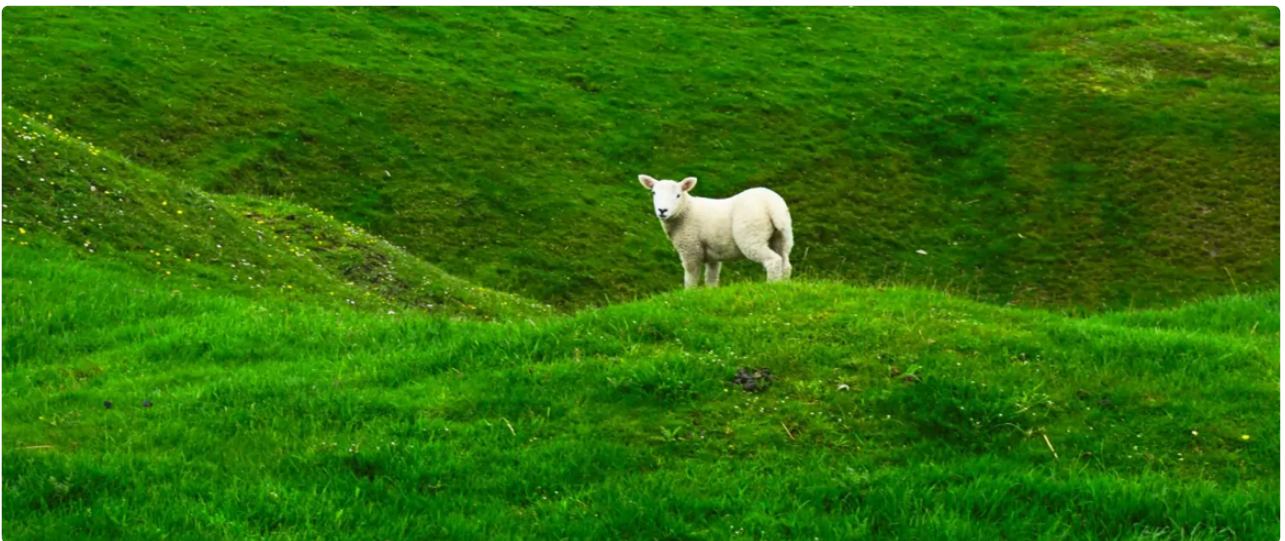


# THE FINAL ATONING SACRIFICE



DAY 4



Moses, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, described the importance of

sacrifice in Leviticus 17:11, *“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.”* During the Ten Days of Awe, we understand that we are marching toward the holiest day of the Jewish year, the day on which the most important sacrifice of the year—for the sins of the nation of Israel—would take place. This season of the year, initiated by the sounding of the shofar, is consummated with the Yom Kippur sacrifice.

However, the idea of sacrifice and blood atonement is not easy for us twenty-first-century people to understand. Why did the Lord, our God, require the blood of bulls, rams, and lambs as the price to fellowship with Him? Part of the answer is the concept that sacrifice includes a cost to someone—a cost that reminds us there is a price for sin.

Disobedience to the Lord degrades our relationships with God and one other. But there is more to it, and broken relationships call our hearts and minds to consider the biblical principle of substitution. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, and until the destruction of the Temple in the year 70 AD, the principle of substitutionary sacrifice was understood to restore a balance that the presence of sin had upset. The innocent substitute acts as the means through which *shalom* (peace or completeness) is reestablished between the sinner and God. Therefore, the primary purpose of sacrifice is to allow the estranged person to be drawn once more into unbroken fellowship with God.[1]

However, traditional post-Temple Judaism has a problem, and understands that there is something missing! Since the destruction of the Temple, sacrifice could no longer be made because the one and true altar in the Temple was gone. How, then, do Jewish people find reconciliation with God?

The sages declared that, in the days without the Temple, Judaism rested upon three pillars—prayer, repentance, and acts of mercy. However, at the time, these three elements were thought to work in conjunction with the sacrifices. Today, because we do not have the Temple or an altar, these three are actually said to take the place of substitutionary sacrifice.

Yet, Jewish memory is not so easy to erase, which is why some observant Jews carry out an obscure ritual called *kapporot* (“covering”). For this ritual, the head of

the household will take a live kosher hen or rooster and slaughter it. He will swing the body around his head three times while reciting, "This is my exchange, my substitute, my atonement; this rooster (or hen) shall go to its death, but I shall go to a good, long life and to peace." The fowl, which is sometimes stuffed with coins, is given to the poor for food.[2]

For followers of Yeshua, neither sacrifices in the Temple nor any other means of reconciliation are needed beyond that of Messiah, whose once-and-for-all sacrifice is more than sufficient to satisfy our need for atonement, provided we receive this priceless gift through our faith in Him. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews reminds us:

*But when Messiah appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Messiah, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. (Hebrews 9:11–15)*

[1] "Jewish Practices and Rituals: Sacrifices and Offerings (Korbanot)," Jewish Virtual Library, accessed September 18, 2014, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/korbanot.html>.

[2] Richard Schwartz, "The Custom of Kapparot," Jewish Virtual Library, accessed September 18, 2014, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/kapparot.html>.

### **Scripture Meditation:**

I encourage you to meditate on the above passages of Scripture to help you again appreciate the wonder of God's love in sending His Son to be our once-for-all atonement for sin. He did for us what we could never do for ourselves, and whether you are Jewish or part of some other religious faith, if you rely upon your own efforts to please God, you will assuredly fail. We know this in the depth of our souls. We understand that we need our guilt lifted and it is only through the power of His sacrificial atonement that we can be forgiven and enjoy peace with God forever more.

### **Today's prayer:**

*Abba*, thank You for the once-for-all sacrifice of Yeshua the Messiah! Please fill us anew with the wonder of the love that You showed when You gave your one and only son to atone for our sin. Help the whole world—Jew and Gentile alike—to recognize how utterly incapable we are of earning salvation for ourselves and to receive what has been purchased at so high a cost. We praise You for your faithfulness to wipe away all our guilt, forgive us, and give us *shalom*!

