



Introduction to “Sin and Atonement”

Review of Previous Article

After 70 years in Babylonian exile, the Jewish captives were encouraged to return to their home in the Promised Land. The Second Temple was built, and the Temple services were restored. But YHWH, the God of the covenant, was not symbolically present. The prophetic office was terminated. The kingly rule was ended. The entire concept of covenantal relationality was profoundly compromised. The priesthood basked in prosperity and power, exalting the rule of contractual law and demanding contractual obedience and submission. The people were chattel, inevitably suffering abject poverty and privation. Because covenant (involving personal relationships) became misconstrued as contract (involving property, goods and services), the Chosen People were tragically reduced to property, to a transaction, to a form of goods and services.

Overview of This Article

An investigation of Hebraic thought uncovers findings that are directly opposed to traditional Christian conclusions on the nature of both sin and atonement. Rather than a violation of contractual law, sin is a violation of personal, covenantal relationships. Rather than a remedy demanding the death of the violator of contractual law, atonement is insurance coverage to protect and restore threatened covenantal relationships — between God and humanity, between humanity and God, and between humanity and humanity. This protection is grounded in God himself as our shield, our cover. Even in the New Testament the Greek word *katallage* — translated “atonement” — is actually the equivalent of the Hebrew *kippurim*, which embraces the concept of covenantal protection. In fact, *katallage* actually means “a becoming other.” That is, God is not simply internal relational Being for himself. Rather, he is Becoming. He is for the “other.” He is eternally committed to protecting and restoring threatened covenantal relationships.

Thus, real sin is uncovered as the disruption and dismissal of relationship

with an “other” — the denial of human co-relationality. And real atonement is revealed as insurance coverage to protect and restore the threatened relationship with an “other” — to shield human co-relationality. Then there is no longer room for inhuman terrorism, war and violence. There is no room for anything other than mutual faith, hope and love toward all “others.”

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