

Unit 1: Major Messianic Prophecies

Lesson 2 | December 8, 2024 Jesus' Atoning Sacrifice for Sin

Study Text

Exodus 12:1–30; Leviticus 16:20–34; Numbers 21:1–9; John 3:1–17; 1 Corinthians 5:6–8; Hebrews 9:1–15; 1 Peter 1:18–19

Central Truth

Jesus' atoning work made the blessings of forgiveness and eternal life available to all.

Key Verse: Hebrews 9:14

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (KJV)

Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will explore the meaning of *atonement* and its importance in our salvation experience.
- Students will recognize Jesus as the only One who can deliver from sin and offer new life.
- Students will pray for opportunities to lead others to salvation.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: Think about the last time you had to “make amends.” Maybe you bought a coffee for a coworker after you had to reschedule an important meeting. Maybe you paid for repairs after your child damaged something in your neighbor’s yard. Or maybe you made dinner for a friend to apologize for hurting their feelings.

Discussion Starter—Making Amends

Say: What is something that you’ve had to make amends for?

Say: The word *atone* basically means “to make amends” or “provide reparation or compensation for something bad or unwelcome.” There is no stronger use of the word than describing what Jesus has done to save our souls. We were guilty of sins we could not fix, cover up, or pay for. So Jesus stepped in and made things right between us and God. *Atonement* may sound like a heavy theological term, but it’s the basic cornerstone of our faith.

We have all experienced the physical, emotional, and spiritual consequences of sin. And none of us can fix our own sin problem. Today’s lesson looks back at the Old

Testament sacrifices that atoned for sin. In God's perfect plan, they foreshadowed the ultimate atonement that Jesus would one day provide.

Part 1—The Passover Lamb

Saved by a Perfect Lamb

Exodus 12:1–10, 15, 21–30

Say: John the Baptist described Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). This view of Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb was foreshadowed in the first Passover.

As Pharaoh's heart continued to be hardened after nine devastating plagues, God unleashed the worst judgment of all. Every firstborn son in Egypt would die—from Pharaoh's son to the lowliest servant's son (Exodus 11:4–8). Then, God's people would be free.

God did more than protect His people during this final plague; He instituted Passover, an enduring reminder of His love, protection, and salvation. Because this day marked a new beginning for Israel, the month in which it fell (roughly mid-March through mid-April on our calendar) would become the first month of the Jewish year (12:2).

The focus of Passover would be the sacrifice of a year-old lamb or goat without blemish. If a household was too small to have its own sacrificial lamb, another family should share with them (verses 4–5). The lamb would be sacrificed at twilight on the fourteenth day of the month, and its blood would be placed on the door frame of each house. The meat would be eaten along with bitter herbs that would later come to symbolize the bitterness of slavery and unleavened bread to symbolize the Israelites' hasty departure from Egypt (verses 6–8). At midnight, the Lord struck down the firstborn of Egypt. But when He saw the blood on the Israelites' door frames, He passed over their homes, keeping His promise that “this plague of death will not touch you” (verse 13).

Both the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread began with this event, and Jewish people continue to commemorate their deliverance by celebrating them today. These festivals were to be strictly observed—under penalty of being cut off from the nation (verse 15). This punishment may seem harsh, but the feasts would serve as object lessons to future generations, reminding them of all God had done to deliver them (verses 24–27).

Resource Packet Item 1: Passover Parallels

Students will consider the similarities between Jesus' sacrifice and the Passover lamb. You may choose to summarize the information in class or send the handout home for personal study.

Discuss

? Why do you think the Passover lamb had to be perfect?

? Why do you think God so strongly emphasized remembering the Passover?

Christ Our Passover

1 Corinthians 5:6–8; 1 Peter 1:18–19

Say: Now let's take a look at two passages in the New Testament. Paul and Peter both give us practical direction about Christian living by reminding us of Jesus' atoning work as the Lamb of God.

We might be surprised that Paul mentioned Passover and alluded to the Feast of Unleavened Bread in 1 Corinthians 5:6–8. After all, he was rebuking the Corinthian believers for allowing sexual sin in their congregation and then boasting about it. But he explained their pride was dangerous, affecting the entire church like yeast spreading through a batch of dough. They were to get rid of the "old bread of wickedness and evil" and embrace the "new bread of sincerity and truth" (verse 8). Why? Because "Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us" (verse 7). Through His sinless life and atoning death, Jesus made it possible for us to escape corruption—the "yeast" of sinful indulgence.

In 1 Peter 1:13–19, the apostle issued a call to holy living, made possible through the blood of Jesus, "the sinless, spotless Lamb of God" (verse 19). Just as the Israelites were held in bondage by Egypt, so every person is held captive by sin. Our ransom payment could never be made with "mere gold or silver, which lose their value" (verse 18). Instead, God redeemed us by "the precious blood of Christ" (verse 19), making amends for our sins and saving us from the empty lives we were living. We must never lose sight of the reality that we are redeemed from slavery to our sin by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus. Only through the spotless Lamb of God can we find salvation.

Resource Packet Item 2: Unfolding Revelation of the Lamb

Students will explore how the concept of the Lamb of God develops throughout Scripture and reflect on the significance of Jesus' sacrifice.

Discuss

? What does it mean that Jesus has delivered us from sin?

? Why do you think both Paul and Peter mentioned Jesus' atoning sacrifice when encouraging believers to pursue holiness?

Part 2—Atonement for Sin

The Scapegoat

Leviticus 16:20–25, 29–34

Say: Along with Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the spring, Jesus' sacrifice was also foreshadowed by another event on the Jewish calendar that took place each autumn: The Day of Atonement.

God is holy, and His holy people should contend with sin. The Book of Leviticus describes the many ways sin infects and pollutes individuals and groups of people. Like dirt or sand continually being blown against a house, sin constantly creeps in and

accumulates. It must regularly be swept away. And despite the Israelites' ongoing sacrifices and cleansing each year, sins were still overlooked or hidden. Leviticus 16 describes the Day of Atonement, the most solemn of all Israelite holy days on which the people were cleansed from their sins.

After sacrificing a bull for his own family's sins, the high priest Aaron presented two identical goats to the people. One would be killed as a sin offering for them, while the other would be sent into the wilderness as a scapegoat. Aaron would "lay both of his hands on the second goat's head and confess over it all the wickedness, rebellion, and sins of the people of Israel. In this way, he will transfer the people's sins to the head of the goat. . . . As the goat goes into the wilderness, it will carry all the people's sins upon itself into a desolate land" (verses 21–22).

The Day of Atonement was known as the Sabbath of Sabbaths (literally *shabbat shabbaton* in Hebrew, from verse 31), and both Israelites and foreigners were commanded to deny themselves—to fast and do no work (verse 29). The people would be purified by the offerings, but their righteousness would not last. Instead, the atonement sacrifices were to be made each year (verses 31, 34)—until God's purposes were fulfilled in Jesus. Fulfilling the role of both goats, Jesus not only gave His life as a once-for-all offering for our sin, but He also took our sins upon himself and distanced them from us (Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 53:6; Hebrews 10:17–18).

Discuss

? In what sense is sin a constant issue for us?

? Why did God command the people to deny themselves by fasting and doing no work on the Day of Atonement?

Christ—The Perfect Sacrifice

Hebrews 9:6–15

Say: To fully understand and appreciate the Book of Hebrews, we need to read it through the lens of Leviticus. Together, they tell the story of our desperate need for cleansing and forgiveness and the answer Jesus provided through His all-sufficient sacrifice.

Hebrews 9:6–10 reminds us of the shortcomings of the Old Testament sacrificial system. The people and the high priest needed perpetual cleansing—the same sacrifices year after year. Entering God's presence was limited, because "the entrance to the Most Holy Place was not freely open as long as the Tabernacle and the system it represented were still in use" (verse 8). This kind of atonement provided a temporary covering for sins, cleansing the body without touching the conscience. God had not created a flawed system that failed and needed to be replaced. Instead, the Law served a temporary purpose as a step toward the eventual fulfillment in Jesus.

Every shadow of hope contained in the Law became fully realized in Jesus. By willingly giving up His sinless life, Jesus entered the presence of God in the heavenly tabernacle

by means of His own blood. His offering never needs to be repeated. His sacrifice provided internal cleansing. No other human has ever been or will ever be qualified to make such a sacrifice (verses 11–13). Only Jesus was able to remedy the sin problem, mediating a new way for people to relate to God (verses 14–15). Through Jesus, our sins are not just temporarily covered, but we become God’s children, set free from sin and inheritors of all His promises (Romans 8:15–17).

Resource Packet Item 3: Jesus—Humble and Exalted

Describing himself, Jesus said, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Students will read Isaiah 53 and Philippians 2, reflecting on Jesus’ humble sacrifice. This handout would work best as a take-home page for personal devotions.

Discuss

- ? How does familiarity with the Old Testament sacrificial system help us better appreciate Jesus’ once-for-all sacrifice?
- ? What made Jesus the perfect sacrifice for our sins?

Part 3—“If I Be Lifted Up”

A Bronze Serpent Lifted Up

Numbers 21:4–9

Say: Near the end of their 40-year exile in the wilderness, the Israelites again grumbled against Moses and God. Even decades later, they were still complaining about leaving Egypt.

In Numbers 21:4–9, God uniquely punished the Israelites for grumbling about their long journey, the lack of water, and the “horrible manna” He had given them (verse 5). He sent poisonous snakes among the people. The King James Version uses the term “fiery serpents” in verse 6; likely this term in the original language refers to the fevers, burning, and pain caused by the snakes’ bites.

Many Israelites were bitten and died. In response, the people admitted their sin (something Scripture does not record them doing before this incident) and asked Moses to seek God’s mercy. Moses prayed, and God responded: “Make a replica of a poisonous snake and attach it to a pole. All who are bitten will live if they simply look at it!” (verse 8). Moses obeyed God and crafted a bronze snake, and the people were healed from the effects of the venom by looking at it (verse 9).

God’s response seems strange, considering He had forbidden the people to make graven images. Not only that, snakes were unclean animals that symbolized sin (Genesis 3:1–15; Leviticus 11:41–42). Plus, God provided a cure rather than removing the snakes altogether. There are some answers about this account that we simply cannot provide, but a few things are certain:

- The bronze snake had no magical properties. Healing came from God as the people obeyed His instructions.
- The Lord allowed the obedient people to survive, but He did not remove the effects of judgment, namely the snakes and their bites.
- The Israelites kept the bronze snake, although there had been no command to do so. The next time it is mentioned in Scripture, about seven hundred years had passed and the people were offering sacrifices to the image (2 Kings 18:4). When Hezekiah became king, he destroyed the snake, along with the pagan shrines, sacred pillars, and Asherah poles the people were using in idol worship.

Resource Packet Item 4: The Bronze Serpent

Students will learn more about the bronze serpent, or *Nehushtan*, and reflect on ways Christians may still attribute spiritual power to objects, places, or rituals rather than God himself.

Discuss

? Why do you think God issued such a unique command in this instance?

? Tell us about a time when God asked you to do something unusual. What were the results?

Christ Lifted Up

John 3:1–17

Say: John 3 records the familiar story of Jesus’ nighttime conversation with Nicodemus. In this passage, Jesus describes what it means to be born again, and in verse 16, He speaks some of Scripture’s most famous words. But in the verses just before John 3:16, Jesus explains that Moses’ bronze serpent held prophetic significance, foreshadowing His own death on the cross.

In explaining regeneration to Nicodemus, Jesus used several illustrations: second birth (verses 3–7), the wind’s movement (verse 8), the bronze snake (verses 14–15), and light (verses 19–21). Again and again, Jesus explained that, through faith in Him, a person can leave behind a life doomed to end in death and eternal judgment, and begin a new, transformed life that will endure forever.

Understanding this context, we can see how the bronze serpent prophetically represented God’s answer to sin’s judgment. The Israelites looked at the bronze serpent to escape the death they deserved; we look to Jesus to escape the death we deserve. Moses lifted up the serpent so all the Israelites could see it and be healed, and “the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life” (verses 14–15). Jesus describes being lifted up two other times in John’s Gospel:

- “Jesus said, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man on the cross, then you

will understand that I am he. I do nothing on my own but say only what the Father taught me” (8:28).

- “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.’ He said this to indicate how he was going to die” (12:32–33).

Jesus’ words in John 3, spoken near the beginning of His ministry, indicate He already understood the way He would die. Although being “lifted up” may seem passive—as though Jesus had no choice but to be crucified—the opposite was true. Just a few months before His death, He explained further, “The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. . . . No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again” (10:11, 18; see also Matthew 26:53; Galatians 2:20).

Discuss

? Read John 12:32. How does Jesus being lifted up cause people to be drawn to Him?
? How does Jesus’ reference to the bronze serpent help us better understand that Old Testament story?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross was foreshadowed in many ways in the Old Testament—not just through the words of prophets but through the history and rituals of God’s people. Jesus is our Passover Lamb, delivering us from the bondage of sin. He is our atoning sacrifice, paying the price for our sin. And when He was lifted up on the cross, He opened the door to eternal life for anyone who would believe in Him.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- List some ways your class can show Jesus’ love to your community. Then choose one option and make it happen!
- Take some time to write down or practice sharing your testimony. When the opportunity arises, you’ll be ready to share the good news of how Jesus has given you new life.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

A Sacrificial Lamb.

Exodus 29:35–43

Tuesday:

Old Testament Atonement Practices.

Exodus 30:1–10

Wednesday:

Blood for Atonement.

Leviticus 17:8–11

Thursday:

Shed Blood Required for

Forgiveness.

Hebrews 9:16–22

Friday:

Jesus: Our Atoning Sacrifice.

1 John 2:1–6

Saturday:

Worthy Is the Lamb.

Revelation 5:1–10