

**Christian Ministry Unit 1**  
**Introduction to Theology**  
**Week 4 – Substitutionary Atonement**

**Introduction**

For the next three weeks, we will be studying soteriology—the study of salvation. Specifically, we will address three questions:

- THIS WEEK: How did God make our salvation possible?
- WEEK 5: Is our salvation secure, or can we lose it?
- WEEK 6: Do we choose our salvation, or does God determine in advance who will be saved?

While all major world religions are concerned with salvation, they differ on two fundamental issues:

- What is humanity’s biggest problem?

Animistic religions

Pantheistic religions

Monotheistic religions

- What is the solution to this problem?

All other major world religions except for Christianity

Biblical Christianity

The Bible teaches that God makes salvation available to us through substitutionary atonement. “Substitutionary atonement” means that *God in his love provides a blameless substitute to bear his righteous judgment of our sins*. NOTE:

- Substitutionary atonement is a “given” in the Bible.
- God was not *obligated* in any way (by anything in us or outside himself) to provide atonement for us; it is a free, unmerited gift extended by him (1 Jn. 4:10; Gal. 2:21).
- Both the Bible and animistic/tribal religions emphasize the offering of sacrifices, but they view these sacrifices in very different ways:

TRIBAL RELIGIONS	THE BIBLE
<b>The gods' wrath is arbitrary and capricious.</b>	<b>God's wrath is rational and dependable.</b>
<b>Sacrifice is often meeting a god's physical need (hunger, sensuality).</b>	<b>Sacrifice satisfies God's righteous wrath upon our sins.</b>
<b>The worshipper innovates ways to appease the gods.</b>	<b>God ordains and prescribes the way to atone for sin.</b>
<b>The sacrifice is an animal, vegetable, mineral, or a human.</b>	<b>The sacrifice is ultimately God himself in human form.</b>

### **Progressive revelation of substitutionary atonement**

God revealed his plan of salvation *gradually* over time. He taught this theme with increasing specificity throughout the Old Testament, through hundreds of specific predictions and foreshadowing types,<sup>1</sup> so that that the New Testament can say that Jesus' substitutionary death was "according to the scriptures" (see 1 Cor. 15:3; Lk. 24:26,27,44-47). Key Old Testament passages include:

#### **BEFORE JESUS' DEATH:**

*Clothing for Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21):*

**SUMMARY:** *Death of animals provided to cover our shame and guilt?*

*Cain and Abel's offerings (Gen. 4:3-5):*

**SUMMARY:** *God instructed humans to approach him through faith and a sacrifice that he prescribes.*

*Noah's sacrifice (Gen. 8:20,21):*

**SUMMARY:** *God extends mercy to sinful human beings through his chosen sacrifice.*

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<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive list and brief explanation of these passages, see "History of Salvation in the Old Testament: Preparing the Way for Christ," *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), pp. 2635-2661.

*Abraham's offering of Isaac (Gen. 22:1-18):*

- 22:14 is a prediction that God would one day provide his sacrifice on Mount Moriah. Mount Moriah is the site of Jerusalem, the Temple (2 Chronicles 3:1), and Jesus' death.
- God, like Abraham, offered up "his son, his only son, whom he loved" (22:2; Jn. 3:16)
- Jesus, like Isaac, in obedience to his Father carried the instrument of his own death to the site (22:6; Jn. 19:17).
- Jesus offered himself voluntarily in faith, just like Isaac likely did (22:7-9).
- Isaac's deliverance from death was a prophetic type of Jesus' resurrection (22:5; Heb. 11:19).
- Through this event, God explained further *how* he would make his blessing available to all the nations—through the sacrifice of his own Son (22:16-18).
- Jesus was likely the "angel of the Lord" who stopped Abraham from killing Isaac (22:12; Jn. 8:56?).

NOTE: God later made it very clear that he detested child sacrifice as a form of religious worship (Lev. 18:21; Jer. 32:35). It is not, however, morally objectionable for God to require the life of sinful human beings.

SUMMARY: *The location (Moriah) of the future sacrifice; the identity (only Son) of God's Substitute; a picture of the horrible cost of this blessing; a picture of Jesus' resurrection*

*The Passover meal (Ex. 12:1-14):*

- The sacrifice must be *without physical defect* (12:5).
- The sacrifice must be *killed* (12:6). The *blood* of the sacrifice (proof of its death) is why God's judgment "passes over" despite their guilt (12:7,22,23).
- The Israelites appropriated God's provision by faith by displaying the blood, eating in haste (unleavened bread), and dressing in readiness.
- God commanded that they celebrate Passover yearly as a memorial (Ex. 12:14,26,27). He also commanded them to celebrate Passover *in the land* (12:25), and eventually *in Jerusalem* (Deut. 16:5,6; 2 Chron. 6:6).

SUMMARY: *Substitute must be without defect; individuals must place faith in the death of the substitute to avoid judgment; location of sacrifice (Jerusalem).*

*The Day of Atonement (Lev. 16\*\*):*

- Aaron's sons (16:1) were killed because they offered "strange fire" (Lev. 10:1-3). We may come into God's presence *only* in the way which he prescribes.
- The high priest was the only one who could enter the Holy of Holies, and he had to dress and bathe in a way which symbolized purity (16:4). The high priest had to offer a sacrifice for his own sins (16:11), which was one of the inferiorities of this symbolic system (Heb. 7:26-28).
- The Ark of the Covenant (16:7-10,15-17) was a family cooler-sized box, the only furniture in the Holy of Holies, a cube-shaped room in the center of the tabernacle. The phrase "Ark of the Covenant" literally means the "box of the evidence"—it contained evidence of God's indictment against their/our sins:

MANNA:

AARON'S ROD:

TEN COMMANDMENTS:

The Ark was covered by a lid called "the mercy seat." Two cherubim were attached to the mercy seat, one on either end. Their downward look apparently symbolized God's focus on the sins of the people.

- Two goats were used as sin-offerings representing the nation of Israel (16:5). The high priest killed one of the goats and offered its blood on the mercy seat ("mercy" means literally "to cover" or "to atone") to atone for the nation's sins that year (16:16,17). After emerging alive from the Holy of Holies (signifying God's acceptance of the sacrifice), he then laid his hands on the other goat and confessed Israel's sins (symbolizing the identification of their guilt with the sacrifice) and chased the animal off to the wilderness (symbolizing that the guilt of their sins had been sent off because of the atoning death of the substitute) (16:20-22).
- The fact that this sacrifice had to be reenacted year after year indicated both its importance and the inferiority of the system (Heb. 10:1-4).

*SUMMARY: Greater development of separation caused by sin; removal of guilt through the death of a substitute; the priest is a mediator who must be "clean;" the emergence of the priest from Holy of Holies signifies God's acceptance of the sacrifice*

*The Anonymous Servant (Isa. 52:13-53:12\*\*)<sup>2</sup>*: This passage shows that God never viewed the animal sacrifices as efficacious in themselves. They were always a prophetic picture of God's chosen Servant—a blameless Jewish person whose voluntary death would pay for the sins of both Jews and Gentiles. Note the repeated emphasis on substitutionary atonement:

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<sup>2</sup> This passage is the culmination of four passages about the Anonymous Servant (42:1-9, 49:1-13, 50:4-11).

- 52:14,15 “. . . he will sprinkle many nations . . .”
- 53:5 “. . . pierced through for our transgressions . . . crushed for our iniquities . . . by his scourging we are healed . . .”
- 53:6 “. . . the Lord caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him . . .”
- 53:8 “. . . he was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due . . .”
- 53:10 “. . . if he would render himself as a guilt offering . . .”
- 53:11 “. . . my servant will justify the many, as he will bear their iniquities . . .”
- 53:12 “. . . he himself bore the sin of many . . .”

NOTE: Why is the Servant described in the past tense?

NOTE: What about the view that the Servant is the nation of Israel?

SUMMARY: *God will send a blameless human to atone for humanity's sin; he will die and be resurrected.*

*John the Baptist's description of Jesus' mission (Jn. 1:29):*

SUMMARY: *Jesus' substitutionary death was his main mission*

*Jesus' claim about his mission (Mk. 10:45):*

SUMMARY: *Jesus' substitutionary death was his main mission*

*Jesus interprets the Passover meal (Matt. 26:26-30):* Understanding how the Passover was observed yields additional insight into Jesus' statements.

- The head of the household normally passed the bread out in silence—but Jesus spoke (26:28), explaining that it represented his death which would inaugurate the New Covenant (Lk. 22:20) that was promised in Jer. 31:31-34.
- They normally drank four cups—but Jesus drank only three. Each cup represented a different phase in Israel's deliverance from Egypt (Ex. 6:6,7). The third cup was called the “cup of redemption,” and Jesus explained its significance in 26:28. The fourth cup was called the “cup of consummation” looking forward to God's future kingdom, but Jesus refused to drink this cup until his return at the end of the age (26:29; see Isa. 25:6-9).

- They customarily ended this meal by singing Ps. 116-118. Note especially Ps. 118:6-9,17,18,22,23, which speaks prophetically of Jesus' death and resurrection.

SUMMARY: *Jesus' death is the ultimate fulfillment of the Passover meal, and the means through which God brings the blessings of the New Covenant.*

### **AT JESUS' DEATH:**

Jesus was crucified on the Day of Passover, as the ultimate Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7).

One of Jesus' last statements from the cross was "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30), which announced that his death fulfilled God's plan of substitutionary atonement.

Matt. 27:45-54 narrates three unique events that demonstrated that Jesus' death was an atoning sacrifice:

- The land was covered with darkness (27:45)
- The Temple curtain was torn at the moment of Jesus' death (27:51)
- Dead believers were raised from the dead after Jesus' resurrection (27:52,53)

### **AFTER JESUS' DEATH:**

Many, many passages in Acts through Revelation expound on the substitutionary meaning of Jesus' death.

Rom. 3:21-28 is one of the clearest and most comprehensive statements in the Bible concerning substitutionary atonement:

- 3:21 says that the Old Testament clearly taught and predicted Jesus' atoning death.
- 3: 23,24\* explains our dilemma and Jesus' atoning death as the solution.
- 3:25 explains that the sins of the Old Testament believers were *not* forgiven by the animal sacrifices.
- 3:26 summarizes substitutionary atonement as the way God can accept sinful people while remaining righteous himself.
- 3:22,25,26,27,28 emphasizes the necessity of faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice.
- Note the three terms Paul uses to describe the freedom we receive through Jesus' substitutionary atonement (see also Gal. 5:1):

TERM	PASSAGES	HUMAN SETTING	MEANING	SPIRITUAL RESULT
JUSTIFICATION	Rom. 3:24	Law-court	Acquitted; declared innocent	<i>Freedom from guilt</i>
REDEMPTION	Rom. 3:24	Bondage in Egypt; slave-market	Delivered by payment of ransom	<i>Freedom from bondage</i>
PROPITIATION	Rom. 3:25	Temple	Satisfaction of wrath	<i>Freedom from judgment</i>

Heb. 9:11-14,23-26 contrasts the *temporary* and *insufficient* sacrificial system of the Old Testament with Jesus' atoning death:

	LEVITICAL SYSTEM (Old Covenant)	JESUS' DEATH (New Covenant)
WHO?	<i>Sinful priest</i>	<i>Christ/Messiah</i>
WHERE?	<i>Earthly tabernacle; temple</i>	<i>Heaven; the presence of God</i>
WHAT?	<i>Animal sacrifices</i>	<i>His own blood</i>
WHEN?	<i>Year after year</i>	<i>Once for all</i>
RESULT?	<i>Ceremonial cleansing only</i>	<i>Full salvation</i>

- **The Old Covenant is now obsolete.**

## Summary

- **Substitutionary atonement is the heart of biblical theology/soteriology. Apart from it, there is no salvation.**
- **People have *always* been saved by grace through faith (Heb. 11:2), and always through Jesus' death.**

## Memory Verses

**Leviticus 16\*\*** – The Day of Atonement is a clear example of substitutionary atonement for the nation of Israel.

**Isaiah 53\*\*** – This passage makes it clear that the Old Testament sacrificial system must be fulfilled by a Person—the Servant of the Lord.

**Romans 3:23,24\*** – All humans fall justly under God's condemnation because of their sins, but all humans are acceptable to God if they receive Jesus' atoning death for their sins.