

1913

The Old Testament idea of atonement

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SENIOR THESIS

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"The Old Testament Idea of Atonement"

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Introduction

In approaching a study of the Old Testament idea of Atonement, we shall investigate, first, the current theories with reference to the origin of Sacrifice; second, a review of the Old Testament teachings about Sacrifice; and finally, a survey of the development of the sacrificial idea in the documents culminating in the priestly ritual Atonement. Here we have to deal with the various theories as to what was the prevailing idea connected with the earliest sacrificial practices. We shall note that no one theory explains all of the facts but that an adequate explanation of the idea of sacrifice comes from more or less obscure beginnings and presents a process or growth.

As we review the Old Testament teachings about sacrifice, we shall be called upon to note its predominant note, its predominant characteristic and its significance during the Pre-Prophetic period of Israel's history. Here the earlier forms of Semitic sacrifice, with their accompanying simple motives for such rites, will be brought to light. We shall note

the distinct conception connected with the sacrificial rites through the pre-prophetic period and the period of the prophets in Israel's history. The former will contain a historical review of the idea of Atonement in the Old Testament prior to Amos, while the latter will include the period from the eighth century to Ezra. We shall note in passing that there are the periods of the Covenant Code, and of Deuteronomy respectively. The pre-prophetic period distinguishes the primitive Mosaic religion as gradually modified and enriched through contact with Canaanitic civilization and religion.

Finally, the doctrine of Atonement becomes clear and well defined in the Priestly Code, where we find a highly developed system of Sacrifice. This is a period of Hebrew philosophy and Wisdom Literature when the priesthood, temple rites, sacrifices become the all important matters of religious and national concern, and the idea of Atonement has grown into a complex theory.

Chapter I.

Sacrifice as an institution is to be accounted for either in the ordinance of Jehovah or human nature itself. Considerable controversy has been offered in reaching a decision here. The advocate of the divine origin of sacrifice has contended that Abel's sacrifice (Gen. 4:3-5) has been thus construed by Hebrews 11:4, which says that God sanctioned the gift because of Abel's faith. Therefore the conclusion is drawn that God ordained the institution. Fairbairn* contends that in Gen. 3:21, in making for our parents "coats of skins", God prompted and authorized the rite which serves as a covering for the soul.

However, there is a multitude of evidence that sacrifice was not ordained of God. There is no historic basis for such a theory. It seems that sacrifice can be accounted for only on the basis of human nature, back of which it is here impossible for us to penetrate. We find that J treats sacrifice as natural, while P ignores its existence entirely for pre-Mosaic times. The sacrifice of Cain and Abel was spontaneous and not a divine mandate. Davidson

* Typology of Scripture

says it was the "instinctive expression of their feelings of dependence on God and thankfulness to Him". Besides, we find that the priestly code, while it does regard the sacrifice of Moses as directly due to God's commands, it recognizes no offering of sacrifice prior to this time*. There are no references to the sacrifices of Noah after the Flood, nor of Abraham, nor of any of the patriarchs prior to the Exodus. In addition to this, "the universal prevalence of sacrifice among the heathen nations seems to imply that sacrifice was in some way a natural expression of man's sense of his relation to God". The hypothesis of a primitive religion, the remains of which lingered among the peoples of the world and which expressed itself through sacrifice, is precarious. It certainly cannot be proved; and to explain sacrifice by it must leave the origin of that institution involved in the same precarious and hypothetical condition.** The divine origin of sacrifice can thus be held only by conceiving God as creating man for the sake of religion which He desired to promote, and thus His becoming the Author of the institution in

* Davidson, O. T. Theology, p. 311 f.

** H. B. D. *IV*. p. 307.

which religious sentiment has been given universal expression from the dawn of human history. But such a procedure is impossible. Historically we cannot go back of human nature, and we conclude that the origin of the institution of sacrifice was human.

Yet even when we have reached this conclusion we have but gained a position for a fresh starting point for the discussion of rival theories dealing with the original significance attaching to the rite, its earliest form and the stages of its development. The question as to the primitive idea underlying sacrifice has been generally dealt with in various theories which trend in two directions, the ethical and the physical.

The ethical principle is involved in the following theories: (1) The Expiatory* or propitiatory theory, which explains that man, having come to a conception of the unity of the race and the universe, also conceived a monotheistic religion. Reflecting upon his own nature and that of God and their relation to each other, God's holiness, man's poor service, conscious of sin, man felt that his shortcomings merited punishment, and even the death

* H.B.D. IV, "Relig. of Semites"; Sykes, Nature of Sacrifice; Davidson's O. T. Theology.

of the sinner. Hence, to indicate his sentiment to the deity, man substituted an animal victim to bear the infliction of the death which he deserved and so made his peace with God. This idea of piacular sacrifice has been current to some extent in the Old Testament. The substitutionary idea is found in I Sam. 14:43-45, Ex. 34:20, Lev. 5: 11-13; yet none of these references are decisive. In the last the animal is not killed. Altogether, the sense of sin is a little too highly developed. The idea of punishment for sin with death belongs to a more "advanced period of ethical reflection".

(2) The homage theory of sacrifice holds that man was impelled to seek a closer communion with God, not because he feels guilty of offense against God, but rather out of a desire to acknowledge his dependence and to pledge his obedience. Thus they pledge themselves not by mere verbal thanksgiving and praise but by deeds. Offering the fruits and fat of the land as Cain and Abel did, is the most impressive manifestation of their allegiance. Here again we have a highly developed theology that is impossible to the childhood of the race. "The homage theory

is attractive to spiritual and philosophical minds when seeking a justification for sacrifice, but can hardly be supposed to have originated it."

(3) The Gift theory of sacrifice declares that the offerings were presents to gain the favor of the deity. The idea here presents the deities of primitive man as belonging to an anthropomorphic order of nature spirits, ancestral ghosts or fetishes. The king or chief of the tribe is approached with gifts, as too must the gods be so treated. The gift was to pacify his anger, that he might grant them success in battle or grant the pleasure of intimate fellowship with him. The idea must have had considerable currency in ancient times as Cicero gives testimony: "Let not the impious dare to appease the gods with gifts. Let them harken to Plato, who warns them that there can be no doubt of what God's disposition toward them will be, since even a good man will refuse to accept presents from the wicked." * Herbert Spencer declares that "the origin of the practice is to be found in the custom of leaving food and drink at the graves of the dead, and as the ancestral spirit rose to divine rank the refreshments

* De Legibus, II, 16.

placed for the dead developed into sacrifices".*

It is quite true that the earliest sacrifices seem to have been offered as gifts, yet we cannot be too decisive in establishing the certainty of the conclusion that this was the original and parent idea. It has been objected that the prominence given to "blood" in the ritual can scarcely have denoted a desirable gift. Thus the gift idea cannot have influenced the whole system in a genetic way.

The physical principle is involved in the following theories: (1) That the sacrifice was a sacrificial meal. The idea is that the communion of man and the deity in eating common sacramental food,* taking the food together, united man and deity in a bond of friendship and even blood relationship. This idea Davidson explains was established on the ground that as eating together cemented men's friendship, so eating with the deity cemented the union of deity and man. "The participants on the human side, by eating food in common, confirmed their union one with another; and by giving the god part of the sacrifice, that is, smearing the blood on stones which he inhabited, and which more lately developed into

* Principles of Sociology, sec. 139 ff.

** Davidson, O. T. Theology, p. 313; Robertson Smith, Relig. of the Semites; Williamson; etc.

an altar, they allowed him also to participate, and so cemented his union with them." But it is doubtful that the Hebrews of the Old Testament ever adopted such a conception in this crude form. They may have practised the usage but there is difficulty in ascribing the original idea to the Jews, for two or three reasons. There are so many sacrifices in the Old Testament where the whole offering is given to the deity and man does not partake of it at all -

שִׂשִׁבִּי and מִזְבֵּחַ - the whole burnt offering.

Rather the earliest idea that prevails is the gift or present to the deity. The sacrifices of Cain and Abel are unmistakably a present. - מִנְחָה

Lastly, the change from nomadic to agricultural life had the tendency to make the sacrifice of the Old Testament times individual gifts, rather than sacrificial meals of the whole community.

(2) The theory of a materialistic, sacramental communion is a development of the last named theory. This is that at certain stages of civilization religion takes the form of animal worship. The animal possesses the spirit of the deity and on solemn occasions furnishes the sacramental meal. The clan

"eats their god".* In eating the animal the savage is supposed to incorporate "not only the physical but even the moral and intellectual qualities of the sacred animal!" Totemism is an illustration of such a religion, in which a clan, which was a band of individuals bound together in blood relation, formed an alliance with a resident spirit in some species of animals which it then treated kindly and on certain occasions killed one of them; the spirit of the sacred animal passed into all who partook. It was a natural and easy step from this conception to that of the sacrificial feast of communion a little later.** The main body of anthropologists refuse to accept this conception as primitive.

"All of the theories above mentioned assume that sacrifice was directly called into existence by the religious idea." All of these assist in pointing out controlling ideas and conceptions that prevailed yet no one of them contains all the truth, though all present some measure of the facts. The outstanding distinction to be made must be but a (general one; namely, that sacrifice originated in childlike ideas about God, and the fundamental motive

was to gratify Him by giving presents or sharing with Him in a sacrificial meal. To attempt much beyond this is useless speculation and dogmatism. We shall be content then to adopt none of the theories and to accept the one fundamental and general truth as here stated, and to proceed to the development of the idea of sacrifice until we find its fruitage in the doctrine of Atonement.

Chapter II.

We began with a study of the conception of sacrifice in the pre-prophetic period of Israel's history. A word should first be said about sacrifice before the time of Moses, before Israel had become consolidated into a nation. This matter largely belongs to the field of speculation. The researches of Wellhausen (*Reste arabischen Heidenthums*) and W. R. Smith associate the sacrifices recorded in the Old Testament for this period with the primitive sacrifice of Totemism. The sacrifices referred to are: The bloody offering of Abel (Gen. 4:4), burnt offering of Noah (Gen. 8:20), offerings of Abraham, peace offerings (Gen. 31:54), burnt offerings (22:13), covenant sacrifice, (15:78), libation (28:18), human sacrifice not required (22:1 ff), sacrifices outside the chosen people (Ex. 18:12, cf. Nu. 23:1 f).

The attempt has been made by these two scholars to rely upon the survivals of heathen Arabia or the vestiges of Phoenician and other Semitic cults, to carry us back to the earliest stages of Semitic sacrifice. A very serious weakness rests on the fact that Smith depends upon comparatively too recent Arab

practice in furnishing his evidence rather than upon researches in the more ancient fields of Babylon and Assyria. Until such research, now being made, brings to light the facts, this period prior to Moses must still be more or less a matter of speculation with the burden of proof on the side of the radical element.

Advancing to the period which extends from the Exodus to the eighth century, Moses is our starting point. The question is, first, to what extent was Moses the organizer of a system of sacrificial worship? The Jewish Encyclopedia contends that "Moses' own self-abnegating love, which willingly offered up his life for his people, disclosed the very qualities of God as far as they touch both the mystery of sin and the divine forgiveness, and thus became the Key to the comprehension of the Biblical idea of atonement". The Pentateuch, in its main body, represents the work of Moses in this department as epoch-making and final. Wellhausen declares that the priestly narrative ascribing to Moses the elaborate code, given him as the instrument of God, determines "the when, the where, the by whom, and in a very

special manner the how of sacrifice!"

But such a representation is unhistorical. The history of tradition furnishes all the evidence necessary for the use of sacrifice in primitive Israel. It is quite true that Moses holds a unique place and "stands for an early stage in the evolution of the institution which culminated in the system of the priestly code; but it would be a hopeless task to try to disengage the Mosaic element in the archaic usages which P. certainly embodies". . . .

So we find the account of ancient Hebrew sacrifice not independent of Moses but more particularly in connection with the Code of the Covenant. (J. E.)

Sin was considered as the occasion of divine punishment which took form in the shape of national calamities and chastisements. (Judges 9:22 f, 20:35; Exodus 21:12, 15f; II Samuel:6:7.) In I Kings 2:31f we find that sin must be punished and the punishment is usually death. The only escape is righteousness, "that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee". There were some exceptions, however, as certain sins were pardonable though the distinction between pardonable and

unpardonable sins is not clear. There were certain sins that never could be pardoned; these must meet with punishment. The former were sins of ignorance or inadvertence נִלְשָׁה and could be pardoned; the latter were sins that were wilfully or purposefully committed "with a high hand" בְּיָד חֲזָקָה "The sins done with a high hand threw those committing them outside the covenant relation. Such sin as idolatry, homage to another deity than Jehovah, infringed the first principle of the covenant relation, the basis of which was that Jehovah was God of Israel.* Repentance was the real ground upon which pardon for pardonable sins was obtained. But this contrition of heart must be reinforced by the offering of sacrifices and there was just as much emphasis upon the act as upon the inner condition. (II Sam. 24:15-25; Josh. 6:25.)

The method of pardon was both appointed and executed by Jehovah Himself. On His initiative He executed a כִּפָּר (to cover), as in Psalms 3:2, - "Blessed is he whose sin is covered." The sin is thus covered or hidden from Jehovah's eyes so that His wrath is not aroused; but He Himself must do the covering and appoint the means. The sacrifice thus

* Davidson, p. 316f.

becomes a ransom. (Ex. 21:30, 32; Nu. 25.)
I Sam. 3:14 indicates that all ordinary guilt may be thus expiated, and in II Sam. 21:3f and Exodus 21:30, we find that guilt may be appeased in two ways, - either "life for life" or by the ransom suggested. Hence a gift is offered to "atone" for the wrong committed. At this time the ceremony connected with the sacrifice must have been simple as described in I Sam. 26:19; II Sam. 24:23; Gen. 8:20-22.

We find, moreover, that each individual is not required to make atonement for himself, but that the righteousness or sacrifice of one good man of sufficient importance to the community may atone for all. This idea was doubtless based upon the principle of the solidarity of the community; not that they understood it so, but that now we see this to be the natural development out of human experience as the history of the race reveals it. Examples of the above are found in the plea of Lot for Sodom, if there be but a few righteous people that the city might be saved; also in the captivity of Joseph, which resulted in blessings upon the evil brethren who had sold him into Egypt; again, the prayers of

Moses for his people that Jehovah might spare them because Moses himself was righteous. (Nu. 21:7-9) We find similar examples in the recompense of the enraged deity and the saving of Jonathan (I. Sam. 14) and the return of the Ark by the Philistines in I. Sam. 6:1-18).

There were types or varieties of sacrifices during this period, that in which the offering was devoted entirely to God and that in which He received only a portion while the worshipers partook of the rest.* To the former belong burnt offerings, to the latter the sacrificial meal. (Ex. 10:25; 18:12; 20:24) The sacrificial feast was doubtless the oldest and most common. The occasions of peace offering were events that prompted people to come together in festive spirit, much as we would assemble at a banquet today. They celebrated the conclusion of successful campaigns, (I Sam. 11:15, cf. Judges 16:23), the cessation of famine or pestilence (II Sam. 24:25), the ascension of a king to his throne (I Kings 1:19), the dedication of the temple, when a very elaborate ceremony took place (I Kings 8:63). Firstlings and first fruits provided the

* H. B. P., Vol. LV, p. 333f.

sacrificial material and all occasions for great rejoicing brought the people together to present their peace offerings. The religious efficacy of such a feast in the popular mind was that Jehovah had been entertained and honored in their rejoicing and this rendered Him well disposed to the worshipers. "The offering would thus be considered efficacious as bringing the response which it naturally elicited by a gift or service. The command, "None shall appear before Me empty handed," (Ex. 23:15; 34:20) suggests that the practice of approaching a monarch with gifts was regarded as typical of the approach to Jehovah with gifts." Yet even thus early, higher interpretations were given of such a feast, for Samuel declares that offerings are worthless without obedience (I Sam. 15 :22)

Before proceeding further with our conclusions, let us turn for a brief investigation of the burnt offering. Here the predominant mood is not joy and hope but grief, apprehension and awe. When a sense of danger prevailed, then Jehovah was approached with burnt offerings (Gen. 22:13; Judges 13:16). Also at the beginning of war, when about to embark on

hazardous undertakings (Judges 6:26), to determine the divine will in times of perplexity (Judges 6:17f), and in all cases where the "object was to secure protection against threatened danger, success in conflict, deliverance from calamity, The idea was to ensure safety by performing an act which was acceptable to God."

What is the contribution of all this praxis to the Old Testament idea of atonement? Professor O. B. Smith contends that the whole gift idea involves a kind of substitute or propitiation. We have, for example, I Sam. 14:43-35; Ex. 34:20 (J); Gen. 22:1-14. (1) That the life of the first born belongs, on general principles, to Jehovah and therefore should be sacrificed to him. (2) But Jehovah accepts something else as a satisfaction or substitute for the surrender of this life as in the case of Abraham offering up Isaac. This substitute, it is true, has nothing to do with propitiating for sin, but if Jehovah accepts the gift in one sphere, the practice warrants our conclusion that He would (in another. In II Sam. 21:1-14, we find the account of the Gibeonites being too weak to avenge the wrongs

done, therefore Saul's innocent grandsons are hanged as a substitute.

Moreover, the argument for the solidarity of the Hebrew family does not hinder this conclusion. Individualism was already manifesting itself in this respect. The Canaanitish civilization was centuries old and complete solidarity is possible only where the community is very primitive. Consequently, we find the individual being held responsible and having to pay the penalty of his wrongs. (II Sam. 3:27; 14:7,11; I Kings 3:3, 31-33.)

Therefore the idea of substitution must have had some prevalence as a general practice, though probably not as a penal substitution. (Gen. 22:1f) Even in the case of burnt offering the intention is not always to appease the wrath of God, "but they were always at least propitiatory in the secondary sense that they were designed to prevent God from changing His attitude from one of clemency into an attitude of hostility".*

Thus we conclude that during this preprophetic period of Israel's history the main idea of sacrifice was that of compensation to Jehovah in order that He

might mitigate punishment and preserve life. There is no case that can be indicated with certainty in which an innocent individual has been sentenced to bear the penalty of the wicked. Yet the general idea is that of substitution. Jehovah will accept a substitute for the penalty to be inflicted upon the guilty. There are certain evidences that indicate that nothing but death can appease His wrath, yet this is not universally demanded. In all events the sacrifice was the outward act which simply expressed the fact of contrition of heart and true repentance. As yet the whole scheme of sacrifice was comparatively simple.

Chapter III.

Thus the sacrificial system had grown up in Israel supplied by the influences of a heathen past. These rudimentary forms had undergone modification, and then in the eighth century the prophets appeared. Their task was to transform the religion of Israel. This they attempted to do in several distinct ways.* First, by the prohibition of heathen sacrifices (Hos. 11:2, 13:2; Jer. 11:12; Ps. 106:28; Ezek. 8:10). Also the prohibition of certain kinds of sacrifice enforced, as human sacrifices (Ezek. 20:31), disparaging the costliness of offerings (Is. 1:11; Micah 6:9; Amos 4:4); condemnation of such excesses as were connected with the sacrificial cult; here drunkenness and licentiousness prevailed. (Hos. 9:13; Amos 2:7)

Thus we must observe that while the prophets did not protest against sacrifice as a principle, their reformation was rather that "in consideration of the organic connection of the sacrificial meal with the indulgence of fleshly lusts, they meant to discountenance the peace offering as the main source of evil, and labored to enhance the credit of those other varieties which precluded its characteristic temptations".

* H. B. D. IV, 335f.

The glory of the prophets consists in this, that they knew where to place the emphasis in religion. They sought to substitute for the elaborate and wincere rites and ceremonies of Israel equally splendid ideals and purposes.* Jeremiah emphasizes the inwardness of religion (Jer. 31), and this is the burden of the whole prophetic message.

This being true, we expect to find a little different view of the idea of atonement in this period. The conception is different because there is now a new conception of sin. To the prophets sin is an attitude or act of the will; it is not an accident, but a choice, and therefore sacrifices and offerings are useless in themselves. That which is demanded above all else is to abandon the evil in contrition of heart. Gifts cannot atone for violation of God's moral and spiritual law; such things do not affect Him because He has no need for these things as kings have; besides they all belong to God, anyway, and are not man's to offer. (Is. 50:10) Forgiveness depends upon repentance and a resolute turning away from evil.

The sacrificial system had so degenerated, that

* Smith, The Atonement.

the people were trying to buy the favor of Jehovah with offerings, even human sacrifice and idolatry. (Mic. 6:68; II Kings 21; Jer. 49:13-19). Smith says: "Over against this whole commercial aspect of religion in general and of atonement in particular, and engaged in a life and death struggle with it for supremacy, the teaching of the prophets concerning sin and forgiveness, stands out glorious in its purity of motive, simplicity of conception, clearness of vision and depth of insight into the character of God."

Not only did the prophets emphasize this inward character of religion and the individual's responsibility for his own sin, for which he must repent, but they recognized also vicarious suffering. Isaiah 53:13-53:12 and the other servant passages explain the sufferings of the Servant of Jehovah - in this case, the people of Israel - as vicarious: "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone." The purpose here is to explain why the innocent suffer; not on account of their own sins but for the sins of the heathen world. The character of God is such that sin must be punished. Thus if the innocent suffer it must be for others.

Nor did the prophets stop with this development of the idea. The suffering of the Servant in Isaiah is not only the substitute but the redeemer. "By the knowledge of himself shall my righteous Servant make many righteous." The Servant too will be exalted. He is to be raised from the dead and given a place of position and power in the world. Here is Isaiah's message of hope. In the converted world Israel, despite her present sufferings, will find her true place and reap her just reward.

The new development we have in the prophets of the atonement idea may be summarized as follows:

(1) Repentance is emphasized as the sine qua non of pardon.

(2) The idea of penal substitution is fully accepted in Isaiah 53.

(3) The sufferings of the innocent exercise a redemptive and regenerative influence over the guilty.

All this was accomplished by the prophets not through a scientific study of the past and present and therefore drawing conclusions for the future. (They little thought of systematic study; the development of the idea of atonement with them depends solely on their passionate and persistent search for the truth.

Chapter IV.

It remains for us to observe the final development of the Old Testament idea of atonement as it culminates in the Levitical legislation of the Priestly Code. This is the period of the triumph of the legalistic or priestly aspect of religious thought. The prophets had emphasized the ethical elements in religion, calling special attention to being and character. The legalistic aspect emphasized a right attitude toward God as exhibited not so much in being as in doing. The inevitable danger resulted, - formalism and externalism.

There are two fundamental grounds upon which this development rests*: The notion of the immeasurable Holiness of God and the enormity and universality of sin. Just as this time the national experience of the Jews augmented such notions. Jerusalem had fallen and the people had been driven into exile, inflicting serious damage upon the relation of the Hebrews to Jehovah - because a national calamity was also a religious calamity. Therefore the Israelites had been driven far away from Jehovah and if ever they were to be restored the ancient and honorable rites must be replaced and a most rigid and

*Patterson, Smith, etc.

comprehensive application alone would atone for the sins of the people and secure Jehovah's forgiveness. A second Temple must be erected, and as Patterson says, "novel circumstances, foreign impressions, deeper reflexion, required that the legacy from the past should be handled with freedom as well as piety" Consequently, we have the Priestly Code adopted as authoritative under Ezra, 444 B. C., which thereafter characterized Jewish worship.

The literature of this exilic and post-exilic period is Ezekiel, P. Cod and document, Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah. We find in this literature conflicting evidence descriptive of the practical application of the doctrine of atonement. In a general way, there are three classes of sins for which atonement may be made: - Uncleaness; unwitting or intentional, and deliberate or intentional offenses. There are passages which indicate that deliberate sins cannot be atoned, as Nu. 15:30f; Gen. 17:14; Ex. 12:15,19; 30:33,38, 31:14,15, 32:33f; Levit. 7:20f; 25-27, 10:1, 17:4,9,10. Yet such deliberate crimes as perjury, robbery, oppression, witchcraft, are atoned for: Levit. 16:21f. The only way out of this

confusion seems to be that the dominant note is that only unintentional sins can be atoned. But as this rule is too strict in practice, concessions were made from time to time and here recorded. Thus we notice that the idea was a growth, not an invention.

The atonement served the purpose of removing obstacles and establishing communion with God. The act of sacrifice was the chief element to bring about such communion, though confession and inward repentance were sometimes admitted. (Lev. 16:21). The rite of atonement was insisted upon, though a liberal interpretation of it was granted.* Its chief value was its purging agency, and here blood played a large part. The person or thing to be atoned for is anointed or sprinkled with blood. Davidson points out the fact that this purging agency is required because of two conceptions of God's character, - His unapproachable holiness and His righteousness.** Thus until the sinner, who is impure and often a deliberate sinner, has been made clean through the rite he is estranged and in danger of Jehovah's wrath. The idea was that the atonement sacrifice served to "cover" the impurity or sin, that "covering"

* Robertson Smith, p. 16f

** Davidson's Old Testament Theology, p. 320f.
References: Ps. 65:3, 78:38, 79:9; Ex. 32; Num. 25.

it was simply that it no longer provoked the anger of God, Who could no longer see it; that God Himself did the covering; "that the motives are drawn from His own nature", that the means, initiative, place are all appointed by Him.

But Jehovah had come in the Levitical legislation to act thus through the priests who atone; in case of the whole people, it is the high priest who does the atoning. The purging agency of the blood, the means appointed, etc., are the same. Leviticus 17:11 gives the best account of the principle: "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 the blood atoneth in virtue of the life."

Finally, what is the nature of atonement in this period? Clearly it is not that of penal substitution. It is not a vicarious sacrifice in that sense, for in Leviticus 5:11 the "fine flour" cannot suffer vicarious death. In Leviticus 5:13, 6:24f, 7:6, sin cannot have been transferred to these offerings for they were holy. The emphasis is not upon slaughter but upon the sprinkling of the blood.*

* Relig. of Semites, pp. 32, 337, 344.

The only instance we have of transmissio culpae is in Lev. 16:21. But here the goat is only the means by which the sins of Israel are carried away.*

If we study once more the peace and burnt offerings we will find, I think, the idea of gift. The laying on of hands was a method of presenting the gift. In the case of sacrificing for the first born, (Ex. 13:2; Num. 3:12f, 41) the life service of the Levites is dedicated to Jehovah as a gift in compensation for the life service of the first born. We find this in the case of the dedication of Samuel at the temple of Shiloh. The sacrifice is thus vicarious, but not penal. Thus we have a double conception of the sacrifice; to cleanse and to serve as a gift to Jehovah to assure Him of the sinner's sorrow and desire for pardon. Not that God demands gifts like monarchs, as the old idea had it; the gift as such had little value; but the spirit in which it was given. The ritual rite was the important thing and the idea of pardon which it conveyed; and every single part of the ritual was important. Thus it was that the sacrifice became so complex and burdensome. Conformation to the slightest detail was

* A. B. Smith, Atonement

required and the longer and more complex the ritual, the more certain the work of atonement. The climax is reached in the elaborate legislation for the great Day of Atonement. (Levit. 16) The old simple and pleasurable sacrificing had been replaced for a ritual that is difficult and which the worshiper must wield with fear and sorrow.

Conclusion.

Gathering together the shreds of this brief survey of the development of the Old Testament idea of atonement, we have observed that as soon as the idea began to take definite shape, several conceptions resulted:

1. It is God Who forgives sin and covers it up from His sight.

2. His anger is aroused because of the sins of individuals and the nation. This anger is appeased by punishment of the guilty. But under certain circumstances this punishment may be averted, and Jehovah's wrath appeased by sacrifices which atone for the sinner.

3. At first such atonement depended largely upon the intercession of the faithful servants of Jehovah, as Moses, Samuel; but as the prophets pointed out individual moral responsibility and the inwardness of religion, there grew up thereafter a complex scheme by which the individual and nation conforming to prescribed rites might find forgiveness.

Thus God, the Author of righteousness and truth, is also the Author of forgiveness. "Mercy seasons justice", and inward contrition of heart

represented in some outward act secures pardon.