

The Atonement of Jesus Christ

Appendix: How Judaism Denies the Vicarious Atonement of Jesus Christ

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In order to help Christians understand Judaism and therefore witness to Jews more effectively, an examination of their doctrine of atonement is necessary. Before we examine how religious Jews deal with sin and guilt a few things must be said about Judaism in general.

The Jewish religion has very little to do with the Old Testament Scriptures. Modern Judaism is the spiritual step-child of the Pharisees (i.e., the separated ones). The sect of the Pharisees was the most popular religion among the Jews in Jesus' day. Note: Jesus Christ and the apostles rejected the religion of the Pharisees and the Pharisees emphatically rejected Jesus and His teachings. Why? The Pharisees posited two streams of divine revelation. There was God's written revelation (i.e., the Old Testament Scriptures) and God's oral revelation. The oral revelation was supposedly spoken to Moses on the mount and is preserved in the traditions of the rabbis. The reason that Jesus strongly opposed the Pharisees is that their traditions contradicted the Old Testament and had been used by the rabbis to replace the teachings of Moses and the Prophets. Christ said, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?... Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition" (Mt. 15:3, 6). "Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" (Jn. 5:45-47).

Modern religious Judaism is not a religion of the Old Testament Scriptures but is the religion of the Talmud. "The Talmud is a compilation of the oral teachings of the rabbis from perhaps 200 years before Christ until the end of the second century, A.D. (Mishnah), plus an additional three hundred years of commentary (Gemara). The total covers almost seven (possibly eight) centuries. Those who adhere to the Talmud claim that this oral tradition extends back to Moses."¹ Orthodox Jews believe that the Talmud is inspired and authoritative. The English translation of the Babylonian Talmud is 34 volumes (Soncino edition). The Talmud not only repeatedly contradicts the Old Testament but it also contains massive internal contradictions. Gary North has documented some of the many blasphemous and totally perverse teachings found within it.²

¹ Gary North, *Tools Of Dominion: The Case Laws of Exodus* (Tyler, TX: Institute For Christian Economics, 1990), pp. 1007-1008.

² A few examples of the ethical teaching of the Babylonian Talmud ought to be enough to prove to anyone that it overthrows biblical ethics: A woman who commits bestiality is considered a virgin, eligible to marry a priest (cf., *Yabamoth* 59b). The Babylonian Talmud teaches that the phrase in Genesis 2:23 ("This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh") means Adam had sexual intercourse with all the animals of the field but found no satisfaction until he slept with Eve (cf., *Yabamoth* 63a). The Talmud refers to Jesus as Balaam and says that Christians spend eternity with Jesus in boiling excrement (cf., *Gittin* 56b-57a). The Talmud explicitly says that pederasty and sodomy with a child under nine incurs no guilt (cf. *Sanhedrin* 54b). The Talmud teaches that Molech worship is not idolatry and that offering "all thy seed" (i.e., children) to Molech is not worthy of punishment (cf., *Baba Mezia* 33a, *Sanhedrin* 64a, 64b). The Talmud teaches that using a poisonous snake to murder one's enemy does not incur guilt (*Sanhedrin* 78a). Also, a person who ties up his neighbor and allows him to starve to death is not liable (*Sanhedrin* 77a). For an excellent analysis of the Babylonian Talmud from a Christian perspective read "Maimonides' Code: Is It Biblical?" in Gary North, *Tools of Dominion*, pp. 998-1062.

Although Judaism is not a religion of the Old Testament and instead is based on the contradictory and often unethical (cf., footnote 59 below) speculations of various rabbis, apologists for Judaism use arguments based on various Scripture passages to refute Christian doctrine because they know that Evangelical Christians only accept the authority of Scripture for doctrine. The rise of “Messianic Judaism” and the conversion of a number of Jews to Christianity have caused some Jewish teachers to attempt to inoculate Jews against the gospel of Christ. What follows is a brief overview and refutation of Jewish arguments against the saving blood of Christ.

What do Evangelical Christians usually say when they witness to Jews (according to the flesh). First, they point out that all men both Jews and Gentiles, have sinned and are guilty before God. “For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin” (Eccl. 7:20). “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one” (Ps. 14:1-3). Second, they point to the need of a vicarious atonement to eliminate the guilt of sin. Leviticus 17:11: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.” Third, they point to Isaiah 53 and explain how the Old Testament sacrificial system foreshadowed the sacrificial death of the spotless lamb of God—Jesus the Christ. Hebrews 9:22 says that “without the shedding of blood there is no remission.” The author of Hebrews says that the blood of bulls and goats could not really take away sins (10:3-4) but the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Christ does eliminate the guilt of sins (Heb. 10:10-14). Fourth, they point out that the only way to have one’s sins eliminated is by Christ’s sacrifice. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn. 14:6; cf., Acts 4:12; Jn. 3:36; Mk. 16:16, etc.). Fifth, they point out that the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70 and that even according to their own religion they have no system to eliminate sin. “How do you (Jews according to the flesh) deal with the guilt of sin?”

How do Jewish apologists deal with the arguments given above? The trained orthodox Jew would (in dealing with Evangelicals and Messianic Jews) purposely ignore the Talmud and attempt to prove from the Old Testament that blood is not the only method given by God to expiate sin. Why do Jewish apologists ignore the Talmud when dealing with Christians? They ignore the Talmud for two main reasons. First, Christians do not accept the authority of the Talmud. (They rightly recognize that it is only a collection of human traditions.) Second, the system of salvation taught in the Talmud is a bizarre maze of merit mongering assertions. It is as bad or even worse than Roman Catholicism. Jewish apologists know that if (for example) a Messianic Jew was presented the teachings of the Talmud on salvation he would immediately recognize the absurdity, irrationality and unbiblical nature of Judaism. In order to understand how bad the Talmud and Judaism is (on the doctrine of salvation) a lengthy quote from Alfred Edersheim is in order:

All Israel, except a few notorious sinners and unbelievers, were supposed to have part in the world to come [Sanh. xi. i]. (Repentance alone could not atone for the sin of apostasy, which must be expiated by the sinner’s death. A heathen’s penitence availed him nothing unless he embraced the Jewish faith, and in theory it was right to refuse to save the life of an unbeliever [Ab. Sar. 17a, 26ab]). A proper observance of the Sabbath procured the pardon of sins. The merits of Jews secured their entrance into heaven, and a

share in the resurrection of the just, while the good works of the impious and of heathens met their reward only in this world [Targ. Jer. in Dt. vii. 10]. Sufferings were means of procuring merit and atoning for guilt. Chastisements caused the pardon of sins' but if sent as a dispensation of love, they accompanied or preceded special blessings.... All means of grace were available up to death, when the soul appeared before the Judge, who put the good works in one balance, and the evil in another, and adjudged heaven or hell according to the preponderance of good or evil [Jer. Kidd. i. 61d]. But when the good and evil works exactly counterbalanced one another, it was generally supposed, though the Rabbis were not quite unanimous, that God pressed down the one side of the balance or raised the other, so that the merits might preponderate [Arach. 8b]. Certain acts of kindness might in themselves prove sufficient to atone for a whole life of sin. On the whole, there was in this respect a great want of moral earnestness in the Synagogue. Some saints were supposed to possess a superfluity of merits, which might be made available to compensate for the deficiencies of others. Thus, amongst others, the celebrated Simon ben Jochai arrogated to himself the power of atoning by his righteousness for the sins of the whole world, from his time to the end [Jer. Ber. ix. 13d; succ. 45a]. Popularly, the merits of three fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and of the four mothers, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel, were viewed as procuring favour for their descendants [Tar. Jer. in Dt. xxxiii. 15]. (It was one of the greatest privileges of a true-born Israelite, that he had a claim upon the treasury of the merits of the patriarchs. Similarly, the son of a good man might feel more assured that his prayers would be heard, because of his father's merits [Jebam. 64a]. The sufferings of righteous men might suffice to atone for the sins of the whole generation in which they lived). Condemned criminals were, if unwilling to confess, to be admonished at least to exclaim, 'May my death be the expiation of my sins' [Sanh. vi 2]. The death of the just might be the means of procuring pardon for all Israel [Moed K. 28a]. The cessation of sacrifices induced the Rabbis to substitute in their room the study of the Law, which is exalted above every other merit. Confession, repentance, fasting, and the Day of Atonement, together with personal suffering and merits, especially the study of the Law and works of kindness, and finally a man's last agony,—such were the means of reconciliation with God to which the Synagogue pointed a sinner, whose conscience the mere fact of his connection with the patriarchs could not sanctify.³

The purpose of this lengthy quote is to forewarn believers that: 1. Judaism is unbiblical and absurd. 2. Jewish apologists present a highly modified, simplified version of their doctrine of salvation to Christians. 3. The refutation of the Christian doctrine of atonement that this author has read and observed (by Orthodox Jews) also contradicts the Talmud which Orthodox Jews believe is inspired and fully authoritative.

For example, Jewish apologists often will quote Ezekiel 18:20 (which says "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be on himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself") and say that Jesus could not have suffered for the sins of others. But as noted above the Talmud explicitly teaches that righteous Jews can suffer and atone for other

³Alfred Edersheim, *History Of The Jewish Nation After The Destruction Of Jerusalem Under Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 1979 [1856]), pp. 436-438. Alfred Edersheim (a Jewish Christian) was the foremost expert on the Talmud and Judaism among Christian scholars in the nineteenth century. He was a member of the Scottish Free Church (Presbyterian).

Jews. (For a refutation of the Jewish apologists use of Ezekiel 18:20 see the section above entitled Only Christ Meets the Biblical Conditions of a Substitute.)

Jewish apologists argue that there are three main methods of expiating one's sin. First, there is the sacrificing of animals. Second, there is doing good deeds or giving to charity. Third, there is repentance. If one tells God that he is sorry with a sincere heart, then God will forgive that person. The Jews teach that repentance is the best and most important method of dealing with guilt and that blood atonement is the least important. A brief examination of the Jewish alternatives to blood atonement will show that the rabbis have totally abandoned the Scriptures and invented a religion of self-righteousness.

1. Good Deeds

Let us first examine the scriptural evidence the Jewish apologists offer to prove that good deeds expiate sin. "Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivers from death" (Prov. 10:2). "Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death" (Prov. 11:4). Do these passages teach that doing good deeds or giving to charity expiates the guilt of sin? No, they do not. The context clearly indicates that gaining eternal life is not the subject of these passages but wickedness and righteousness as they relate to temporal blessings and cursing. For example Proverbs 11:3, "The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the perversity of the unfaithful will destroy them." Proverbs 11:5-6, "The righteousness of the blameless will direct his way aright, but the wicked will fall by his own wickedness. The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, but the unfaithful will be taken by their own lust." Matthew Henry writes: "Righteousness delivers from death, that is, wealth gained, and kept, and used, in a right manner (righteousness signifies both honesty and charity); it answers the end of wealth, which is to keep us alive and be a defense to us."⁴

Another passage used to teach expiation by good deeds is Proverbs 16:6, "In mercy and truth atonement is provided for iniquity; and by the fear of the LORD one departs from evil." Jewish apologists interpret the first as meaning: by doing deeds of mercy (or loving-kindness) and truth one's sins will be expiated. Their interpretation assumes that 6a refers to man and not God. However, if one lets Scripture interpret Scripture then one must apply 6a to God. Arnot writes, "The subject is the expiation on sin [6a]. The term is the one which is employed in connection with the bloody sacrifices. It intimates that sin is purged by the sacrifice of a substitute. The two clauses of the verse, balanced against each other in the usual form, seem to point to the great facts which constitute redemption,—pardon and obedience. The first clause tells how the guilt of sin is forgiven; the second, how the power of sin is subdued. The first speaks of the pardon which comes down from God to man; the second, of the obedience which then and therefore rises up from man to God. Solomon unites the two constituent elements of a sinner's deliverance in the same order that his father experienced them: 'I have hoped for thy salvation and done thy commandments' (Ps. cxix. 166). It is when iniquity is purged by free grace that men practically depart from evil."⁵ The idea that God will overlook a whole life of sin and pardon a mountain of debt solely on the basis of a few acts of charity to the poor is a denial of God's holiness, justice and the immutability of His moral law. "Indeed God shows the deepest

⁴ Matthew Henry, *Commentary On The Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: MacDonald, n. d.), 3:843.

⁵ William Arnot, *Studies In Proverbs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1978 [1884]), pp. 346-347.

hatred of sin in the very act of the atonement He made for it through the death of His Son.”⁶ The sinners only hope is Jesus Christ “the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14).

Another passage used by Jewish apologists is Hosea 6:6, “For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” Jewish apologists interpret this passage as meaning that showing mercy or loving-kindness and charity to others is a far better method of atonement than sacrifice. This interpretation also ignores the context and the analogy of Scripture. Jehovah is rebuking Israel and Judah because they were living wicked unrepentant lives and yet they were still engaging in the external ceremonies because they mistakenly believed these ceremonies could remove sin without true faith in Jehovah and repentance. In chapter five of Hosea we are told: that Israel is guilty of harlotry and is defiled (v. 3), that “they do not know the LORD” (v. 4), that Israel and Judah stumble in their iniquity (v. 5), that Jehovah “has withdrawn Himself from them” (v. 6), etc. God is saying that He desires true faith in Himself, a faith that leads to godly living, far above unbelief, wickedness and empty ritualism. God through the prophet Isaiah condemns unbelieving ritualism with even stronger language. He calls the sacrifices of the wicked “futile sacrifices” (1:13). Their incense is an abomination (1:13). He hates their feast days (1:14). He says, “I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting” (1:13). In Hosea, God is not condemning the sacrificial system itself but the abuse of the sacrificial system. If the external ordinances of religion are practiced without true faith and repentance then they are worthless. Indeed, they are an abomination (cf., Isa. 1:10-17). We must first have genuine faith in God before we engage in church ordinances.

One of the passages most often used by Jewish apologists for atonement through good works is Daniel 4:27. Because the Jewish interpretation of this passage is based on an incorrect translation from the Hebrew into English, we will quote from the Jewish Publication Society translation (1982) and the New King James version. “Therefore, O king, may my advice be acceptable to you: Redeem your sins by beneficence and your iniquities by generosity to the poor; then your serenity may be extended” (Dan. 4:24, JPS: Jewish versions of the Old Testament have a slightly different numbering of verses in Daniel than Christian versions). “Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you; break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity” (Dan. 4:27, KJV). For some reason Jewish translators have ignored the Masoretic text (break off) and have instead follow the LXX (redeem). Hebrew scholar E. J. Young writes: “it is a gross perversion of the text to force it to teach salvation by the merit of good works. Jerome gave a classic expression to this false view,...(—and redeem thy sins by almsgiving, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, perhaps God will ignore thy sins). This translation, however, is inaccurate. The verb does not mean to redeem. The translation to redeem occurs in LXX, and is adopted by many, e.g., Syriac, de Wette, Hitzig, Zoeckler, but the meaning to redeem is not original, but is one which came later to be attached to the verb. The correct meaning is to break off, cast away.... If the king is to have lengthening of prosperity, he must give up his injustice and cruelty to the poor and must practice righteousness and mercy.”⁷ Daniel 4:27 does not deal with the expiation of sins. It speaks of the relationship between personal obedience and temporal blessings.

⁶ Charles Bridges, revised by George F. Santa, *A Modern Study In The Book of Proverbs* (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1978), p. 275.

⁷ Edward J. Young, *A Commentary On Daniel* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1972 [1949]), pp. 108-109.

A passage closely related to Hosea 6:6 is Proverbs 21:3, “To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.” Note what this passage does not say. It does not say that doing righteousness or justice renders a person acceptable to God. It does not say that good works expiate sin or atone for sin. Why then does it say that doing righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice? The simple reason is that any hypocrite or wicked person can offer up a sacrifice. Note the example of king Saul, Saul was a wicked man who openly and obstinately disobeyed God’s word yet who loved to offer sacrifice. Thus, the prophet Samuel said to Saul: “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry” (1 Sam. 15:22-23). The ceremonial sacrifices were of divine institution and were typical of Christ. However, they were not acceptable to God apart from faith in Him. And as both testaments clearly teach, true faith issues forth in real repentance, in acts of piety and love toward one’s neighbor. The backsliding, unregenerate Jews offered sacrifices without faith and repentance. They trusted in the ceremony but not in Jehovah who instituted the ceremony.

The last verse that will be considered under the topic of doing good deeds to expiate sin is Jeremiah 7:20-23, “For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices. But this is what I commanded them, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.’” Like the other verses considered above this passage does not teach that sins are expiated by doing good deeds or keeping the law. It teaches that the covenant stipulations (or the moral law) have priority over the performance of rituals (the ceremonial law). God’s covenant blessings or curses in this life are directly connected to one’s performance of God’s moral stipulations. Jeremiah points out that when Israel was delivered from Egypt to the wilderness they accepted God’s covenant obligations by saying: “All that the LORD has spoken we will do” (Ex. 19:8). Only a few days after the people’s acceptance of the covenant, God spoke directly to the covenant people the Decalogue—the ten commandments (cf., Ex. 20:1-17). It is only after the covenant is ratified by oath and blood in chapter 24 that the ceremonial laws are given. Thus, if the covenant people ignore the demands of the covenant (the ten commandments) yet seek Jehovah through ritual sacrifice the sacrifice is useless and sinful. The Old and New Testaments are in complete harmony by teaching that faith and obedience must precede external church ordinances.

2. Repentance

Closely related to the Jewish concept of expiation by doing good deeds (e.g., charity) is their doctrine of expiation by repentance. An orthodox Jew would argue that repentance is the most important method for obtaining expiation of sin. How would religious Jews define repentance? If a person turns to Jehovah with a pure, sincere heart and says, “God I am sorry,” then that person will receive complete forgiveness from God. Some of the typical passages used to justify the doctrine of expiation through repentance are: 2 Samuel 12:13; Psalm 51:16-19; (in Jewish versions cf., 51:18-21); Hosea 14:2-3; Micah 6:6-8; 1 Kings 8:46-50; Ezekiel 18:1-4, 19-23; 33:10-11.

Since these passages are usually variations of a common theme we will examine only a few of the most prominent verses. Psalm 51:14-17 says: “Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your

righteousness. O LORD, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise. For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; you do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise.” Jewish apologists argue that this Psalm teaches that all that is needed to receive forgiveness is a prayer of sincere contrition. No blood is necessary for atonement. Their interpretation, however, ignores not only the analogy of Scripture but also the immediate context of this passage. Kidner writes, “God is not rejecting His own appointed offerings, still less saying that we can be self-atonement. What He is emphasizing is that the best of gifts is hateful to Him without a contrite heart. And the reference is not simply to atonement (for which only the blood of another can suffice: Lv. 17:11; Heb. 9:22) but to the whole range of worship...”⁸ This interpretation is proved by the end of the Psalm which says: “Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.” David did not look to his repentance as the foundation of atonement but to God who justifies through the blood of a substitute. This point is evident from David’s plea in verse 7, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” Referring to this verse Spurgeon wrote: “Sprinkle the atoning blood upon me with the appointed means. Give me the reality which legal ceremonies symbolize. Nothing but blood can take away my blood-stains, nothing but the strongest purification can avail to cleanse me. Let the sin-offering purge my sin. Let him who was appointed to atone, execute his sacred office on me; for none can need it more than I.”⁹

When one examines the many passages which appear to disavow the sacrifices and other rituals (e. g., 1 Sam. 15:14-22; Jer. 7:21-23; Hos. 6:6; Mic. 6:6-8; Zech. 7:4-7) keep in mind that all these rituals were instituted by God and therefore cannot be intrinsically immoral or objectionable before Him. The common theme that runs through all such passages is on the necessity of a proper heart attitude when approaching Jehovah. God requires a broken spirit. A person who is regenerated by the Holy Spirit understands that he has nothing meritorious or good to offer God. He recognizes his sinful depravity. He understands the wickedness of his sins. He knows that he stands guilty and condemned before God’s law. He forsakes his sinful behavior and prays for mercy. True faith looks only to Christ for mercy. Real faith cannot be separated from humility or repentance. To argue as the rabbis do that God saves on the basis of piety, prayer or repentance completely misses the point of these passages. The rabbis take acts of humility and turn them into meritorious deeds which are the opposite of humility. God’s hand is forced by the supposed good deeds of man. Human merit and grace and mercy do not mix. They are incompatible.

The reason that the rabbis have so thoroughly perverted the biblical doctrine of salvation is that they do not make or understand the distinction between what is the foundation of salvation and things that necessarily accompany salvation yet do not contribute to it. There are many passages that discuss the necessity of good works, repentance, confession and prayer in both the Old and New Testaments. (For example: “He who cover his sins will not prosper, but whosoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” [Prov. 28:13]. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” [1 Jn. 1:9]. Jesus said: “Unless you repent you will all likewise perish” [Lu. 13:3, 5]. “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My

⁸ Derek Kidner, *Psalm 1-72* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), pp. 193-194.

⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury Of David: An Expository And Devotional Commentary On The Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983 [1882-1887]), 2:452.

Father in heaven” [Mt. 7:21]. “Those who practice such things [idolatry, adultery, fornication, murder, drunkenness, etc.] will not inherit the kingdom of God” [Gal. 5:21].) However all these things are the fruit of salvation, not the cause of it. Only heretics believe that a person can make a “decision for Christ” and then refuse to repent and still be saved. As noted above Christ saves from the guilt of sin (justification) and the power of sin (sanctification). People who claim to be Christians yet lead lives characterized by sinful behavior are not really saved. They have a counterfeit faith. Christians must lead godly lives, pray, help others, love the brethren and so on but these activities must never be considered meritorious or atoning. Salvation is solely of the work of Jesus the savior of the whole world.

The Centrality of Blood Atonement

The Jewish idea that atonement by sacrifice is the worst method of atonement and is really unnecessary is absurd. If blood atonement was unnecessary and inferior to charity or repentance then why did God even bother to institute the sacrificial system of the Tabernacle and Temple? Why did God set aside a special priesthood? Why did God say that blood was given to make atonement for sin (Lev. 17:11)? The truth is that blood atonement is the scarlet thread that runs through the whole Old Testament. The shedding of blood by sacrifice was crucial because it typified the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ at Calvary. After Adam and Eve sinned, and became conscious that because of their guilt their nakedness was now unacceptable, God promised a coming redeemer (Gen. 3:15), and then slew animals to provide a covering for them (Gen. 3:21). Why didn't God just tell Adam and Eve to be sorry? If repentance was all that was needed why was a redeemer necessary? The promise in Genesis 3:15 is called the proto-evangel because it contains the first general promise of the Messiah's victory in our stead. “Thus we see a Person in the Seed of the women; suffering, in the prediction that His heel would be bruised; and victory, in that He would bruise the serpent's head. These merely general outlines are wonderfully filled up in the Book of Psalms. The ‘Person’ is now ‘the Son of David;’ while alike the sufferings and the victory are sketched in vivid detail in such Psalms as 22, 35, 69 and 102; else in Psalms 2, 72, 89, 110, and 118—not to speak of other almost enumerable allusions.”¹⁰

If the shedding of blood was unnecessary then why did God accept Abel's burnt offering yet reject Cain's non-bloody offering of the fruit of the ground (Gen. 4:3-5)? Even Noah whom the Bible calls a just man offered burnt offerings of clean animals after his deliverance in the ark (Gen. 8:20-21). After the flood Noah and his family were permitted by God to eat animals; yet they were forbidden to eat the blood (Gen. 9:4). Our spiritual father Abraham who had faith in God and was a righteous man offered sacrifices to Jehovah (Gen. 12:7; 13:7, 18). Indeed, God's covenant with Abraham was established by sacrifice (Gen. 15:8-10). When Abraham by God's command was about to sacrifice his only son Isaac on a mountain in Moriah (In 2 Chr. 3:1 Moriah is associated with Jerusalem and the temple mount.) Jehovah provided a substitutionary sacrifice (Gen. 22:8, 11-14). “And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide” (Gen. 22:14). Jacob approached God in worship by sacrifices at Bethel and named that place the house of God (Gen. 35:7-14). After Israel's 400 years of slavery in Egypt God demanded that Israel be permitted to go three days journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifice (Ex. 3:18; 5:3). Israel was redeemed from Egypt by blood sacrifice. The sacrificial blood of a clean animal was placed on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where the Jews ate

¹⁰ Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry And Services As They Were At The Time Of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950), p. 124.

the sacrifice. Jehovah would see the blood and pass over that house. The clean animal was a substitute for the first born of each Israelite household (Ex. 12:4-13, 23). One could multiply references that support the necessity and significance of blood when approaching a thrice holy God. The point however has been clearly established, “that without the shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9:22).

Isaiah 53

A passage of Scripture which completely overturns the Jewish notion of salvation through human merit is Isaiah 53. “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (vs. 4-12). Jewish apologists reject the clear and obvious meaning of this chapter because they reject their own Messiah—Jesus of Nazareth. Although early Jewish works such as the Targum Jonathan and the Jerusalem Targum adopt a messianic interpretation of this prophecy, the rejection of Jesus necessitated a new interpretation.¹¹ Thus the rabbis began to apply Isaiah 53 to the Jewish nation. Jewish apologists point out that many times in Scripture the Jews are referred to as “My servant” or “His servant” (e.g., Isa. 41:8-9, 44:1-2, 21; 45:4; 48:20; 49:3; Ps. 136:22; Jer. 30:10).

Is the Jewish interpretation of Isaiah 53 plausible? No. It clearly is not. The idea that the word “servant” in Isaiah 53 is a figure of speech representing the whole Jewish nation is wrong and impossible for a number of reasons. First, the chapter speaks of vicarious suffering (vs. 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12). If one interprets the chapter as teaching that Israel suffers to atone for its own sins then the chapter does not speak of a vicarious atonement but of personal atonement. If one teaches that Israel suffered vicariously for the Gentile nations then one has a number of insurmountable exegetical difficulties.

1. One must argue that the word “we” throughout chapter 53 refers to the Gentiles. The problem with such an interpretation is that throughout the whole book whenever the word “we” is introduced abruptly in the midst of a prophecy it always refers to Israel and not the Gentiles (e.g., 42:24; 64:5; 36:6; 24:16, etc.) Are we supposed to believe that the phrase “for the transgression of My people” in verse 8 refers to the Gentiles in exclusion of the Jews?

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

2. In verse 6 we have the declaration of the universality of sin. The fact that all men including the Jews are sinners in need of divine mercy is expressly taught in both testaments (cf., Ps. 14:1-3; Gen. 6:5; Eccl. 7:20; Rom. 8:9-19). How are the Jews who are themselves under the guilt of sin; who are a wicked, stiff-necked and rebellious people (Ex. 32:9; 33:3; Dt. 9:6); who themselves need atonement supposed to atone for others? They cannot atone for the Gentiles. God requires a sinless substitute and not a defiled, deformed, diseased animal.

Second, the specific attributes and actions of the suffering servant cannot be applied to the covenant nation Israel. Can one truthfully say that no violence has occurred in the Jewish nation or that the Jews have never spoken deceit (v. 9)? Is it accurate to say that the wicked rebellious Jewish nation is “My righteous servant” (v. 11)? While chapter 53 cannot be applied to a nation of sinners who themselves need atonement, it does perfectly apply to Jesus Christ the sinless lamb of God without spot or blemish (Jn. 8:46; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Jn. 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2:22). Furthermore, the passages which speak of the suffering servant dying and being put in a grave can only be attributed to the nation Israel by applying a Scripture twisting fanciful allegorical method of interpretation. Verse 8 says “He was cut off from the land of the living.” In verse 9 one reads of His death and grave. Verse 12 says “He poured out His soul unto death.” It is popular for certain rabbis and historians to speak of the destruction of Israel as a covenant nation by the Romans in A.D. 70 as a death and the forming of the new nation in 1948 as a resurrection. However, the destruction of the Jewish nation in A.D. 70 was not an innocent righteous nation suffering for the Gentiles. It was a wicked debauched nation suffering judgment for its own iniquities. The leaders were corrupt. The land was full of violence, theft and sexual perversion. (The Jewish historian Josephus [A.D. 37-100] documents the wickedness of the nation in his histories of the Jewish people). The idea that the Jewish nation has suffered as an atonement for the world may appeal to Jewish pride and nationalism but it cannot be supported by Scripture. It is an exegetical and theological impossibility.

Third, the passages which shed light on Isaiah 53 all point to Jesus Christ. Psalm 22 describes Jesus’ crucifixion, “Many bulls have surrounded Me; strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. They gape at Me with their mouths, like a raging and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots” (vs. 12-18). This portion of Scripture is a clear description of Christ’s atoning death. He was surrounded by His enemies who stared at Him and mocked Him. Crucifixion pulls the bones out of joint and leads to severe dehydration. Our Lord’s hands and feet were pierced by spikes when He was nailed to the cross. Roman soldiers gambled for Jesus’ garments. This passage cannot refer to David or to the nation of Israel. It can only refer to Jesus Christ. He is the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. When Psalm 16:10 says that “You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption” it clearly speaks of Jesus Christ. David died and his body decayed in the tomb. All the Jews throughout history have also suffered decay. But Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day. Our Lord did not suffer decay but rather ascended to sit at the right hand of God. “The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’” (Ps. 110:1).

All the Jewish attempts at refuting the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ have totally failed. The arguments of Jewish apologists reveal a very perverted understanding of the central

teachings of Scripture. They reveal minds deluded by human tradition. Like the apostle Paul we earnestly pray and desire that the Jews will return to the true faith of their fathers (e.g., Moses, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and trust in the Jewish Messiah—Jesus of Nazareth. “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom. 10:1-4).

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