

## Temple and Sacrifice

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In his magnificent book entitled *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Philip Yancey struggles with the Ascension of Christ:

So many times in the course of writing this book I have felt like one of those disciples, peering intently at a blank blue sky. I look for some sign of Jesus, some visual clue . . . Like the disciples' eyes, mine ache for a pure glimpse of the One who ascended. Why, I ask again, did he have to leave? . . .

I have concluded, in fact, that the Ascension represents my greatest struggle of faith—not whether it happened, but why. It challenges me more than the problem of pain, more than the difficulty of harmonizing science and the Bible, more than belief in the Resurrection and other miracles. (Yancey 1995: 227,229).

Like most Christians, Yancey has little idea of what Jesus has been doing in heaven, aside from waiting. His prolonged absence is a mystery.

This is where Seventh-day Adventists come in. It is our privilege and special contribution to put people in touch with the post-Ascension Jesus by showing them how the Bible plainly reveals His on-going and intimate interaction with their lives. According to the book of Hebrews, Christ is working as our perfect and perfectly empathetic High Priest in God's heavenly sanctuary, continuing the restoration which He began at the Cross (Heb 4:14-16; 7:1-10:25).

Christ's present ministry in the heavenly sanctuary is illuminated by the prophetic rituals of the ancient Israelite sanctuary (Heb 8-9). There are no topics more relevant to Christians today than the profound ideas conveyed through the sanctuary and its services, namely, the *presence* of God, the *power* of His salvation through Jesus Christ, and His *promise* of restoration to immortality and full intimacy with him. The sanctuary is worthy of our highest attention because it is about Jesus where He is *now*.

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The Adventist sanctuary doctrine is not merely a curious relic of our pioneers, to which we should cling from respect for our historical tradition. It is our access to Jesus, our dynamic model of righteousness by faith and our revelation of the character of God. The sanctuary answers our questions about salvation and keeps in proper balance the nearness and transcendence of God, the “legal” and experiential aspects of atonement, and the successive phases of atonement.

Since the aspects of balance just mentioned address areas of theology which are currently debated, the remainder of this paper examines these aspects by investigating the ancient Israelite sanctuary and its services against its ancient Near Eastern background. While the worship of the Israelites had significant elements in common with that of non-Israelites, the distinctive features of the Israelite ritual system highlight the nearness and transcendence of God, legal and experiential atonement, and phases of atonement.

### **Nearness and Transcendence of God**

Gen 1:27 tells us that God made man, including male and female, in His own image. We are like God, but we are not the same as God. This tension in nature is paralleled by a tension in encounter. Even after the human fall into sin limited the divine-human encounter, God has drawn near through assuming human form (Gen 18; Judg 6:11-23; 13:3-20), through the Shekinah at the Israelite sanctuary (Exod 40:34-38), through the incarnation of Christ (Matt 1:18-23; John 1:14) and through the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-18; 16:12-15). But amidst all this nearness, God reminds us of His transcendence:

It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. (1 Tim 6:16; NRSV here and in subsequent biblical quotations unless indicated otherwise).

God interacts with us, but this is no ordinary encounter. For our interactions with God to have divine efficacy and power, we should always, within the contexts of our respective cultures, acknowledge that while God makes Himself familiar, we must maintain our sense of awe rather than slipping into undue familiarity.

The Israelite sanctuary provides one of the clearest expressions of the balance between God’s nearness and transcendence as it impacts divine-human interactions. The following paragraphs show that while ancient Near Eastern people commonly believed that their deities resided among them in temples, the unique residence of the Shekinah in the Israelite sanctuary made a unique statement about God’s transcendent nearness.

In the last two centuries, archaeologists have unearthed a wealth of textual material relevant to the religious life of ancient Near Eastern people, such as

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Sumerians, Babylonians, Hittites, Canaanites, and Egyptians.<sup>1</sup> Like the Israelites, these peoples believed their well-being depended upon healthy relationships with their deities. For example, a Sumerian hymn to the goddess Nanshe (c. 2100 B.C.) refers to the benefits of Nanshe's presence among the people of Lagash and the surrounding area:

The living quarters of the land prosper in her presence . . .  
Does not propriety shine brightly in the presence of the lady? . . .  
In the presence of Nanshe abundance triples in Lagash . . .  
(lines 12, 32, 33; Heimpel 1981: 83, 85; cp. e.g. Deut 28:11)

Ancient Near Easterners practiced some forms of religious expression which have continued until modern times, even in our own religion. These include prayers, recitations, hymns, and symbolic ceremonies (ed. Pritchard 1969). Through such expressions ancient people believed they interacted with transcendent beings who lived and moved in the heavens, in the air, on earth, in the region of subterranean freshwater, or in the netherworld (see e.g. Oppenheim 1964: 194-197). They could learn about the origins, powers, and exploits of their gods from various sources, including myths (ed. Pritchard 1969: 3-155).

It was not enough for ancient people to worship their deities from a distance. They desired tangible evidence of divine presence dwelling among them and believed it was their duty to provide temples as palaces for their gods. Thus, the Sumerian "Cylinder A" claims that Gudea, the Ur III period governor of Lagash (c. 2141-2122 B.C.), followed divine orders in building a temple for the god Ningirsu (ed. Pritchard 1969: 268). Similarly, Exod 25:8 tells us that YHWH<sup>2</sup> ordered the Israelites to build Him a sanctuary so that He could dwell among them.

The idea that the Israelite portable sanctuary was the earthly dwelling of YHWH was conveyed by its designation as *miškān*, "tabernacle" (Exod 25:9), from the root *škn*, of which the verb means "dwell" (Exod 25:8). The postbiblical word Shekinah, referring to the resident divine presence (Jastrow 1975: 1573), is a noun derived from the same root.

The dwelling function of the tabernacle was reflected in its architectural layout (Exod 25-27, 30). There were two rooms:

1. An inner "throne room" containing the ark of the covenant over which YHWH was enthroned (Num 7:89; 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15; Isa 37:16).

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<sup>1</sup>If the sheer number of religious texts is any indication, these people must have been very religious. For example, of the thousands of Hittite texts which have been discovered, the largest genre consists of descriptions of religious festivals.

<sup>2</sup>This is the personal name Yahweh/Jehovah, written in Hebrew with four consonants (YHWH) for which the original vowels are not known with certainty.

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2. An outer “living room” containing several kinds of items which were found in residences of well-to-do people: a table for food, a lampstand, and an incense burner to sweeten the atmosphere.<sup>3</sup>

The layout of the portable tabernacle and the permanent temple which superseded it (1 Kgs 6-7) showed remarkable similarities to other ancient Near Eastern shrines. For example, archaeologists have found Syrian temples which are like Solomon’s in that they each have an inner room or area (i.e., holy of holies), a main hall (i.e., holy place) and a portico (Fritz 1987).

Ceremonies at the Israelite sanctuary reinforced the concept that YHWH was in residence. Regular (*tāmîd*) rituals performed by the priests every morning and evening constituted the work of servants for their Lord (Haran 1985: 216-219). These rituals included tending lamps (Exod 27:20-21; Lev 24:1-4), burning incense (Exod 30:7, 8), and performing a regular burnt offering with its cereal and drink accompaniments (Num 28:1-8). Thus the divine king of Israel (Num 23:21) was treated to a significant extent as if He were a human king.

Not only did YHWH reside at a sanctuary made by human hands and receive service from human priests; He even received token offerings of human food. Sacrifices offered at the outer altar before YHWH were called the *lehem*, “food” of God (Lev 21:8, 17, 21, 22; 22:25; cf. Num 28:2), and *lehem (hap)pānîm*, the “bread of the presence,” was regularly placed on the golden table in the holy place (Exod 25:30; Lev 24:5-9).

Quasi-human treatment of YHWH paralleled ceremonies outside Israel, where deities represented by their idols received service by human beings. Laying out bread before deities was an early kind of ritual, appearing, for example, in a Sumerian inscription of Urukagina of Lagaš,<sup>4</sup> whom J. Cooper dates a little before 2350 B.C. (Cooper 1983: 60). That is most of a millennium before the Israelite sanctuary was constructed. The regular placing of bread on tables or stands, which is also attested among the Babylonians, Egyptians, and Hittites, was part of the daily care and feeding of the gods (Kingsbury 1963; Blackman 1918-19; Hoffner 1974: 216). The Babylonians were known to lay out loaves in multiples of twelve, a number to which they apparently attached astral significance (Zimmern 1901: 94-95; cp. Lev 24:5-6). In addition to being served food and drink, such as meat, bread, and beer, twice every day (Blome 1934: 249-250; ed. Pritchard 1969: 343-345; Oppenheim 1964: 188-192), idols were washed, clothed, and in some cases even provided with makeup paint (Goetze 1957: 162-163; Erman 1907: 46).

Outside Israel, deities represented by their idols were regarded as actually consuming human food and drink. For example, Oppenheim describes food consumption by Mesopotamian deities:

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<sup>3</sup>On incense in non-cultic use see Nielsen 1986: 90.

<sup>4</sup>Ukg. 4-5, x:14-15ff, transliterated and translated by Steible 1982: 304-305.

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Food was placed in front of the image, which was apparently assumed to consume it by merely looking at it, and beverages were poured out before it for the same purpose. A variant of this pattern consisted of presenting the offered food with a solemn ritual gesture, passing it in a swinging motion before the staring eyes of the image. (Oppenheim 1964: 191-192).

In the Hittite cult, consumption of bread by a deity could be symbolized by breaking the bread. (Hoffner 1974: 217).

Food consumption by non-Israelite deities was regarded as filling a real need: The gods were at least to some extent dependent upon human service and sustenance. For example, in the Old Babylonian epic *Atrahasis*, when the flood annihilated the human population, the gods suffered terribly from hunger and thirst. Then when *Atrahasis* offered his sacrifice after the flood (cp. Gen 8:20-21), the gods smelled the offering and crowded around like flies.<sup>5</sup> Since humans were at the same time dependent upon the gods, divine-human relationships could be characterized as symbiotic (Gane 1992a: 191).

Unlike other deities, YHWH was not viewed as consuming the food set before him in order to satisfy His hunger. The “food” on the outer altar was burned up and YHWH enjoyed only the smoke (e.g. Lev 1:9). Although the “bread of the presence” was not burned, the following aspects of the ritual show that YHWH distanced Himself from excessive anthropomorphism by denying His need for human food (Gane 1992a).

1. Unlike other regular rituals, which did not carry the same danger that YHWH would be viewed as consuming human food, the bread was arranged only once a week (Lev 24:8).

2. YHWH assigned the bread to His priests when it was removed from the table at the end of the week (Lev 24:9). Thus, He did not merely have a slow metabolic rate; He did not consume the bread at all.

3. YHWH appropriated the frankincense offered with the bread as His *'azkārāh*, “memorial portion,” at the same time the priests received the bread (Lev 24:7; Gane 1992a: 196-197). Thus, when the priests ate the bread this was not secondary utilization following consumption by the deity, which took place in the Hittite cult (ed. Pritchard 1969: 208).

The Israelite bread ritual did not simply deny that YHWH needs human food (cp. Ps. 50:12-13); it indicated the opposite idea: YHWH the Creator feeds Israel (Gane 1992a: 199-203). The ritual took place on the Sabbath (Lev 24:8), the memorial of Creation (Gen 2:2-3; Exod 20:11; 31:16-17). To strengthen the Sabbath connection, Lev 24:8 calls the twelve loaves an “eternal covenant,” that is a token of the covenant between YHWH and the twelve Israelite tribes. The only other thing which YHWH called an “eternal covenant” between Himself and the Israelites during the wilderness period was the Sabbath (Exod 31:16).

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<sup>5</sup>Atrah...asis III v:30-36. For transliteration and translation, see Lambert and Millard 1969.

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Within the framework of the Sabbath and the covenant, the bread, i.e. basic food (cp. Ecclesiasticus 29:21), constituted a token acknowledgment of the fact that YHWH as Israel's Creator-in-residence continued to provide for and sustain His people (cf. Ps 145:15-16; Job 12:10; Dan 5:23). But God wants His people to enjoy more than maintenance of mortal existence. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life . . . Whoever eats of this bread will live forever" (John 6:48,51).

We have already found that the rituals of the Israelite sanctuary uniquely preserved YHWH's transcendence by denying that He needs human food. But there was an even more striking difference between the Israelite sanctuary and other shrines: The Israelite sanctuary contained no material representation of Israel's deity. The Israelites did not need idols, because unlike other gods, YHWH drew near to them (Deut 4:7), especially in the form of the Shekinah (Exod 40:34-38).

For normative biblical religion, idolatrous worship of YHWH was ruled out because no human being living on earth has seen His face (Deut 4:15-18). Thus, an idol can only be an inaccurate representation which fails to do justice to His transcendent glory.

There was another problem with an idol of YHWH: It would deny the sufficiency of the Shekinah, as if YHWH did not really dwell among His people. Even before the sanctuary was built, it was when the people lost their faith in the assurance of YHWH's presence manifest in the cloud on Mt. Sinai (Exod 24:15-18) that they made and worshipped a "golden calf" to give them false assurance (Exod 32:1-6).<sup>6</sup>

Now that deity has become flesh and has tabernacled among us (John 1:14), one who denies the incarnation of Christ in any way is "antichrist" (1 John 2:22; 2 John 1:7). In Old Testament times, an idolatrous Israelite was the equivalent of antichrist because he/she implicitly denied the Shekinah by making a false substitute.

At the heart of Israelite worship, the sanctuary and its services expressed the central concept of YHWH's religion: The awesome Creator desires an intimate relationship with His created beings. Other ancient Near Eastern cults were believed to have resident deities. But the Israelite sanctuary with its Shekinah was unique in the way it simultaneously affirmed the nearness and transcendence of God, *without compromising either*.

If we ever doubt the importance of theological balance, we should remember how YHWH in His sanctuary walked a theological tightrope to provide assurance for His people without having them fall into idolatry. The ancient Israelites

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<sup>6</sup>Due to Moses' first intercession, YHWH did not destroy the Israelites or totally abort the covenant (Exod 32:7-14). But because the people had denied His presence, He would not be present (Exod 32:34; 33:1-5). The punishment would fit the crime (cp. Judg 10:10-14; Prov 1:24-31). It is implied that even though YHWH had already given Moses the directions for building the tabernacle (Exod 25-31:11), He threatened to call off the whole project (Moberly 1983: 63) because idolatry and Shekinah were mutually exclusive.

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had much in common with other peoples, just as Seventh-day Adventists have much in common with other Christians. When the Israelites neglected and then abandoned the unique balancing aspects which made their religion distinctive, they lost their reason for existence and their identity as a people. May the Lord save us from that kind of experience!

#### **Legal and Experiential Atonement**

Once YHWH was installed in His sanctuary (Lev 9), His continuing residence there was not guaranteed unconditionally. The Israelites were obliged to recognize His benevolent sovereignty by providing him with offerings daily and on special occasions (Num 28-29). Burnt offerings performed daily and on festivals and purification offerings on festivals carried an additional meaning: They provided “atonement” for the Israelites (cp. Lev 1:4; Num 28:22, 30; 29:5).<sup>7</sup> Thus, they addressed a problematic dimension of the divine-human relationship: while YHWH was perfect, the Israelites were faulty.

While the Shekinah brought YHWH near, the fact that He had to veil Himself within a cloud (Exod 40:34-38) and limit access to His presence within the sanctuary precincts (Lev 16:2) shows that intimacy was not full and ideal, as when Adam and Eve met face-to-face with their Creator in the garden (Gen 2-3). While the sanctuary provided a controlled setting for divine-human encounter, its very existence was necessitated by the faulty human condition resulting from the Fall into sin (Gen 3). When perfection and complete intimacy are again restored through Christ’s atoning ministry in the heavenly temple, we will no longer need mediation involving a temple (see Rev 21:22).

In a world of sin and death, having God’s presence requires atonement. This is clear in Lev 16:16: The high priest was to atone for the sanctuary, where YHWH resided among a faulty people. The condition and fate of the Israelites was inextricably linked with the sanctuary, which provided them with access to God in His “tent of meeting” (cp. Lev 1:1). If their sins accumulated too much in the sanctuary, YHWH would be forced to abandon them to destruction, as vividly depicted by Ezekiel (Ezek 9:3; 10:4, 18-19; 11:22-23; Hasel 1981: 119; Milgrom 1991: 258; Schwartz 1995: 21).

The idea that YHWH could abandon His people was paralleled outside Israel. For example, the Moabite stone refers to the god Chemosh becoming angry with the Moabites so that he allowed them to be dominated by the Israelites (ed. Pritchard 1969: 320).

Outside Israel, restoring a relationship with a deity who had become angry for some reason was similar in some ways to Israelite atonement with YHWH. People could make amends for wrong-doing by reforming their behavior and/or

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<sup>7</sup>While the festivals continue to teach us and the antitypical fulfillment of the “feast of tabernacles” is yet in the future, we cannot literally keep the Old Testament festivals because we lack the earthly sanctuary and its rituals, which were central to their observance (Lev 23; Num 28-29).

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by restoring the temple and ritual service of the deity (ed. Pritchard 1969: 315-316). But there were crucial differences between Israelite and non-Israelite atonement:

1. YHWH held the Israelites to a higher standard of life. Not only were they responsible for their deliberate offenses (see e.g. Num 15:30-31), but also their inadvertent violations (Lev 4:2, 13, 22, 27; Num 15:22-29) and even their attitudes (Exod 20:17; Lev 19:18).

2. Maintenance of YHWH's presence and favor required much more atonement than was necessary for non-Israelite gods. Even regular and festival offerings to YHWH made atonement (see above). Thus, the Israelites were continually obliged to acknowledge that they were faulty even when YHWH was not angry. The most dramatic acknowledgment was the high priest's confession of the sins of all Israel over the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:21). By contrast, when the Babylonian king came before the god Marduk on the fifth day of the Akītu Festival as the representative of his people, he uttered a self-righteous plea of his own innocence (ed. Pritchard 1969: 334; Milgrom 1991: 1069).

3. In Israel, emphasis on atonement included a unique form of ritual expression: application of blood to parts of the sanctuary (Lev 1:5, 11; 4:6, 7, 17, 18, 25, 30, etc.). In Babylon and Egypt, sacrifices were presentation offerings which were placed before deities as food (see above). In Syria/Palestine and Greece, some sacrifices were similar to those of Israel in that they were designated by similar terms and involved slaying animals, burning up parts of the animals on altars, and in some cases eating some of the meat in cultic meals (Selman 1995: 97-102). But only in Israel was blood manipulated by priests as a special instrument of atonement (Kedar-Kopfstein 1978: 239, 247-248). It is true that draining the blood would make an offering to YHWH kosher (Gane 1992b: 100). But the blood was not simply disposed of (cp. Lev 4:7, 18); it was assigned to YHWH by applying it to His altar to ransom/atone for life (Lev 17:11; Schwartz 1991: 52-59).

It was not enough for the Israelites to have a "legal" work of ransom done for them by the priests. Their participation was required so that they would experience acknowledging and turning away from their evil and a restored relationship with God. A person who sinned or had a ritual impurity was required to take the initiative in utilizing the remedy which YHWH prescribed. Failure to do so constituted rebellious, wanton neglect for which no sacrificial expiation was available and the divine penalties were to die (Lev 15:31) or be "cut off" (Num 19:13, 20), i.e. to suffer extirpation of one's line of descendants (Wold 1978).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>See e.g. Lev 20:2-3, where "cutting off" is in addition to capital punishment by stoning. The punished person would not even be history! For an Israelite, losing the descendants through which in a sense one's existence continued would have been a fate worse than death (cp. Deut 25:5-10;

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Some have explained Christ's atonement as including only a legal/forensic dimension or, on the other extreme, only an experiential dimension. Such theories do not take into account the ancient sacrifices which pointed forward to Christ's sacrifice. In Leviticus and Numbers there is no room for debate: Legal and experiential elements were integrated and essential to the atoning process. Neither could be safely denied or put out of functional existence by neglect or de-emphasis.

Even on the Day of Atonement, the day of legal atonement *par excellence*, the experiential element was essential for the Israelites to receive atonement. Even though they were not required to come to the sanctuary, they were obliged to identify with the cleansing of the sanctuary on their behalf by "afflicting themselves," i.e. practicing self-denial, and abstaining from work (Lev 16:29, 31). There were "legal" penalties for neglect of these observances: divine extirpation and destruction (Lev 23:29-30). The reason for self-denial and keeping sabbath is given in Lev 16:30:

"For on this day shall atonement be made *for you*, to cleanse *you*; from all *your sins you* shall be clean before the Lord" (emphasis supplied).

Do you get the impression that the cleansing of the sanctuary is relevant for *you*? If the high priest did his work properly the sanctuary would be cleansed, but unless the people entered into the experience they would not receive the benefit promised by Lev 16:30.

Atonement is a dynamic transformation process through which God's people are restored to a proper relationship with Him by the means He has provided (Col 1:19-23; cp. Titus 3:4-7).<sup>9</sup> The "legal" element is essential because sin creates "debt" which must be paid and which is completely beyond reach of human capability to pay. This is why Jesus instructed us to pray, ". . . forgive us our debts" (Matt 6:12). Debt is a legal matter. If you doubt that, check the fine print on your mortgage. The experiential element is indispensable because human beings cannot experience restoration of relationships against their will. But although repentance involves the human response to God, the ability to respond is a divine gift (Acts 5:31). There is no "righteousness by works" here.

The following paragraphs will explore legal and experiential atonement through consideration of the following questions:

1. Did some ancient sacrifices emphasize legal or experiential aspects more than others?

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Ruth 4). At least to some extent this penalty seems to foreshadow the final Second Death (Rev 20:14). Notice the Messiah is "cut off" in Daniel 9:26! This seems to indicate that Christ suffered for us the equivalent of the Second Death (compare Rev 20:14).

<sup>9</sup>Cp. White 1955: 114—"God's forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness *for* sin, but reclaiming *from* sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart."

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2. Did an Israelite who had sinned have “assurance”?
3. Why was atonement necessary for “ritual impurity”?

**Varying Emphases in Ancient Sacrifices**

Much of Leviticus reads like a complicated handbook of veterinary biology. Rather than getting involved in all the technical language, blood, and gore, it is much simpler to jump straight to the real sacrifice of Christ in the New Testament.

By neglecting Leviticus, though, we suffer inestimable loss. The variety of ancient sacrifices highlighted various aspects of Christ’s sacrifice, which is so rich in meaning that one kind of animal sacrifice could not possibly have represented it adequately. The Israelite sacrifices broke into parts the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice the way physiology textbooks show organisms dissected so that they can be understood. This breakdown necessarily involved a certain amount of distortion, particularly because animals and human priests represented our perfect Redeemer and Mediator. But viewing Christ’s sacrifice through the lens of Leviticus is like turning a diamond around in the light to reveal otherwise obscured facets of stunning beauty. Together the “shadow” (Heb 8:5) and the Shekinah help us to grasp the full picture in such a way that it explodes into our consciousness and etches our Savior indelibly into our very being.

All of the sacrifices involved an experiential element because all were brought to the sanctuary by those who offered them. But the degree of participation in the ritual by the offerer varied. A bird or cereal offering was simply handed over to the priest (Lev 1:14-15; 2:2). But with a four-legged animal the offerer leaned (verb *smk*; cp. Amos 5:19) one hand on its head and slew it (Lev 1:4-5; 4:24,29), acknowledging that Christ would bear the weight of his/her iniquities and diseases (Isa 53:4) and human evil would slay Christ. In the case of a well-being offering, the offerer even ate the flesh (Lev 7:15-21), pointing to the life-giving power of Christ, who said: “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day” (John 6:54; cp. Matt 26:26).

The sacrifices varied in their emphasis on legal atonement. This is partly because not all sacrifices provided atonement in the sense of restoration from faults.

Atonement is not even mentioned in connection with grain offerings (Lev 2), which were simple gifts of devotion to God, except for the grain offering which functioned as a poor person’s substitute for a purification offering (Lev 5:11-13).<sup>10</sup> Even though well-being offerings (so-called “peace offerings”; Lev 3) involved blood, to which YHWH assigned an atoning function (Lev 17:11), they did not atone for specific wrongs. Rather, they could be presented from a

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<sup>10</sup>Cp. Heb 9:22—“under the law *almost* everything is purified with blood” (emphasis supplied).

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variety of motivations, including thanksgiving (Lev 7:12-15), fulfillment of a vow, or as a free expression of devotion to God (Lev 7:16). The blood of well-being offerings reminds us that even joyful praise and worship by faulty people require the atoning blood of Christ to find acceptance with God.<sup>11</sup>

Sacrifices which atoned for specific faults highlighted the legal element. The flesh of such a sacrifice could not be eaten by the offerer, even if the offerer was the high priest (Lev 4:11-12), because a debtor cannot take back part of a debt payment (Milgrom 1991: 253).

While burnt offerings provided atonement from unspecified faults (Lev 1:4), purification (so-called “sin”) and reparation (so-called “guilt”) offerings remedied specified classes of evils. Purification offerings were generally for inadvertent sins (Lev 4:2, 13, 22, 27) or severe ritual impurities (Lev 12:6-8; 15:13-15). Ransom/atonement (Piel of *kpr*) for life (Lev 17:11) was emphasized by elevation of the blood, which was daubed on the horns, i.e. highest points, of the outer altar (Lev 4:25, 30) or the altar of incense (Lev 4:7, 18) rather than simply dashed against the sides of the outer altar (e.g. Lev 1:5; 3:2). Cp. Matt 20:28: Christ came “to give his life a ransom for many.”

Reparation offerings were for cases involving some form of sacrilege (Lev 5:15; 6:2 [Hebrew 5:21]) or possible sacrilege (Lev 5:17-19; Milgrom 1991: 332-333). While the blood of a reparation offering was only dashed against the sides of the altar (Lev 7:2), this sacrifice was associated with payment of debt because it was preceded by literal payment of reparation/restitution to God or man (Lev 5:16; 6:5 [Hebrew 5:24]). The combination of restitution + sacrifice shows that even when we correct our wrongs to the best of our ability, sin creates additional debt which must be paid by Christ’s sacrifice (cp. Matt 6:12; see above).

It is important to recognize that the Bible uses terms such as “ransom” and “debt” as metaphors by which we understand Christ’s atonement through analogy with mundane life. We should not seize upon one or another of these metaphors to the exclusion of others any more than we should explain the Kingdom of God by referring to only one parable of Jesus. It is only when we look at all the biblical evidence regarding Christ’s atonement that we gain a balanced picture so we can have the full benefit of that which God provides for our salvation.

#### **Assurance**

An Israelite’s assurance was based on his/her covenant connection with YHWH within the community. That connection depended upon loyalty to

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<sup>11</sup>Ellen White expresses this idea: “The religious services, the prayers, the praise, the penitent confession of sin ascend from true believers as incense to the heavenly sanctuary, but passing through the corrupt channels of humanity, they are so defiled that unless purified by blood, they can never be of value with God” (1958: 344).

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YHWH. As long as basic loyalty remained, there was abundant provision for atonement from non-rebellious sins and from ritual impurities.

A transgression of YHWH's law could sever the covenant connection if it was committed "with a high hand," i.e., rebelliously (Num 15:30-31). For such a sin there was no ritual remedy (see also verses 32-36).<sup>12</sup> If an Israelite committed a non-rebellious sin, such as inadvertent violation of a divine commandment, or contracted a ritual impurity, he/she was obliged to use the means which God had provided for atonement or purification. God did not punish a person before there was a reasonable opportunity to utilize the designated ritual remedy. But a guilty or impure Israelite could not simply do nothing and maintain the covenant connection. Wanton neglect to purify oneself was a rebellious sin (Num 19:13,20; cp. Lev 15:31) and culpability for a non-rebellious sin (Lev 5:1) continued unless a sacrifice was brought. Such a sacrifice relieved the sinner by transferring the sin to YHWH (Exod 32:32), who bore it through the mediation of a priest (Lev 10:17).

Now we can consider the status of a Christian who has committed an act of sin and knows it, but has not apostatized (Heb 6:4-8) or committed the unpardonable sin of irrevocably shutting out the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:31-32). In light of Leviticus and Numbers, such a person is not punished before he/she has opportunity to receive forgiveness. Willful neglect of this provision would constitute rejection of Christ.

The only thing that stands between us and the Second Death is the blood of Christ. Only Christ can save us (Acts 4:12). His blood, daily received and applied, is our *only* assurance.<sup>13</sup> But Christ's blood, freely available, is abundant provision!<sup>14</sup>

Arguing about whether an individual is "in Christ" or "out of Christ" is confusing because it is too simplistic. When a person commits a sin, he/she is not necessarily immediately punished by God, but there is something to make right. Compare the status of a person who fails to pay income taxes to the U.S. government. He/she is not immediately thrown in jail, but unless the debt is paid, jail can be the result.

There is more to accepting Christ's blood than acknowledging sin. Even when an ancient Israelite who had sinned offered a sacrifice, forgiveness was not

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<sup>12</sup>It is true that God showed astonishing mercy to rebellious King Manasseh (2 Chron 33) and to David when he took Bathsheba (2 Sam 11-12). But God forgave them on the basis of Christ's future sacrifice outside the bounds of the ritual system. As David recognized: "For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased" (Ps 51:16 [Hebrew v. 18]). While the ritual system was restricted by the need for YHWH to teach His people the standards of His government, Christ's sacrifice is freely available to all who will accept it.

<sup>13</sup>Cp. White 1958: 397—"Every sin must be renounced as the hateful thing that crucified the Lord of life and glory, and the believer must have a progressive experience by continually doing the works of Christ. It is by continual surrender of the will, by continual obedience, that the blessing of justification is retained."

<sup>14</sup>see Rom 5:17—"abundance of grace."

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automatic. The priest did not forgive the offerer; he carried out ritual actions “that he/they may be forgiven” (Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35; Num 15:25-26, 28). Notice the passive construction, which implies that the offerer was forgiven directly by YHWH (Hasel 1981: 120; Milgrom 1991: 245). Thus, sacrificial activity officiated by the priest was *prerequisite to* forgiveness by YHWH. Rituals did not automatically provide forgiveness, and God has never given to human priests the authority to forgive sins. A hypocritical person could not gain forgiveness because it was granted by YHWH, who sees the heart and who values obedience even more than sacrifice (1 Sam 15:22). Our religious exercises are of value only insofar as they express the *reality* of our relationship with God.<sup>15</sup>

Even Israelites who gained forgiveness during the year did not have final assurance until they were cleansed on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:30). Atonement goes beyond forgiveness (see below). But even the final stage of atonement was through blood which represented Christ’s blood. The bottom line is that in Christ we have abundant assurance as long as we accept and keep on accepting each wave of His transforming atonement.

#### **Ritual Impurity**

Physical ritual impurities of the Israelites made the environment of the sanctuary less than ideal and defiled it so that it needed to be cleansed on the Day of Atonement (see Lev 16:16, above).

Outside Israel, impurities which polluted sacred precincts could come from demons (Milgrom 1991: 1068). For example, the ritual for exorcising impurity from the cella of the god Nabū on the fifth day of the Babylonian Akītu Festival has an incantation, called a “loud cry,” which includes the following words:

- (378) Marduk purifies the temple,
  - (379) Kusug draws the plan,
  - (380) The deity Ningirim casts the spell.
  - (381) Any evil that is in this temple, get out!
  - (382) Great evil demon, may Bēl kill you!
  - (383) Wherever you are, be suppressed!
- (translation by Gane 1992b: 267-268; cp. ed. Pritchard 1969: 334).

A Seventh-day Adventist cannot help noticing the irony of comparison between the Babylonian exorcism and Rev 18:2, where a “loud cry” announces that “Babylon” is fallen and has become a dwelling place of demons!

Israelite impurity was not caused by demons, but by the Israelites themselves (Milgrom 1991: 1068-1069). With YHWH’s presence among them, their

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<sup>15</sup>Hypocritical religion without heartfelt devotion or obedience was not simply worthless; it constituted sin (see Isa 1:11ff). The same is true of flippant or hypocritical participation in Christian rituals such as Communion (1 Cor 11:17-34) or going through the motions of confessing sin to God when there is no intention to accept reformation of life through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5; Titus 3:4-7).

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only fear was that they could alienate Him.(cp. Num 22-25). They were their own worst enemies.

Although Israelite ritual impurities resulted from physical factors such as death (see Lev 11:24ff; Num 19), scaly skin disease (so-called “leprosy”; Lev 13-14), genital flows (Lev 12, 15), etc., it was not the same as ordinary physical dirtiness. Comparison between passages dealing with cases of ritual impurity (esp. Lev 11-15; Num 19) yields a common denominator: impurities have an aspect of death about them (Milgrom 1991: 1002). The holy God in residence could not be approached too closely by mortals under the curse of death resulting from sin (cp. Gen 3:22-24; Rom 6:23), especially when they were affected by physical factors which emphasized their mortality. Thus, impure Israelites were disqualified from coming into contact with holy things. For example, it was forbidden to eat the flesh of a well-being offering while in a state of ritual impurity (Lev 7:20).

Ritual impurities were not sins, even though they resulted from a mortal state which came from sin (compare Rom 6:23).<sup>16</sup> They required purification, but not forgiveness. To be cleansed from a light impurity it was enough to launder one’s clothes, bathe and wait until evening (e.g. Lev 15:5-8). This washing was the forerunner of Christian baptism, which represents purification from a *morally* evil life by burial of the old life with Christ (see Rom 6:1-14; cp. Zech 3:4).<sup>17</sup>

Severe impurities which lasted a week or more required atoning sacrifices as part of the purification process (e.g. Lev 12:6-8; 15:13-15; Num 19). Why should atonement be made for something which was not sin? The answer is a neglected concept: Christ not only forgives and cleanses us from our sins (1 John 1:9); He cleanses us from our *mortality* and gives us *eternal life* (John 3:16)! The two aspects of restoration are expressed in Ps 103:3, which refers to YHWH “who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases.” Thus, atonement is bigger than we may have thought: it includes restoration not only from the guilt of sin, but also from the state of mortality which results from sin. Christ has paid a legal price to give us a new experience.

### **Phases of Atonement**

Christians commonly believe that Christ’s death on the cross constituted the sum total of “atonement,” and therefore atonement was completed at the cross. It is true that the cross represents the one and only, once for all, truly efficacious atoning death (Heb 9:28). It is only on the basis of Christ’s death

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<sup>16</sup>Some causes of ritual impurity such as menstruation (Lev 15:19) and nocturnal emission (Deut 23:10-11) were normal, involuntary functions of the human body. Other kinds of ritual impurity, such as defilement by a corpse, could usually be avoided, and becoming impure was wrong only if God prohibited it (see e.g. Lev 21:1-4,10-11).

<sup>17</sup>Perhaps waiting until evening pointed forward to the time of Christ’s death: about the time of the “evening” sacrifice (Matt 27:46-51; cp. Num 28:4).

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that any atonement can be made. But the Bible clearly shows that atonement did not end at the cross; atonement is a grand process which began at the cross and which continues until we are completely separated from sin and united with God.

Viewing the cross through Leviticus, we cannot even say that Christ's sacrifice was completed at the cross. Sacrificial death, yes, but not sacrifice as a whole. An ancient Israelite sacrifice included not only the slaughter of the animal, which pointed forward to Christ's death, but also priestly mediation which prefigured Christ's ministry in heaven from His Ascension (Heb 7:25-27) until the time when mediation for sin is no longer needed (Rev 22:11). In the purification offering it was what the priest did, following slaughter of the animal by the offerer, which was called atonement (Piel of *kpr*; Lev 4:26, 31, 35). The death made provision for atonement to be carried out, but without mediation there would be no atonement. Similarly, Christ's death alone without His resurrection, which made possible His mediation, would have availed nothing: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor 15:17).

In Israel, following the first stage of atonement accomplished by death + mediation, the second stage took place on the Day of Atonement. The cleansing of the sanctuary was called "atonement" (Piel of *kpr*) at each of its phases (Lev 16:16, 18). These multiple "atonements" confirm that atonement is a process involving several phases.

The idea that atonement was completed at the cross is unbiblical in its exclusion of subsequent atonement. There would be no need for Christ's mediatorial ministry to transfer sins into the heavenly sanctuary, so that these sins would later need to be cleansed out of the sanctuary through an end-time "Day of Atonement" judgment. In Adventist terms, 1844 would be a non-event. Stages of atonement are foundational to SDA theology.

The relationship between the stages of Christ's atonement can be summarized metaphorically: Christ's death put abundant money in the checking account to cover the salvation of all human beings. During His mediation Christ writes checks of salvation to all who will accept them. During His judgment, Christ makes sure that those who received checks have not thrown them away. Each stage of the process is essential to salvation, just as an ancient Israelite would be destroyed or "cut off" if he/she did not receive the benefit of each stage.

Does the idea that atonement was not completed at the cross diminish the sacrifice and atonement of Christ? No way! We magnify what Christ is doing. Christ's sacrifice and atonement are much bigger than they are commonly thought to be!<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Cp. the statement of R. Folkenberg: "To see Jesus only on the Cross limits the meaning of the Cross" (newsletter "From the G.C. President," June 3, 1996).

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Aside from the idea that atonement was completed at the cross, there is another way to wipe out an end-time Day of Atonement judgment. Some have argued from Lev 20:3 and Num 19:13, 20 (cp. Lev 15:31) that sins and ritual impurities automatically defiled the sanctuary, so that the purpose of sacrifices during the year was not to cleanse the sinner or impure person by transferring evil to the sanctuary, but to cleanse the sanctuary from defilement which had already reached it automatically when the sin or impurity occurred (Ballenger 1911?: 58-82; cp. 1913?: 106-12; Ford 1980: 216-220; Milgrom 1976; 1991: 254-258, citing *Mishnah Šebu*<sup>ot</sup> 1:4-5).<sup>19</sup>

The approach just described leaves the Day of Atonement to purge the sanctuary from rebellious sins of Israelites (Milgrom) or, in Christian antitypical application, to atone for Satan's guilt (Ballenger) or from the wickedness of Satan's followers (Ford). But the Day of Atonement is not regarded as dealing with the sins of those among God's professed followers who are saved. According to this view, the sins of the saved are handled throughout the year before the Day of Atonement.

The above theory has serious implications for SDA typology. If the sanctuary is cleansed throughout the time preceding the Day of Atonement, the cleansing begins in A.D. 31, not in 1844. Furthermore, the eschatological Day of Atonement is not a judgment of God's true people; instead it fixes the fates of those who are lost. Thus, this judgment is not relevant to us in the sense that because Christ's most holy apartment ministry determines our destiny, we should by faith enter the experience with Him behind the veil.

It is true that in Lev 20:3 and Num 19:13, 20 severe offenses, i.e. Molech worship and neglect to have oneself purified from corpse contamination, defile the sanctuary in an illegal/illegitimate way which short-circuits the sacrificial process (Treyer 1986: 221; Adams 1993: 87-8). The sanctuary is defiled from a distance; there is no evidence that this defilement depends upon the sinner entering the sacred precincts. Nor is there evidence that "atonement" accomplished by punishment of the sinner (cp. Num 25:13) cleanses the sanctuary from such defilements.

Following are seven points of exegetical evidence which rule out the theory described above. The positive value of these points is that they confirm the two stages of atonement which are foundational to SDA sanctuary theology.

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<sup>19</sup>See Ford 1980: 217—"Neither the Old nor the New Testament teach what we have traditionally taught about the confessed sins of the saints defiling the heavenly sanctuary. Even on earth the sanctuary was defiled by the *act* of sin, not its confession. See Num. 19:13, 20; Lev. 20:3." Milgrom, my teacher, holds that the various kinds of purification offerings, including those of the Day of Atonement, had differing degrees of efficacy in proportion to the extent to which evils of varying degrees of severity had "aerially" penetrated into the sanctuary. His evidence for these degrees is Lev 4, where sacrifices for more serious situations of sin by the high priest or the entire community involved application of blood inside the sacred Tent rather than simply at the outer altar (Milgrom 1976).

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1. Sins which defiled the sanctuary automatically were rebellious sins for which no sacrificial atonement was available to benefit the sinner (Lev 20:3; Num 19:13, 20). The sanctuary had to be cleansed from this category of sins (*p<sup>e</sup>šā<sup>c</sup>îm*; Lev 16:16) because they were committed by people who had a professed connection to God. But these sins were not cleansed from the sinners themselves,<sup>20</sup> who continued to bear their culpability. Automatic defilement of the sanctuary and the sinner receiving atonement were mutually exclusive. Therefore, there is no basis for saying that during the year such a sinner could bring a purification offering to have the sanctuary cleansed on his/her behalf.

2. There is no evidence that sacrifices during the year cleansed the sanctuary. They atoned only for persons, whether from sin or from ritual impurity (Rodriguez 1979: 104-5; 1986: 173 n. 6, 189; Treiyer 1986: 216-7).<sup>21</sup>

3. According to Lev 16:16, the Day of Atonement rituals cleansed the sanctuary from “all” non-rebellious sins of the Israelites (*ḥattā’ôt*; cp. vs. 30,34). There is no indication that this collection of sins was limited to those for which sacrificial expiation had not already been made during the year (Hasel 1981: 119; Kiuchi 1987: 156).

4. While atonement for ritual impurities resulted in the cleansing (root *thr*) of persons during the year (Num 8:21; cp. Lev 12:8), persons who had committed sins did not reach the cleansed state until the Day of Atonement. The Hebrew terminology clearly indicates two stages of atonement: individual forgiveness (verb *slh*) through sacrifices during the year (Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35; cp. Shea 1986: 165-6) and corporate cleansing (*thr*) granted when the sanctuary was cleansed on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:30; cp. Kiuchi 1987: 157). Compare 1 John 1:9—“If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will *forgive* us our sins and *cleanse* us from all unrighteousness.”<sup>22</sup>

5. Careful comparison between purification offerings during the year (Lev 4) and on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16) shows that there was a *reversal in the order of blood applications* performed in the outer apartment of the sanctuary (Gane 1992b: 175, 186-194).

On the Day of Atonement, the sanctuary was cleansed from the inside out, as we would expect for a “house-cleaning” job: inner sanctum → outer sanctum → outer altar (cp. Shea 1986: 155). Within these areas, blood was applied

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<sup>20</sup>In Lev 16:30, Israelites were cleansed only from *ḥattā’ôt*, non-rebellious sins.

<sup>21</sup>It is true that these sacrifices involved applications of blood like those performed on the Day of Atonement which cleansed the sanctuary (Lev 16:16, 18; Milgrom 1991: 255). However, it is a fundamental principle of ritual theory that because a physical action has no inherent meaning, the same action can be assigned different meanings at different times (Staal 1989: 127-129, 131, 134, 137, 140, 330). This principle is exemplified in Lev 16 itself, where sprinkling blood seven times has two meanings in the same ritual: it purges part of the sanctuary (vs. 14, 16) and reconsecrates the outer altar (v. 19; Milgrom 1991:1037).

<sup>22</sup>It is true that experiential cleansing occurs throughout the Christian era along with forgiveness (Titus 3:5), but comparison with Lev 16:30 suggests that a final dimension of cleansing occurs during an antitypical Day of Atonement (see Andreassen 1947: 187).

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in locations which moved progressively *away from* the ark of the Covenant (Lev 16:14-15). Lev 16:16b abbreviates the prescription for blood rites in the outer sanctum by referring to the procedure in the inner sanctum. However, we know from Exod 30:10 that the outer sanctum object that received the blood was the incense altar (on its horns), and we know from Lev 16:14-15 the pattern of blood applications in the inner sanctum: object and in front of that object. Therefore, we can reconstruct the blood applications in the outer sanctum as follows:

- a. Daubing on the horns of the incense altar.
- b. Sevenfold sprinkling east (in front) of the incense altar.

During the year, in purification offerings for the high priest or the community, the blood applications in the outer sanctum moved in the opposite direction, *toward* the ark of the Covenant, where God's Presence is located.<sup>23</sup> The blood applications were (Lev 4:6-7, 17-18):

- a. A sevenfold sprinkling "in front of the veil,"<sup>24</sup> i.e. east (in front) of the incense altar as on the Day of Atonement.<sup>25</sup>
- b. Daubing on the horns of the incense altar.

This reversal of blood applications indicates that during the year evils went into the sanctuary and on the Day of Atonement they were brought out. What goes in must come out!

6. On the Day of Atonement, incinerating the carcasses of the purification offering animals (Lev 16:27) required the personal purification of lay performers (vs. 28), but in Lev 4 the same activity (vss. 11-12, 21) did not (Gane 1992b: 175).<sup>26</sup> Thus, it is clear that on the Day of Atonement the animals were contaminated by their function as ritual "sponges" for cleansing the sanctuary, but they were not contaminated in this way on other days because at those times they did not have the function of cleansing the sanctuary.

7. Unlike other days, the Day of Atonement was clearly a day of judgment for all Israelites, including those who were faithful.<sup>27</sup> By the end of the day

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<sup>23</sup>Pouring out remaining blood at the base of the outer altar (vs. 7, 18) simply disposes of it (Milgrom 1991: 238); this was not an application of blood to the altar.

<sup>24</sup>Not "on" the veil/curtain (against Wenham 1995: 83).

<sup>25</sup>Other blood applications performed both during the year and on the Day of Atonement took place in the same locations (Lev 4:7, 18; Exod 30:10; Lev 4:25, 30, 34; 16:18-19), so it is reasonable to believe that the location of the sevenfold sprinkling would be the same as well.

<sup>26</sup>Against rabbinic tradition, which assumes that the rules in Lev 16 apply to the cases in Lev 4 (*Mishnah* Para 8:3; *Tosefta* Yoma 3:16). The prescription for the incineration in Lev 16:27 assumes knowledge of 4:11-12, not the other way around. Aside from the fact that the list of animal parts is fuller in Lev 4 than in Lev 16, only Lev 4 provides the important specification as to where outside the camp incinerations of purification offering animals sacrificed at the sanctuary are to take place: "A pure place . . . the ash dump" (v. 12).

<sup>27</sup>According to rabbinic tradition (*Mishnah* Roš Haššanah 1:1-2 and *Babylonian Talmud* Roš Haššanah 16b), which is followed by Bacchiocchi (1996: 51-80), judgment took place at other times, including especially the "new year" of the first day of Tishri (so-called "feast of trumpets");

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there were only two classes of people: “cleansed” (Lev 16:30), i.e., restored to a status in which there were no impediments to the covenant relationship with YHWH, and “cut off” or destroyed (Lev 23:29-30), i.e., rejected by YHWH. Fates were determined upon the basis of loyalty to YHWH throughout the year and on the Day of Atonement. Throughout the year an Israelite was to refrain from rebellious sins (Num 15:30-31) and seek forgiveness for other sins (Lev 4-5). On the Day of Atonement he/she was to show remorse and humility by practicing self-denial (Lev 16:29, 31; cp. Ezra 8:21; Dan 10:2, 12) and was to abstain from working in order to fully enter into the experience of the day (Lev 16:29, 31).

The Israelite two-stage restoration to full favor with the deity, in which atonement was begun throughout the year and completed on a particular day, was unique in the ancient Near East. Non-Israelite cults did have special days which functioned like the Day of Atonement in that they involved the cleansing of sacred objects and/or areas. But these days did not culminate restoration processes which were begun earlier in the year.

For example, on the fourth day of the Ninth Year Festival of the god Telipinu, the Hittites cleansed their cult by taking idols and a pedestal to a river and washing them in the river (Haas and Rost 1984; Gane 1992b: 295-312). Another example is the fifth day of the Babylonian Akītu Festival, when the Babylonians purified the enormous Esagila temple complex of the god Marduk by sprinkling it with water, sounding a copper bell, and carrying around a censer and torch. Then they purified the Ezida cella of the god Nabū by sprinkling holy water, carrying a censer and torch, smearing the doors with cedar oil, and wiping<sup>28</sup> the cella with the decapitated carcass of a ram. As in the Israelite ritual for purging the sanctuary, the animal functioned as a ritual sponge and contaminated its handlers. A further phase of purging the Ezida consisted of setting up a kind of canopy and reciting the “loud cry” to which I referred earlier (ed. Pritchard 1969: 333-334; Gane 1992b: 257-270).

Although the Sumerian Nanshe Hymn (c. 2000 B.C.) is earlier than the Babylonian and Hittite purifications, it describes a New Year celebration which was closer to the Israelite Day of Atonement in that it involved judgment of persons on the basis of loyalty which they demonstrated toward a deity and his/her personal moral standards. Contracts of persons employed by the temple of Nanshe were reviewed in terms of their ritual and ethical behavior during the previous year and their presence on the New Year (Heimpel 1981). This is a particularly striking parallel with the Day of Atonement, on which covenant loyalty was reviewed in terms of behavior during the year and on the great Day

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Lev 23:23-25). But although the *t̄rūāh*, “(trumpet) blast,” of Tishri 1 most likely acclaimed YHWH as king (cp. Num 23:21) and therefore announced the coming of His judgment, there is no biblical evidence that judgment actually began until ten days later on the Day of Atonement.

<sup>28</sup>Akkadian *kuppuru*, cognate of Hebrew *kipper*, “atone.”

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itself (see above). However, the Sumerian review did not include the element of forgiveness or consideration of forgiveness earlier received. It was a one-stage judgment.

Having demonstrated that biblical atonement uniquely involves two stages—forgiveness and cleansing—we are left with a crucial question: What was the purpose of the cleansing stage? “Cleansing” is a metaphor. What does this cleansing mean? When we come to the antitype, the question becomes: What is the reason for the cleansing of the sanctuary (Dan 8:14), which is the same event as the pre-Advent judgment (Dan 7:9-14)? If a person is forgiven by the King and Judge of the universe, why would a further stage of atonement be necessary?

For me, the clearest starting point is 2 Sam 14, where a woman from Tekoa tells a story about having a son who murdered his brother, and then asks King David to forgive the murderer. Recognizing that a king acting as judge is morally responsible for his judgment if he forgives a murderer, she offers: “On me be the guilt, my lord the king, and on my father’s house; let the king and his throne be guiltless” (vs. 9). Notice the wording: “. . . let the king *and his throne* be guiltless.” The throne is the place where the king rules. It represents royal authority and justice. So when God forgives people, His authority and justice, i.e. His character, are open to question and must be vindicated by judgment (cp. Davidson 1991: 21).<sup>29</sup> Since God’s throne is at His sanctuary (cp. Jer 17:12), the sanctuary represents His character (Treiyer 1986: 245). Therefore the sanctuary must be “justified” (Niphal of *šdq*), i.e. vindicated or legally “cleansed” in an end-time Day of Atonement (Dan 8:14; cp. Job 4:17).<sup>30</sup> This vindication simultaneously vindicates God’s people, because it is forgiveness of their sins which has been under review (Davidson 1991: 6-7).

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest did not wipe off bloodstains from earlier sacrifices, which could be regarded as a “record” of forgiven sins (Andreasen 1947: 141, 143, 147, 179). Rather, the high priest overlaid them with more blood, also representing the blood of Christ, in the same places (cp. Andreasen 1947: 148; Shea 1986: 156). This expresses the idea that the judg-

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<sup>29</sup>See also Ford 1980: 223, commenting on Dan 9: “In harmony with his prayer regarding the iniquity, transgressions, sins, of his people, pleading the everlasting righteousness of God as witnessed by prophets, the prophet is visited by Gabriel, who takes all the key elements of his prayer and weaves them into heavenly promises. Part of the angel’s message has to do with atonement for iniquity. The three words here used by the angel for sin had their chief combined usage in connection with the Day of Atonement (see Lev. 16:21 and cf. Dan. 9:24). Only in one other place in all the Bible are the three items conjoined—Ex. 34:7, where the character of God—which is to be vindicated in the judgment—is described.”

<sup>30</sup>Notice that in Dan 8:14 justification is the functional equivalent of atonement in Lev 16. Therefore it should not be surprising that justification, like atonement, involves both legal and experiential dimensions (Titus 3:4-7). In Titus 3:7 the NRSV correctly renders the Greek aorist participle: “having been justified . . .” Thus justification is not separate from the transforming work of the Holy Spirit described in verses 5-6.

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ment (Dan 7:9-14), through which the sanctuary is cleansed/vindicated (Dan 8:14), is not primarily about who has sinned, because all have sinned (Rom 3:23), but about who has really been forgiven! The judgment is a review of forgiveness already granted. God saves those who are in a “new covenant” relationship with Him, and that covenant is based upon forgiveness (Jer 31:31-34).

On the Day of Atonement God vindicates Himself by vindicating the forgiveness which He has previously granted. But Rom 3:26 says that Christ’s sacrifice has *already* vindicated God as just when He justifies those who believe. What further vindication could possibly remain?

The key here is that God is just when He justifies *those who believe*. Compare Eph 2:8—we are saved by grace *through faith*. But God cannot save a person who does not really have faith or who abandons faith after receiving forgiveness. See Col 1:21-23:

And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him — *provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard . . .* (emphasis supplied).

So God’s justice depends not only on paying the debt for sin by the sacrifice of Christ; He must also demonstrate that those whom He saves continue to have true faith.

How can faith be tested? James 2:26 gives a clue: Faith without works is dead. Faith and works are not separate; works are part of faith. Faith that is not working through love (Gal 5:6) is not the kind of living faith which grasps divine saving grace. God uses the evidence of human works in the judgment (Eccl 12:14; Dan 7:10)<sup>31</sup> not because works save, but because they testify whether or not sinners have truly accepted and followed through on the forgiveness freely granted them. Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery: “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again” (John 8:11). The parable of the unjust steward (Matt 18:23-35) illustrates that forgiveness already granted is revoked if the one to whom mercy is shown does not subsequently treat others with corresponding mercy (cp. Andreasen 1947: 177-8).

Since atonement continues into the end-time, righteousness by faith and eschatological salvation are inseparable. For example, a pre-Advent “close of probation” when mediation for sin ceases (Rev 22:11; cp. 15:5-8) requires personal transformation to a life of obedience. This obedience is a divine gift through the Holy Spirit, which pours love (Rom 5:5)—the basis of God’s character (1 John

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<sup>31</sup>Why does God use records of works in the judgment (Dan 7:10) when He can read thoughts (cp. Ps 139:23; Luke 7:39-40)? Because works of faith, without which true faith does not exist, constitute evidence which can be witnessed by God’s created beings, before whom He must be vindicated. They cannot read thoughts as He can.

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4:8)—and law (Matt 22:36-30) into the heart. The close of probation and a legal-only view of atonement are mutually exclusive. On the other hand, if atonement consists only of a “moral influence” experience, there is no need for mediation and judgment to deal with the “debt” of sin. Once again, both legal and experiential aspects are essential.

The process of atonement shows that mercy has a cost which God takes very seriously. God’s love, the only principle by which intelligent beings with free choice can co-exist harmoniously, embraces both justice and mercy, demands of the law and experience. Neither can be compromised. Both are balanced in the sanctuary. As the Psalmist put it: “Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other” (Ps 85:10).

### **Conclusion**

We have found that theological balance was crucial for the Israelites, as it is for us. For them the sanctuary was a safe guide to aspects of God’s nature, character, and interactions which could seem opposed and paradoxical, but which could not be compromised. Other nations had much in common with Israel, but without the Shekinah they lacked everything. For Israel to remain distinctive she had to hold on to the distinctives of her faith. Once neglect blurred significance of the unique aspects, it was a short step to counterfeit religion.

For us, careful study of the sanctuary services is a safeguard from errors or extremes in our understanding of God and the way He saves us. More importantly, the sanctuary puts us in touch with Jesus and what He is doing for us and with us now. Rather than staring forlornly into the blank blue sky, we can come boldly before the throne of grace (Heb 4:16) and humble ourselves (Lev 16:29) as Christ is reaffirming the forgiveness which He has granted through His blood.

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