

## IT IS FINISHED

The three so-called Abraham religions are Judaism, Mohammedanism, and Christianity. They have some doctrines and rituals in common, but they also have grave differences. Each has a day of atonement, but they have different meanings and significance. Judaism has the holy day of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, which is to be observed annually. This is prescribed in the Book of Leviticus, which states:

And Aaron shall offer his bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make an atonement for himself, and for his house. And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat. And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the LORD'S lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering. But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness. (Leviticus 16:6–10)

In this ritual, bulls and goats are slaughtered to make atonement for the sins of the people. Judaism acknowledges that it is not sacrifice that atones for sins, but repentance. God through Ezekiel the prophet said, “Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.” (Ezekiel 18:27)

Mohammedanism has the ritual of Eid al-Adha, the Feast of Sacrifice, which includes the sacrifice of animals. This is founded on the following passage in the Quran, which passage concerns Abraham:

And when he had reached the age of running with him, he said, 'My son, I see in a dream that I shall sacrifice thee; consider, what thinkest thou?' He said, 'My father, do as thou art bidden; thou shalt find me, God willing, one of the steadfast.' When they had surrendered, and he flung him upon his brow, We called unto him, Abraham, thou hast confirmed the vision; even so We recompense the good-doers. This is indeed the manifest trial.' And We ransomed him with a mighty sacrifice, and left for him among the later folk 'Peace be upon Abraham!' Even so We recompense the good-doers; he was among Our believing servants. Then We gave him the good tidings of Isaac, a Prophet, one of the righteous. (Arberry translation 37:100-12)

The ritual is not an atonement for sin, as the Day of Atonement is in Judaism, but an imitation of the faith of Abraham that proves the faithful. (22:34–67) Of course, the passage from the Quran borrows from the Bible's record of God's commanding Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. In the Bible, God commanded Abraham to offer his only son, Isaac, the heir of God's promise, as a burnt offering to God. When Abraham was about to kill Isaac on the altar, God stopped him, saying, “Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.” (Genesis 22:12) Abraham was ready to obey God, and so God rewarded him for his devotion.

In both Judaism and Mohammedanism, God is merciful, and forgives the sins of those who repent. A man's sin divides him from God, but his repentance unites him to God. A man must in the end, atone for his own sins by prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The Jewish Encyclopedia states:

Atonement in Jewish theology as developed by the Rabbis of the Talmud, has for its constituent elements: (a) on the part of God, fatherly love and forgiving mercy; (b) on the part of man, repentance and reparation of wrong. ('Atonement' in The Jewish Encyclopedia, 1908)

The Quran states, "Truly, God loves those who repent, and He loves those who cleanse themselves," and "Believers, turn to God in sincere repentance; it may be that your Lord will acquit you of your evil deeds, and will admit you into gardens underneath which rivers flow." (2:222; 66:8)

Judaism has its Day of Atonement, and Mohammedanism its Feast of sacrifice. Yet, neither religion understands the significance of the Bible texts that lie under those rites. Those religions affirm God's mercy and forgiveness, but without expiation, without atonement

When God told Abraham to offer his son as a sacrifice, Abraham trusted God, and obeyed Him. When Abraham was about to kill his son, God saw his faith and stopped him. This was not the end, however. Abraham saw a ram caught in a thicket and he sacrificed the ram instead of his son, and God accepted his sacrifice. This makes part of the foundation for the doctrine of vicarious atonement. At Mount Sinai, God gave Israel the system of animal sacrifices, including the Day of Atonement. He told the people, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." (Leviticus 17:11) This teaches, as Saint Paul wrote to the Hebrews, "Without shedding of blood is no remission." (Hebrews 9:22) Men, because of their sins, deserve to die. Yet, God is merciful, and gave His only-begotten Son to atone for the sins of men. If a man repents of his sins, and believes in Jesus, then He has forgiveness; he has atonement.

In the days of Isaiah the prophet, the people of God rebelled against Him. The prophet prophesied:

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. (Isaiah 1:2-4)

The people regularly broke God's moral law, but they would not repent and turn away from their sins, and turn back to God. Yet, they were careful to observe God's ceremonial law, particularly the laws of sacrifice. God said to the people:

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. (Isaiah 1:1-14)

The people made the ritual sacrifices, but to what end? Because the people did not repent of breaking the moral law, their observance of the ceremonial law was to no purpose. Their sacrifices were empty, and they had no

forgiveness. They were hypocrites, so God despised their sacrifices. Yet, even if the people repented of their sins, the bloody sacrifices were not able to expiate sins. Moses told the people:

And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree. His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.” (Deuteronomy 21:22, 23; compare Galatians 3:13)

Ezekiel the prophet told the people that, if they repented of their sins, then God would forgive their sins, and they would not die. Yet, he was careful to tell them, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” (Ezekiel 18:4) The man that sins deserves to die, and the death of an animal cannot atone for the man’s sins. A man’s sins deserve death, and the death of an animal is no substitute.

Isaiah prophesied to God’s people:

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. (Isaiah 53:3–8)

There would come one devout Israelite to serve God and the people, but the people would despise Him, and reject Him. He would, because of their rejection, be a man of sorrows. Because of His suffering, the people would regard him as cursed by God. Yet, His suffering would be on behalf of God’s people. He would suffer for their sins. All of God’s people had strayed from Him. They all did as they pleased. Yet, as the high priest placed, as it were, the sins of the people on the goat, so God would place the sins of the people on His Suffering Servant. Yet, this Servant would not suffer grudgingly, but willingly. He would be unjustly killed, but He would not resist or protest His innocence. He would die, so that others might live.

Abraham showed his love for God by giving to Him the thing he loved most, his only son. God showed His love for man by giving to him the thing He loves most, His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) Saint John wrote, “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:9–10; compare Romans 5:8)

Jesus is the Son of God incarnate. Yet, the people of God rejected Him, just as Isaiah the prophet said they would. From the beginning of Jesus’s earthly ministry, the Jew rejected Him, and sought to kill Him. They did finally arrest Him, and try Him in the supreme court of Israel. But His trial was a sham. The council found Him guilty of blasphemy, and turned Him over to Pontius, Pilate, the Roman governor for execution. Pilate tried

Jesus, and judged that he was guilty of no crime. He would release Jesus, but he finally acquiesced to the demands of the Jews, and ordered his soldiers to crucify Him. When the time came for Jesus to die, He said, "It is finished," and He gave up His spirit. (John 19:28).

Saint Paul gives theological perspective on the death of Jesus. The law of Moses required the people to sacrifice animals for their sins, but the sacrifices had to be repeated. Every day the priests offered sacrifices, and The Day of Atonement was observed every year. This means that the animal sacrifices were not able to take away sins, and thereby make the people perfect. If the animal sacrifices really atoned for sins, then they would not need to be repeated. The sacrifice of Jesus is different; it is once and for all. Through Jeremiah the prophet, God promised a New Covenant in which He would write His law on the hearts of the people, and make an atonement for sin that did not need to be repeated. He said, "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jeremiah 31:34) Saint Paul explained, "And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary." (Hebrews 10:18)

Saint Paul drew the following conclusion:

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And *having* an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of *our* faith without wavering; (for he *is* faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. (Hebrews 10:19–25)

Under the Old Covenant, only the high priest was allowed to enter into the holiest part of the tabernacle, and that only once a year. When Jesus's flesh was torn on the cross, the veil of the temple was torn, indicating that it no more necessary to have a temple, or sacrifices, or a high priest; everyone who believes in Jesus has direct access to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. (Matthew 26:51) Just as the priests were ritually cleansed by the sprinkling of the blood of animals, so the believer is cleansed by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. Just as the priests were ritually cleansed by water, so the believer is cleansed by the blood of Christ in baptism. Therefore, the Christian may, with a true heart and full assurance of faith, draw near to God. A man is right with God by faith, but not faith only at the start; he is right with God by faith from start to finish. Moreover, he must firmly hold onto the hope which He has in Christ. God is faithful to His promises, and so the Christian ought to maintain faith and hope in those promises. A man must persevere, not only in faith, and in hope, but also in love and good works. Every Christian is obligated to have faith, and by that faith perform works of love. So, Christians ought to encourage each other to do that very thing. Some Christians had failed to persevere in faith, and in hope, and in love, and so they had abandoned going to church services. Christians ought to encourage each other to faith, hope, and love, generally, and to Christian fellowship particularly. This was especially important at the time Saint Paul wrote to the Hebrews, considering that Christ would soon judge the city of Jerusalem. It is also important considering that Christ will someday return to judge the world.

Let us understand that every man is a sinner, and none can save himself. Let us believe that Jesus died, once and for all, to save us from our sins. Let us encourage each other in faith, hope, and love.

Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.