. But inasmuch as it all comes from God in the first place, it retains its character as grace and cannot be construed as any kind of bargain, negotiation or *do ut des* relationship.

### Maintaining or Restoring Social Order

Philip Jensen observes that sacrifice can function to initiate a fresh state of affairs that is desirable (e.g., the ordination of priests) or to correct a state of affairs that has degenerated (e.g., through pollution, sin, etc.). Also, it can function to restore and strengthen relationships – not only vertically with God but also horizontally within families and the community (e.g., the fellowship offerings).<sup>3</sup> So, in light of our observations about the human predicament, including the disturbance of *shalom*, we need to see Old Testament language of atonement and sacrifice in much more than individual terms. It had social and even cosmic significance. It was the means of preventing the slide into chaos and disorder, of sustaining the boundaries and regularities of an ordered world. Something of this deeper meaning also pervades what Paul has to say about the cosmic significance of the "blood of the cross" (e.g., *Col. 1:20*).

### Life and Death

Sacrifice was not just about maintaining or restoring order; it was about resisting death and sustaining life. Wenham states, "Sin and uncleanness lead a person from the realm of life into the realm of death. Sacrifice stops this process, indeed reverses it. It gives life to those doomed to die."<sup>4</sup> God is the source of all life, so whatever was brought to him must be as perfect in its earthly life as possible, and all that was associated with death (corpses, discharges of the body, etc.) must be cleansed away. Sin and uncleanness were to be treated seriously, and the sacrifices inculcated this attitude.

### Special Arrangements for the Poor

Finally, however, it is worth noting the significance of *Leviticus 5:7–13*, where further regulations are made, in relation to the sin offering, for those

who could not afford the standard prescription of a lamb. They could bring two turtle doves instead. And if they could not afford even that, a few cups of flour would suffice. *And even this would still count as a sin offering!* Its atoning efficacy would be the same; the same words of atonement and forgiveness would be declared to the worshiper. Nothing could have made it clearer that the forgiveness of sin was entirely dependent on God and his grace – not on the size of the sacrifice, and not necessarily even on the presence of sacrificial blood, and least of all on the social or economic status of the worshiper. A poor Israelite who knew that he could come before God with nothing more than a few handfuls of flour, a contrite heart, and the spirit of true sacrificial confession, and then walk away with the words of forgiveness ringing in his ears was learning something very profound about the nature of Yahweh God and the meaning of divine grace.

### The Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement was an annual putting things right for the whole community in a highly symbolic way. The role of atoning blood in the four sacrifices was clearly to cleanse everything that was associated with God in the sanctuary, and at the same time to cleanse the people from the uncleanness of accumulated sins.

In Leviticus 16:11–22, we can see a double movement involving the two goats.

1. Spatially there is movement from the Holy of Holies in the sanctuary (where the blood of the sacrificed goat is taken) to the wilderness (where the live goat is driven off).
2. Spiritually there is movement from the holiest presence of God to its demonic opposite (“Azazel”).

Space has a quality as well as a quantity in the priestly writings, and the two goats eventually encompass the extreme reaches of significant space in the priestly worldview. The blood of one goat reaches to the heart of holy space, whereas the other is driven out to where major impurities have their proper place (cf. Num. 5:1–3).<sup>5</sup> Atonement [sc. on the Day of Atonement], states Derek Tidball, “reaches right to the heart of God and propels sin to the furthest part of the earth. Cleansing comes from an act of God in his dwelling-place and leads to the removal of the problem as far away as it is possible to conceive.”<sup>6</sup>

The effect of the complex ritual was not solely to atone for sin but was to restore harmony between God and Israel. The movement of the goats represents, or even effects, the reestablishment of the normative world order, thus allowing normal offerings to be resumed.<sup>7</sup>

All of the above speaks of a comprehensive response to sin and its effects. Putting things right in the Levitical system was far from narrowly individual or private. Rather, it was a system that tackled the effects of sin and uncleanness in every area of life, every dimension of space, and every relationship in the community. The overarching objective was to sustain or restore the normative pattern of healthy relationships, in personal, social and spiritual wholeness, cleanness and forgiveness.

### The Prophets

Space precludes a detailed account of each prophet’s characteristic “slant” on sin and its solution, but a few salient points may be mentioned.

1. *Sharp perception of sin.* Undoubtedly we owe to the great prophets of Israel a sharper, deeper and clearer perception of what sin is and does, a perception which complements the narrative portrayal in the historical books. The prophets expose both specific individual wickedness and general social ills. They put a spotlight on specific events and actions that breach covenant loyalty but also highlight endemic and structuralized injustice and oppression.

2. *Rejection of corrupt sacrificial ritual.* The prophets could not tolerate sacred rites in the context of social wrongs. There could be no putting things right with God by shallow cultic exuberance unless there were corresponding efforts to put things right horizontally within society. This is a fundamentally covenantal understanding of both relationships. The famous passages in which prophets vigorously reject the cultic activity of priests and worshipers should be seen not as hostility towards sacrifice and other rituals of Israel’s worship in and of themselves but rather as a rejection of the worship of *these people*, in their persistent wickedness.<sup>8</sup> Moral obedience is thus prioritized over cultic observance – a point fully endorsed by Jesus himself.

3. *The necessity of repentance.* Jeremiah, perhaps more than any, called for the people to make a radical “turn” away from sin and back towards God. This is seen in his repeated use of the verb *sub* in its multiple forms. (See especially Jeremiah 3; 4; 7; etc.). Joel 2:12–17 provides a powerful litany on what true repentance means, while Ezekiel’s appeals reach evangelistic levels in Ezekiel 18:30–32 and 33:10–11.

4. *Covenant restoration.* Putting things right for the prophets meant primarily the restoration of the broken covenant. For this, various metaphors were employed, such as a restored marriage (Hosea; Isaiah 50; 54) or restored relationship between parent and child (Jer. 31:9, 20). Ultimately, only a fully renewed covenant relationship would suffice, in which the original covenant realities would be fully guaranteed and experienced – wholehearted obedience, knowledge of God, assured relationship, and complete forgiveness (Jer. 31:33–34).

5. *Dependence on grace.* Ezekiel, who has the most severe portrayals of sin among all the prophets, also achieves the greatest insight into the miraculous grace of God. Any hope for Israel in exile flows only from God's will that they should live, not from any merit or potential of their own. His grace can purge the past, if they will acknowledge their guilt and turn from their wickedness (Ezek. 18:30–32; 33:10–11). His grace, meeting with practical repentance, can effect cleansing, regeneration, a new heart and spirit, and strength for obedience (Ezek. 36:24–28). But in the end, nothing short of resurrection, through the life-giving power of God's Spirit, will suffice (Ezekiel 37).

6. *"For the sake of my name".* Another emphasis of Ezekiel is that when God puts things right for Israel, it will have global effects. For not only Israel but all the nations will come to know the living God for who he truly is. "Then you [or they] will know that I am the LORD" is virtually Ezekiel's signature tune; the phrase occurs about eighty times in his book. It draws our attention to an essentially missional dimension in this whole matter. God's acts of grace and forgiveness have a revelatory purpose. God wills to be known to the nations not merely as the judge before whom they stand (or flee) but as the saviour to whom they can and must turn for salvation (cf. Isa. 45:22).

7. *"By my righteous servant".* In Isaiah 40–55, Yahweh alone is the God who puts things right, for "there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Saviour" (Isa. 45:21) and "in the LORD alone are righteousness and strength" (Isa. 45:24). Salvation and forgiveness come from the sheer grace of Yahweh and his choice to forgive and blot out transgressions (Isa. 43:25). But the anticipated vehicle or agent of this saving work of God will be the Servant of the LORD. His vicarious suffering and death will "bear" the iniquities of those who, having thought he was suffering under the judgment of God for his own sin, now realize that it was actually *our* sorrows, transgressions, iniquities and sins that were laid upon him. The language of sacrificial substitution and of vicarious sin-bearing runs through Isaiah 53 unmistakably.

## The Psalms

In the book of Psalms, we see Israel at worship. It is here that we will find how Israelites in the presence of God thought about sin and about how things could be put right. The following points stand out.<sup>9</sup>

1. There is a remarkable paradox that, on the one hand, we find a deeply penitential awareness of sin in several psalms, yet, on the other hand, an almost total absence of reference to atoning sacrifice. The sin offering is mentioned once, but even then only to reject it (Psalm 40)!
2. Sacrifices of various sorts are frequently mentioned, but broadly in contexts of thanksgiving, praise or joy in the communion of worship. The sacrifices normally referenced in Psalms are those that express what God has already done for the worshiper or in anticipation of what God is being asked to do – not in relation to confession of sin or guilt.
3. In fact, on several occasions sacrifice is decisively "relativized" or put in the context of other perspectives. Thus Psalms 40:6 and 51:16 state that obedience and contrition, not sacrifices, are what God desires. And Psalm 50:8–16 argues with intentional irony that while God is happy to receive the sacrifices of his people, the fact is that we cannot give him anything that does not already belong to him. God certainly needs no feeding at our hands, and we cannot influence him to overlook covenant wickedness by such means.
4. Accordingly, putting things right is once more seen as entirely a matter of God's character and grace. Psalmists frequently plead for forgiveness, cleansing, pardon, protection, renewal of life and so on. But this is done entirely on the basis of God's mercy, compassion, righteousness or promise. It is never the expected "product" or "benefit" of a sacrifice that has been made or promised. We may assume that the Israelites who wrote and sang these psalms were devout men and women who were in fact bringing their sacrifices to the sanctuary, in cultic as well as ethical obedience. But they never appeal to them as grounds for God's favour; rather they appeal only to the character and word of God himself. The book of Psalms does not deny Leviticus but, while

assuming it, points beyond it to the known mercy and grace of God, and indeed ultimately anticipates Hebrews in recognizing the inadequacy of all animal sacrifice in contrast to the only and all-sufficient adequacy of the self-sacrifice of Christ.

## For Further Reading

- ↗ Averbeck, Richard. "קָדַשׁ." In *NIDOTTE*, Vol. 2., 689–710.  
 Beckwith, Roger T., and Martin J. Selman, eds. *Sacrifice in the Bible*.  
 Carlisle: Paternoster; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995.  
 Jensen, Philip. *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the  
 World*. JSOTSup 106. Sheffield: Sheffield, 1992.  
 Tidball, Derek. *The Message of Leviticus*. Leicester: IVP, 2005.  
 Wenham, Gordon J. *The Book of Leviticus*. NICOT.

## Notes

1. See further, T. D. Alexander, "The Passover Sacrifice," in *Sacrifice in the Bible*, ed. Roger T. Beckwith and Martin J. Selman (Carlisle: Paternoster; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 1–24.
2. See the excellent discussion by Richard Averbeck in *NIDOTTE*, vol. 2, 689–710. *for Kipper*
3. Philip P. Jensen, "The Levitical Sacrificial System," in Beckwith and Selman, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 32.
4. Gordon J. Wenham, "The Theology of Old Testament Sacrifice," in Beckwith and Selman, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 82.
5. Jensen, "Levitical Sacrificial System," 34.
6. Derek Tidball, *The Message of Leviticus* (Leicester: IVP, 2005), 196.
7. Jensen, "Levitical Sacrificial System," 34.
8. E.g., Amos 5:21–25; Hos. 6:6; Isa. 1:10–17; Mic. 6:6–8; Jer. 6:19–20; 7:21–23.
9. See further, Nigel Courtman, "Sacrifice in the Psalms," in Beckwith and Selman, *Sacrifice in the Bible*, 41–58.

## chapter five

# the atonement in the new testament

geoffrey grogan

The atonement is an important and heartwarming theme which should inspire both thought and worshipful devotion in the Christian. It is intimately related to the atonement teaching of the Old Testament. In this essay, we will consider the main New Testament books that give teaching on the atonement.

## The Gospels and Christ's Teaching in Them

Many Christians studying New Testament atonement theology go straight to the Pauline Epistles. This is not necessarily the best place to start, for Paul's teaching is grounded not just on the Old Testament but on the teaching of Jesus. Many have attempted to drive a wedge between Paul's teaching and that of Jesus, representing Paul as the real author of atonement theology. So we will start with the Gospels. We will assume they give us an accurate account of the life and teaching of Jesus, and that the theological message of each is not imposed on but rather arises out of these facts.

Mark begins, "The gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God", which shows it is not just a record of facts but a message based on them. The early church came to apply this term to all four canonical gospels, for they all have this character. Each writer has his own way of stressing the importance of the cross, and each gives much space to the closing week of Jesus' life.

Early on, Mark records the baptism of Jesus, when the voice from heaven declares, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11), often held to echo both Psalm 2:7 ("You are my Son") and Isaiah 42:1