

PSA Examined

Article Series:

Article #5: Sin Offerings & the Day of Atonement



PSA Series – Do the Old testament Sin Offerings or the “Day of Atonement” support PSA?

Description

PSA Examined

Article Series:

Article #5: Sin Offerings & the Day of Atonement



In [the previous article in this series on Penal Substitutionary](#)

[Atonement \(PSA\)](#), we looked at the definition and usage of the word “kaphar”, which is the Hebrew word usually translated “atonement”. Today, we’ll look at how that definition applies to the Old Testament sin offerings and also the “Day of Atonement”. The Day of Atonement includes a sin offering, which is why we are looking at them together.

As a super-quick recap, “kaphar” (*the word translated “atonement”*) means to “cover over” so a wronged person will pretend that a wrong done to him isn’t seen, even though he did see it. We express an almost identical idea with the English word “overlook”. The word “kaphar” also contains the idea of reconciliation, which is an important nuance that might not come out as much as it should in this article or the previous one.

If you would like more detail on what “kaphar” (*atonement*) means, please read [the previous article](#) because that’s all the recap this article will have.

(This article was originally the second half of the previous one, but I split it up because it got too long. This article will pick up right after the split, so if you haven’t read the previous article, this one might not make much sense.)

Anyway, let's begin.

Old Testament sin offerings, “kaphar”, and forgiveness

There are a few sin offerings in the Mosaic Law, but most of them are very similar to each other. Thankfully, this is especially true when it comes to our topic of “kaphar” (*atonement/overlooking/reconciliation*), so **we'll concentrate on the most applicable ones: the sin offering for the common man, and then the “Day of Atonement” a little later.**

The sin offering for the common man

Here is the passage, and please keep in mind that “salach” is the word we looked at in [a previous article](#) that's pretty much always translated “forgiveness” or “pardon” because it means exactly that.

Leviticus 4:27-31

27 ‘Now if anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and becomes guilty,

28 if his sin which he has committed is made known to him, then he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without defect, for his sin which he has committed.

29 ‘He shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and slay the sin offering at the place of the burnt offering.

30 ‘The priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering; and all *the rest of* its blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar.

31 ‘Then he shall remove all its fat, just as the fat was removed from the sacrifice of peace offerings; and the priest shall offer it up in smoke on the altar for a soothing aroma to the LORD. **Thus the priest shall make atonement (kaphar) for him, and he will be forgiven (salach).**

A more literal rendering of the end of verse 31 would be:

Thus the priest shall **cover over** (*his sin, so that it's “overlooked” to bring reconciliation*) for him, **and** he will be forgiven.

Now, that final clause stating: “and he will be forgiven” is a very interesting statement.

But before we talk about why, we need to read the passage carefully.

One of the most important items in my article: [The Biggest Mistakes Most People Make When Studying the Bible](#) is “*not reading the scriptures carefully*”. And by that, I mean slowly, methodically, and

noticing the exact nuance of the words that God chose to inspire.

Notice the difference between “kaphar” and “forgiven”.

It's clear the the priest causes the “kaphar” (*overlooking/reconciliation*) through the sacrifice. That's explicitly stated in the text. **However, the text does not say that the man “will be forgiven” because of the sin offering.**

That's important.

The sacrifice leads to the “kaphar” (*overlooking/reconciliation*), but notice the difference in the verb voices. “Kaphar” (*overlooking/reconciliation*) is in the active voice, meaning the priest does it. However, “will be forgiven” is in the passive voice, meaning that the forgiveness was done to the man by someone else, not by the man himself. (*Yes, this is also the case in Hebrew.*) The phrase “will be forgiven” is linked to the previous statement by “and”, which again means that they aren't the same thing. Perhaps related, but not the same.

The sin offering did not cause the forgiveness.

The sacrifice caused the “kaphar” (*overlooking/reconciliation*), and the “kaphar” accompanied the forgiveness, but the text doesn't say that the sin offering caused the forgiveness. This is important because if our works could make God forgive us, then our salvation would be based on our works. Thankfully, that's not what the text says.

The forgiveness accompanies the sacrifice, but isn't caused by the sacrifice.

This is similar to how good works should accompany our salvation, but good works don't cause our salvation.

So no, this verse doesn't teach works-based salvation.

Okay, that out of the way, we'll move on.

The PSA understanding of “kaphar” and forgiveness/pardon in the sin offerings

Now, the PSA camp would say that the forgiveness in this verse didn't happen at the time of the sin offering, but rather happened after Jesus's death on the cross.

That is, they would say that the “kaphar” (*atonement/reconciliation*) was done by the priest just exactly then, yet God merely “overlooked” (*kaphar*) the sin until the cross, at which point God forgave/pardoned the sin. **There's nothing in the verse to contradict that understanding, but it does require reading a centuries-long time gap where no time gap is stated.** Of course, the verse doesn't say that there isn't a time gap, so there certainly could be one.

However, this harkens back to the addendum in [the article about PSA's #2 pillar](#), where it seemed that PSA requires us to approach a lot of passages with a specific lens. That is, we need to import understanding to the text that isn't in that specific text. Now, a thoughtful PSA supporter would likely

reply that he's simply understanding the sin offerings with the context of Romans 3:25, which we already looked at in the previous article.

That's perfectly legitimate.

The Old Testament foreshadowed the New Testament in many ways, and to fully understand the Old Testament — especially as it relates to Christ's work for our salvation — you need to read it with the context of the New Testament.

It's entirely legitimate to say: "This (or any other) Old Testament passage about sacrifice can't be properly understood without looking at the New Testament's understanding of that passage".

That's good Bible study.

(It'll also come back to bite the PSA school later when we look at certain OT passages — like parts of Isaiah 53 — where the NT explanation/application of a passage is basically ignored by PSA supporters, even prominent PSA guys like Mike Winger. But I digress.)

What is the non-PSA understanding of the passage?

There are two basic understandings that go quite well together.

The first says that the verse includes both "kaphar" and forgiveness because it's normal Hebrew repetition for emphasis. Hebrew does this all the time, all throughout the Old Testament, and since the words have a somewhat related meaning, it does make some sense. I think a PSA fellow would acknowledge this repetition for emphasis, but would deny that it provides grounds to dismiss PSA. I agree with that. Repetition for emphasis is accurate, but doesn't do a single thing against PSA.

The second understanding is a simple reading of the passage. The sacrifice causes God to "overlook" (*kaphar*) the sin, and then God forgives the man's sin. Parents do this regularly, when a kid apologizes and the parent effectively says "Okay, I'll overlook this misbehavior and forgive you".

You could also see it as a "sealed record" in a courtroom. That is, the crime is pardoned and the record of the crime is sealed, so that even the record of the crime is "covered over"/overlooked/"kaphar".

This has parallels in other passages, like this one:

Jeremiah 31:34

34 They will not teach again, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive (*salach*) their wrongdoing, and their sin I will no longer remember."

Obviously the all-knowing God can't forget, but He can "kaphar" ("cover over"/overlook) even the

memory of our sins. This verse in Jeremiah has a typical Hebrew repetition for emphasis, since it emphasizes the complete forgiveness that is offered; **it's not only forgiven (*salach*), it's also no longer remembered**. I'm sure you can think of many other verses to this effect, so I won't quote more.

Going back to the sin offering passage, it could be a similar thing where the sin is both "overlooked" and forgiven, and the "overlooking" is like Jeremiah 31:34, where it's about not remembering the sin.

Importantly, the non-PSA fellow would say that the sin in question was forgiven right then.

Conversely, PSA says that's impossible. As we covered in [a previous article](#), PSA's #2 pillar is that God cannot simply forgive/pardon sin without punishing it. Thus, PSA says it's impossible for God to have forgiven the sin at the time of the sin offering because it hadn't been punished yet. (*Remember what we saw in [the previous article](#), that the blood of bulls and goats can't take away sin.*)

The non-PSA fellow says that the sin was simply forgiven/pardoned right then, just like Ezekiel 18's "will not be remembered against him".

This has the advantage that you can simply read the passage and understand the plain text for what it says. Now, there are plenty of places where additional context is needed to understand something, so this isn't strong evidence — it's actually rather weak — but it's worth noting.

Sin offering, PSA, and pictures/foreshadowing

In [the article on PSA's #2 pillar](#), we spent a lot of time looking at forgiveness/pardon and the definitions of those words. One of the things we concluded is the only example in the Bible where we *might* see forgiveness after punishment is in the sin offerings. However, **the understanding from PSA that we just looked at makes that impossible**. Again, PSA says that the sin offerings didn't forgive anything, but merely convinced God to overlook (*kaphar*) the sin until the cross.

Thus, since nothing was forgiven/pardoned because of the sin offering, the sin offering can't be an example of forgiveness/pardon after punishment.

However...

A thoughtful PSA supporter will likely respond: "That doesn't matter: it's the picture that matters."

That is, they would say that it doesn't matter that the sin offering didn't forgive anything. PSA would say that the sin offering was merely a picture of how God uses substitutional sacrifices to forgive us, and that we should look at the picture as foreshadowing while the substance is Christ.

That's a good argument.

It's not ironclad because there are other ways to take the sin offerings, but the PSA understanding is entirely legitimate. Next, we'll take a look at a few of the other understandings of the sin offering.

Other non-PSA understandings of the sin offerings

Now, a PSA fellow might say that there are no other ways to understand this except for penal substitution. In fact, I've often heard this from them.

Further, PSA supporters will likely say that the penal substitution element is obvious, and any attempt to deny it is completely ignoring the text.

However — and this is important — Not all substitution is **penal** substitution. (*penal substitution involves punishment*) There are theories of Jesus's work on the cross that have a heavy focus on substitution, but no aspect of **penal** substitution. (*they don't involve punishment.*)

No joke.

But extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof, so here's an example:

The earliest complete treatise on Jesus's work on the cross is "De Incarnatione Verbi Dei" ("On the Incarnation of the Word") by Athanasius around 320 AD. I'll link to the complete work below so you can double-check me, but He believed that Jesus had to die because God said that man would die if he ate of the tree in the Garden. Thus, if we didn't die, God would be a liar. But God didn't want us to die, so Jesus died in our place as our substitute so we didn't have to die.

I pulled a few small snippets from various places in the work to try and capture the essence of the argument, though obviously there's more.

Now this is that of which Holy Writ also gives warning, saying in the Person of God: "Of every tree that is in the garden, eating thou shalt eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, ye shall not eat of it, but **on the day that ye eat, dying ye shall die.**" But by "dying ye shall die," what else could be meant than not dying merely, but also abiding ever in the corruption of death?

...

It was, then, out of the question to leave men to the current of corruption; because this would be unseemly, and unworthy of God's goodness.

...

Thus, taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, **He surrendered His body to death in place of all**, and offered it to the Father. **This He did out of sheer love for us, so that in His death all might die, and the law of death thereby be abolished because**, having fulfilled in His body that for which it was appointed, it was thereafter voided of its power for men. **This He did that He might turn again to incorruption men who had turned back to corruption, and make them alive through death**

by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of His resurrection. **Thus He would make death to disappear from them as utterly as straw from fire**

[Source:](#)

(Note: a lot of PSA supporters take Athanasius out of context to try to support PSA. However, they are either copying snippets from someone else and didn't read it, or they did read it and are being dishonest.)

Notice that this is substitution without penal substitution because there's no "punishment" involved in this substitution.

If you read the whole work — which incidentally I recommend, if only for the historical context — you'll see that the idea of Jesus being punished in our place as our substitute doesn't appear. Despite that, **Athanasius definitely believed that Jesus's death was substitutionary**, as the quote above reveals. In fact, **Athanasius's argument for why Jesus died is based on God's goodness, not His justice or wrath**. Athanasius seemed to believe that God's goodness wouldn't allow man to remain in his fallen state.

(And just a note on church history: Athanasius was a huge voice in the early church and very influential. Gregory of Nazianzus called him a "Pillar of the Church" and he had great influence. This isn't some "fringe" fellow; he was entirely mainstream in the early church and thus many others likely held to his views.)

Now, Athanasius wasn't infallible.

Athanasius absolutely could be wrong and I'm not endorsing his view. (I think it's woefully incomplete at best.)

I included the quote above to show that there are other understandings of both Jesus's death and the levitical sacrifices that involved substitution, but not penal substitution. I'm not saying that those understandings are correct, merely that they exist.

Thus, substitution does not necessarily mean penal substitution because there are other ways to understand it. In fact, over half of Christendom doesn't believe PSA.

No joke.

(And of course, being the majority doesn't prove anything correct. I'm simply showing that there are a lot of other Christians who see things differently.)

Typical numbers say that about ~50% of Christians are Catholic and another ~12% are Orthodox. The Catholic Church doesn't teach PSA and the Orthodox church vehemently opposes it. That's at least 62% of Christendom who doesn't believe PSA, and there are some other, smaller denominations that don't believe PSA either. If just 4% of them don't teach PSA (*which is likely*), then two-thirds of Christians don't believe PSA. Even just counting Catholic + Orthodox, that's over 60% who don't.

Thus, Christians who believe PSA are actually a **minority** of Christians worldwide... but of course that doesn't mean they're wrong any more than being in the majority makes you right, which of course it doesn't.

(Most of the Catholics I've talked to think that PSA is very strange when I've explained it. I've heard other Christians who simply can't wrap their brains around PSA because they say "Why doesn't God just forgive them?". Additionally, the Orthodox churches vehemently opposes PSA despite being the oldest Christian denomination. Yes, they're older than the Catholic church, which means that the two oldest Christian denominations don't teach it.)

All of these Christian denominations have understandings of the cross and Old Testament sacrifices that don't involve penal substitution.

Obviously scripture should be the final arbiter for our doctrine.

If scripture teaches PSA, then obviously we should believe PSA. Period. However, it is historically and theologically inaccurate to say that it's impossible to not see PSA in the Old Testament sacrifices. Even if PSA is 100% correct, PSA supporters should be able to look at the passage and realize that there are other ways to understand it, even if those other ways are ultimately wrong. I'm not saying that they are right or wrong, simply arguing that all Christians should keep an open mind because there are other views.

In fact, the oldest understanding of the levitical sacrifices — the one held by the Jews themselves — doesn't involve substitution at all.

None.

No joke.

We'll look at what the Jews thought about it now, then come back to the sin offering passage in a minute.

What the Jews thought about sin offerings and PSA

The following is from the [Jewish Encyclopedia article on sacrifice](#). Please notice they specifically say that the expiation of guilt is not the purpose of the Levitical sacrifices. Now, of course they could be wrong about that. It could be that they completely misunderstood the entire sacrificial system just as they completely misunderstood the Messiah. However, it's worth noting what they thought because Romans 3:2 says: "they were entrusted with the oracles of God". That doesn't make them right, but it's worth looking at their opinion, if only for historical context.

Yet, in what sense the specific sin-offerings were credited with atoning power **can not be understood without an antecedent knowledge of what constituted sin in the conception of those that first observed the sacrificial cult. "Clean" or "holy" and "unclean" are the two poles; and "holy" implies "set aside for the Deity";**

e.g., an object which only the Deity's own may touch, or a precinct into which only the Deity's own may enter. Sin is an act that violates the taboo.

...

The refined sense of the soul's separation from God which is to be offset by another soul (blood) is **certainly not** inherent in the primitive conception.

...

In this connection the ceremony of laying on of hands is discovered to be only one of the many symbolic rites, abundant in primitive jurisprudence, whereby acquisition or abandonment of property is expressed. In the case of the sacrifices it implies absolute relinquishment ("manumissio"). The animal reverts thereby to its original owner—God.

(Berean Patriot Note: Many PSA advocates will say that the laying on of hands on the animal transferred the man's sins to the animal. While that's not unreasonable — and we'll talk about it later when we talk about the "day of Atonement" (kaphar) — that was not the Hebrew understanding of the laying on of hands during the sin offering.)

...

This excursus into primitive folk-lore suggests at once the untenable character of the various theological interpretations given to the sacrificial institutions of the Bible. It will not be necessary to explain at length that **the expiation of guilt**—in any other sense than that given above, though perhaps with a more spiritual scope—**is not the leading purpose of the Levitical sacrifices**. Purification from physical uncleanness is an important function of sacrifices, but only because "unclean" has a very definite religious meaning (in connection with child-birth or with contact with a dead body, etc.). The consecration of persons and things to holy uses through the sacrifices is not due to some mysterious sacramental element in them; but **the profane is changed into holy by coming in contact with what is under all circumstances holy, viz., the blood.**

[Source.](#)

Again, notice that the Jewish Encyclopedia says that expiation of guilt is *not* the leading purpose of the sacrifices. In fact, they consider it so self-evident that the quote says "*It will not be necessary to explain at length*" why it isn't the case. The Jews — right or wrong — definitely didn't hold to penal substitution.

The Jews — right or wrong — believed that blood was holy (*and we'll look at why soon*), and thus anything that came into contact with sacrificial blood became holy.

This idea of something "profane" being changed into something holy by coming into contact with something holy is utterly foreign to Western Christians, but it's explicitly taught in the Bible:

One example:

Exodus 29:35-37

35 “Thus you shall do to Aaron and to his sons, according to all that I have commanded you; you shall ordain them through seven days.

36 “Each day you shall **offer a bull as a sin offering** for atonement, and you shall **purify the altar when you make atonement for it, and you shall anoint it to consecrate it.**

37 “For seven days **you shall make atonement for the altar and consecrate it; then the altar shall be most holy, and whatever touches the altar shall be holy.**

Most Christians I’ve met have this idea that we must not let anything holy touch anything unholy because the unholy thing will contaminate the holy thing.

That idea is wrong.

The opposite is true.

If we could contaminate holy things with our impurity, then instead of Jesus’s blood cleansing us, we would “contaminate” Him. Obviously, that’s absurd; we can no more “contaminate God” than we can overpower Him.

This idea of the “unholy contaminating the holy” seems to stem from the various laws about ceremonial purity. However, according to the law, man isn’t intrinsically holy. For lack of a better phrase, we are “neutrally holy”, and thus — according to the law — could be tipped towards unclean or holy. You sin, you become unclean. You sacrifice, you become holy again.

Now, we need to go down a “rabbit trail” for a bit to talk about the connection between atonement (*kaphar*) and blood.

We’ll come back to the sin offering in Leviticus 4 once we’ve gathered more context for it, specifically what the Bible says about blood and “kaphar” (*atonement/overlooking/reconciliation*).

Does “atonement” (*kaphar*) require a blood sacrifice?

Now, there’s one verse that the PSA school often appeals to in order to say that a blood sacrifice is required for “atonement” (*kaphar/overlooking/reconciliation*), and rightfully so... unless you read it in a good translation. Here is the usual mistranslation, as exemplified by the ESV (*the “Extremely Substandard Version” and for the evidence that it intentionally mistranslates regularly, please see [my article on Bible translation](#)*).

Hebrews 9:22 (ESV)

22 Indeed, **under the law** almost everything is purified with blood, and **without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins**

Now, two things. First, the second highlighted clause is governed by the first, meaning that this only applies under the law. **That's important.** Even if we look at the ESV's mistranslation of the passage, this isn't a universal fact because it's only applicable to the Mosaic Law.

Second and more importantly, this entire clause is mistranslated in nearly every translation, with only the NASB family getting it correct (*except the new NASB 2020, which is significantly worse than the 95 edition. Again, details in [my article on Bible translations](#)*). Here's the verse in the NASB 95:

Hebrews 9:22

22 And according to the Law, **one may almost say**, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Quite different, isn't it? Now, I'll quote the lexicon entry for the word, and then some scholars on the topic afterward.

?????? (??? (????)), adverb, from Homer down;

1. near, hard by.

2. from Sophocles down (of degree, i. e.) well-nigh, nearly, almost; so in the N. T. three times before ???: Acts 13:44; Acts 19:26; **Hebrews 9:22** (but see Winers Grammar, 554 (515) n.; (R. V. **I may almost say**)); (2 Macc. 5:2; 3Macc. 5:14).

Notice the lexical understanding, and here are some scholars expounding on that; their full commentary on the verse can be found [here](#).

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers: And almost all things.—The meaning of the word “almost,” as it stands in the Greek, is rather, “One may almost lay down the rule,” “One may almost say.” What follows, **in both parts of the verse**, is a general saying, modified by these introductory words. And **one may almost say**—according to the Law, all things are cleansed in blood, and apart from the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Meyer's NT Commentary: The author, however, does not write ??? ?? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????????????, but, on the contrary, prefixes ?????? to the whole clause, in order to imply that the limitation contained in this expression extends to both members of the clause. **The sense is consequently: and one must almost say** that all things are according to the law purified with blood, and that without the shedding of blood no remission takes place. So, rightly, Bleek, Winer, Gramm., 7 Aufl. p. 514 f.; Riehm, Lehrbegr. des Hebräerbr. p. 500; Alford, Maier, Hofmann, and Woerner.

Pulpit Commentary: Verse 22. – And almost (**rather, eve may almost say that**) all things are according to the Law purified with blood; and without shedding of blood there is no remission.

And a slightly longer quote from “Vincent's Word Studies” to cap things off, just in case you weren't convinced by the ones above:

The historical facts are summed up, emphasizing one point – cleansing by blood.

Almost all things (??????? – ??????)

The A.V. is wrong. ??????? almost or nearly is prefixed to **the entire clause, and applies to both its members**. Rend. “and I may almost say, it is in blood,” etc. **Almost provides for such exceptions as:** Exodus 19:10; Exodus 32:30-32; Exodus 5:11-13; Leviticus 15:5; Leviticus 16:26-28; Leviticus 22:6; Numbers 16:46-48; Numbers 31:23, Numbers 31:24; Psalm 51:1-17; Psalm 32:1, Psalm 32:2.

And without shedding of blood is no remission (???? ?????? ?????????????????? ??? ?????????? ??????????)

This sentence also is covered by “I may almost say.” It does not state that without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins, which “would be in conflict with the history and literature of the Old Testament.” See exceptions above. ?????????????????? shedding of blood, N.T.o , olxx, oClass. ??? ?????????? ??????????, lit. remission does not take place or ensue. For ?????????? see on James 5:15; most frequent in Luke and Acts. In Hebrews only here and Hebrews 10:18. Commonly with a genitive, in the phrase remission of sins: but sometimes absolutely as here, Mark 3:29; Luke 4:18.

Vincent's Word Studies mentions a whole list of verses where blood isn't required, though most of his examples are about ceremonial purity rather than "atonement" (*kaphar*) for sin. Thus, we'll now look at a few places where "atonement" either doesn't require blood, or is accomplished by something other than blood.

When "atonement" (*kaphar*) isn't made by blood

There are several places where "kaphar" (*overlooking/reconciliation*) isn't made by blood. As a reminder, "kaphar" means "covering over"/overlooking/reconciliation, but does not mean forgiveness/pardon.

Here are some of the verses:

Exodus 30:14-16

14 "Everyone who is numbered, from twenty years old and over, shall give the contribution to the LORD.

15 "The rich shall not pay more and the poor shall not pay less than the half shekel, when you give the contribution to the LORD to make atonement for yourselves.

16 "You shall take the atonement money from the sons of Israel and shall give it for the service of the tent of meeting, that it may be a memorial for the sons of Israel before the LORD, to make atonement (kaphar) for yourselves."

Well, isn't that interesting; you can use money to "make atonement" (*kaphar*) for yourself in some situations. You obviously can't "buy your way into heaven", and that's not the point. You can't buy forgiveness or a pardon from God either. Again, as we saw in [the previous article](#), "kaphar" atonement and forgiveness/pardon are two different things.

Next, we'll look at Numbers.

Numbers 16:46-48

46 Moses said to Aaron, "Take your censer and put in it fire from the altar, and lay incense on it; then bring it quickly to the congregation and make atonement (kaphar) for them, for wrath has gone forth from the LORD, the plague has begun!"

47 Then Aaron took it as Moses had spoken, and ran into the midst of the assembly, for behold, the plague had begun among the people. So he put on the incense and made atonement (kaphar) for the people.

48 He took his stand between the dead and the living, so that the plague was checked.

By following God's command, the sin of the people was "covered over" (*kaphar*) and God "overlooked" their sin to bring reconciliation. This checked God's wrath, and again, this was done without any blood. So far we have money and incense "making atonement" (*kaphar*) in addition to blood.

Here's another verse, and it's even clearer.

Isaiah 27:9 (*ESV, since the NASB makes some odd translation choices here*)

9 Therefore **by this the guilt of Jacob will be atoned for (*kaphar*)**, and this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin: **when he makes all the stones of the altars like chalkstones crushed to pieces, no Asherim or incense altars will remain standing.**

Here, "Jacob" (*Israel*) turning from idols causes the "kaphar". Again, remember that "kaphar" means to "cover over" in the sense of overlooking something to bring reconciliation. **The "full price" of Israel's kaphar (*overlooking/reconciliation*) for past sins was turning from idols in this case.**

To sum these verses up: God can choose whatever He wants as the "price" to overlook (*kaphar*) our sin. However, as we already covered, an "overlooked" (*kaphar*) sin hasn't actually been dealt with; it's just been overlooked.

The animal sacrifices, the money, the incense, and whatever else was said to "make atonement" (*kaphar*) was what God decided was the necessary action before he would "overlook" our sin for the time being. However, atonement (*kaphar*) does *not* mean the sin is permanently gone. Like in the District Attorney example in [the previous article](#), it means that the DA has "overlooked" (*kaphar?*) the sin/crime at that time. However, that doesn't mean that the DA can't bring charges at a later date. **It took Jesus's salvific work to actually and finally solve our sin problem, instead of it merely being "overlooked" (*kaphar*).**

(And there are some sins that God won't overlook, notably murder, as we already covered in the previous article.)

Now, just because God occasionally allows/uses something other than blood for "kaphar" (*overlooking/reconciliation*) doesn't change the fact that under the law, blood was almost always required. That begs the question of the next heading.

Why blood?

Thankfully, God did tell us something about why in a few places.

Genesis 9:3-6 (*God Speaking to Noah after the flood*)

3 “Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as *I gave the green plant.*

4 “Only **you shall not eat flesh with its life, *that is, its blood.***

5 “Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man’s brother I will require the life of man.

6 “**Whoever sheds man’s blood,
By man his blood shall be shed,
For in the image of God
He made man.**

So in God’s eyes according to verse 4, **something’s life *is* its blood**. The next passage says that “its blood is *identified* with its life”, and here’s the full context for that rather interesting statement. Don’t miss verse 11.

Leviticus 17:10-14

10 ‘And any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people.

11 ‘For **the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.**

12 “Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, ‘No person among you may eat blood, nor may any alien who sojourns among you eat blood.’

13 “So when any man from the sons of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, in hunting catches a beast or a bird which may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth.

14 “**For as for the life of all flesh, its blood is *identified* with its life.** Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, ‘You are not to eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off.’

This identification of the life with blood appears elsewhere as well, and this next verse is arguably the most revealing.

Deuteronomy 12:23-25

23 “Only be sure not to eat the blood, for **the blood is the life**, and **you shall not eat the life with the flesh.**

24 “You shall not eat it; you shall pour it out on the ground like water.

25 “You shall not eat it, so that it may be well with you and your sons after you, for you will be doing what is right in the sight of the LORD.

Both Genesis 9:4 and Deut 12:23 make it clear that “blood = life”, and Lev 17:14 strongly hints at this as well. However, Deut 12:23 has the strongest and clearest statement: “the blood is the life”. If we go back to lev 17:11, the connection becomes clear.

Leviticus 17:11

11 ‘For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement (kaphar).’

Again, remember that “kaphar” means to “cover over”/overlook/reconcile, but it does not mean “to forgive/pardon”.

We also know that animal blood (*animal life?*) couldn’t do what Jesus’s blood (*Jesus’s life?*) could do. Animal blood (*animal life?*) could only “kaphar” (*atone/cause to overlook*) our sin, while Jesus’s blood (*Jesus’s life?*) is able to “take away sins”.

So we have this contrast:

Hebrews 10:4: For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

1 John 3:5 You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.

Now, you can make a logical inference from those statements. It is just an inference, but it seems like an entirely legitimate inference.

Consider:

- If the altar was holy enough that anything “profane” that touched it became holy
- **And if** Jesus is more holy than the altar (*which seems a foregone conclusion because He is God Himself in the flesh*)
- **Then therefore**, whatever touches Jesus’s blood — since “the blood is the life” — is turned from “profane” to holy. (*And I’m not talking about if Jesus got a paper-cut or splinter, but rather about faith and salvation*)

Yes, that’s a logical inference, but I think it’s a legitimate one.

Regardless of whether you believe PSA or not, the above should be part of your understanding of Jesus’s salvific work.

There are a vast number of verses in the New Testament that talk about Jesus’s sacrifice “cleansing

us” of our sin. There are many places that communicate ideas like us “being a new creation”, and being given “hearts of flesh” instead of “hearts of stone”, and many other such ideas about how radically Christ’s salvific work changes us.

Jesus’s blood appears to be the vehicle for that, because according to God “blood = life”.

There’s more to it than that, and we’ll cover it when we get to Hebrews and a discussion of the New Covenant. However, for now, we’ll return to our discussion of the sin offering in Leviticus 4.

Sidebar: Why sacrifice the animals then?

According to PSA, the reason is obvious: because it pictures Christ’s sacrifice. The answer is exactly the same in the other theories we looked at as well. This is obvious in Athanasius’s theory, since the goat dies instead of the person. However, you might be wondering why the goat had to die according to the Jewish view. The answer is also pretty simple and there’s a easy analogy: meat.

- People kill animals to get their meat to eat because you can’t extract the meat without killing the animal.
- Likewise, the Jews killed the goat to get its blood to purify things because you can’t extract the blood without killing the animal.

It really is that simple according to the Jewish understanding of sacrifice. That doesn’t make it correct of course, but I found it interesting and worth sharing.

The Sin offering in Leviticus 4, revisited

Now that we’ve looked at other interpretations, I want to point something out: **Based on what we’ve seen so far, PSA has a perfectly valid understanding of the sin offering, it just doesn’t have the only valid understanding of the sin offering.** Like so many other passages, there are other ways to understand it. Obviously this isn’t always true, but it often is. We only looked at two other understandings, but there are more. (*Which we won’t get into for time/space reasons.*) Whether PSA is true or not, hopefully you can see that there are other understandings of the sin offering than PSA.

- If you look at the sin offering with Athanasius’s view, the animal died as a substitute, but not a penal substitute. The animal dying for our sin was merely a picture of Christ dying for our benefit, so that we could “taste death” in Christ, and thus not need to die ourselves.
- The Jewish conception is that the animal died because (*sacrificial*) blood is holy, and something that’s been polluted by sin is made holy again by coming into contact with something that is holy; blood. (*specifically the blood of a sacrificial animal.*)

I’m not saying that those understandings are correct or incorrect, merely that other understandings exist.

Yes, you certainly can look at the sin offering and see penal substitution, and that's valid with what we've seen so far, but the downside is that it's not clearly taught/stated in the text itself. **That is, if you come to the text with PSA in your mind, you'll definitely see PSA. However, if you don't come to the text with PSA in mind, you won't necessarily see it.** Yes, I realize that this is hard for people who've been taught PSA their whole lives to see, but remember that over 60% of Christianity doesn't hold to penal substitution and thus doesn't see it in the sin offering.

That doesn't make either side right or wrong, but remember that there are other understandings.

With that in mind, **please read the passage again slowly and carefully, and judge for yourself if penal substitution is being clearly taught and/or pictured here.**

Leviticus 4:27-31

27 'Now if anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and becomes guilty,

28 if his sin which he has committed is made known to him, then he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without defect, for his sin which he has committed.

29 'He shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and slay the sin offering at the place of the burnt offering.

30 'The priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering; and all *the rest of* its blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar.

31 'Then he shall remove all its fat, just as the fat was removed from the sacrifice of peace offerings; and the priest shall offer it up in smoke on the altar for a soothing aroma to the LORD. **Thus the priest shall make atonement (kaphar) for him, and he will be forgiven (salach).**

Now, even with all the understanding that we've just gleaned, this verse doesn't seem to weigh in on the PSA debate decisively, either for or against. Even if we assume that there's an unstated time gap (*to the cross*) between the sacrifice and the forgiveness/pardon, nothing about punishment is stated here at all. You could argue that there's substitution and that's legitimate, but there's no clear element of penal substitution.

Now, this of course changes based on what you think of the New Testament. If you see penal substitution in the New Testament, then it's perfectly reasonable to see it in the sin offering as well.

This is why the sin offering doesn't actually weigh in on the PSA debate, either for or against.

Next, we'll look at the "Day of Atonement" — or "Day of Overlooking/reconciliation" — with the understanding we've gleaned and see how it applies to the PSA debate.

The “Day of Atonement” in Leviticus 16

I would highly recommend that you read the entire chapter for context, but I’m not going to copy/paste it here for space reasons. You can read it in the [NASB 95 here](#), or the [NKJV here](#) (*both links open in a new tab*).

Don’t miss verse 10, and especially verse 30.

As you read, remember that “atonement” means to “cover over” so the sin is overlooked to bring reconciliation; **atonement = overlooking/reconciliation**.

Leviticus 16:7-10, 15-22, 29-31

7 “He shall take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the doorway of the tent of meeting.

8 “Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat.

9 “Then Aaron shall offer the goat on which the lot for the LORD fell, and make it a sin offering.

10 “But **the goat on which the lot for the scapegoat fell shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make atonement (kaphar) upon it, to send it into the wilderness as the scapegoat.**

...

15 “Then **he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people**, and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat.

16 “**He shall make atonement (kaphar) for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel and because of their transgressions in regard to all their sins**; and thus he shall do for the tent of meeting which abides with them in the midst of their impurities.

17 “When he goes in to **make atonement (kaphar)** in the holy place, no one shall be in the tent of meeting until he comes out, that **he may make atonement (kaphar) for himself and for his household and for all the assembly of Israel.**

18 “Then he shall go out to the altar that is before the LORD and **make atonement (kaphar)** for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and of the blood of the goat and put it on the horns of the altar on all sides.

19 “With his finger he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it seven times and cleanse it, and from the impurities of the sons of Israel consecrate it.

20 “When he finishes **atonement** (*kaphar*) for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall offer the live goat.

21 “Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and **he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness** by the hand of a man who *stands* in readiness.

22 “**The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a solitary land**; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness.

...

29 “*This* shall be a permanent statute for you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall humble your souls and not do any work, whether the native, or the alien who sojourns among you;

30 **for it is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; you will be clean from all your sins** before the LORD.

31 “It is to be a sabbath of solemn rest for you, that you may humble your souls; it is a permanent statute.

To summarize, there are two goats. One is sacrificed as a sin offering to “make atonement” (*kaphar* “cover over”/“cause to overlook”/reconcile) that way, and the other “makes atonement” (*kaphar* “cover over”/“cause to overlook”/reconcile) by being sent away from the camp with all the sins of Israel “laid upon it”. Notice that **both** the sacrificed goat **and** the live goat “make atonement” (*kaphar*/overlooking/reconciliation).

That’s important.

However, we’ll come back to that in a moment. There are several things we need to look at in the “Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation” (*kaphar*), and here’s a short list:

- The stated reason for the day is “to cleanse” the people of their sins.
- That it’s the day of “overlooking/reconciliation” (*kaphar*), not forgiveness/pardon
- That objects needed “kaphar” (atonement/overlooking)
 - The reconsecration of the altar
- The Ark would be beautiful and disgusting at the same time
- The “scapegoat” concept and underlying word
- The live goat is the one that bears the sins, not the goat of the sin offering.

We’ll look at these one at a time.

The stated reason for the day is “to cleanse” the people of their sins.

When God sees fit to tell us why He does something, it's important that we pay attention. He often doesn't, which makes it even more important to pay attention when He does.

Leviticus 16:30 for it is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you ; you will be clean from all your sins before the LORD.

Now, in English that's using an infinitive to indicate purpose. Hebrew does the exact same thing, and in fact does it more than English. Here's an excerpt of an article about how Hebrew infinitives are used:

Function

The infinitive construct can carry the following range of meanings.

Expresses purpose, result, or complementary action of a main verb (with preposition ??)

This is by far the most common use of the infinitive construct, as a standard grammatical infinitive.

Source.

And yes, it's prefixed with the preposition “??” in Leviticus 16:30, which you can confirm in an interlinear bible [here](#). (It's the word “????????”, Strong's #2891, with “to cleanse” under it as the interlinear translation.)

Now, the lexical form (without the preposition “??”) is “?????” ([taher](#)) and it does indeed mean to “cleanse”; it's perfectly translated. Thus, the explicitly stated reason that God instituted the “Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation” (kaphar) was “to cleanse” the people from their sins.

This creates a potential problem for PSA.

According to PSA, neither the “Day of Overlooking/reconciliation” (*kaphar*) nor Jesus's work for our salvation were about “cleansing”. According to PSA, they are about punishment and the satisfaction of wrath. PSA adherents usually won't deny that there's a cleansing aspect, but it's almost always wrapped up in the idea the “cleansing = punishment for sin”.

Here's how Billy Graham explained it:

But God loves us, and because He loves us He hates what sin does to us. That's why He provided the way for us to be cleansed of our sins.

We could never cleanse ourselves; sin's stain is too deep. Only God can do it — and He made it possible by sending Jesus Christ into the world as the final and complete sacrifice for our sins.

Jesus was without sin (for He was God in human flesh) — but **on the cross, all our sins were transferred to Him, and He took the divine judgment that you and I deserved.**

[Source.](#)

So according to PSA, cleansing = transferring sin to someone else so it can be punished.

Now, that does make some sense. If all our sins were transferred to someone else, then in a sense we're "cleansed" of them because they aren't on us anymore. However, that does seem to stretch the meaning of "cleansed". Not impossibly far, but definitely some. The PSA school of thought would say that this is patently obvious because the sins were transferred to the "scapegoat" (*which we'll look at in a minute.*)

We'll come back to this topic of "cleansing" after the rest of our discussion on the Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation (*kaphar*), but keep it in mind for now.

It's the "day of Overlooking" (*kaphar*), not The "Day of Forgiveness/Pardon"

This is a small but important point: **the Hebrew word for forgiveness/pardon doesn't appear in this chapter at all, and thus forgiveness/pardon was not a part of the Day of Atonement (*kaphar*).** While it was *the* high holy day for Israel, it still didn't actually deal with the problem of their sin. It took Jesus many centuries later for that.

However, the Book of Hebrews makes extensive use of the "Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation" (*kaphar/atonement*) in chapters 8-10 to explain what Christ did. Thus, this is definitely foreshadowing for the cross.

This article is already very long though, so we'll save any commentary on Hebrews for the article(s) on Hebrews chapters 8-10. However, I highly recommend that you read all of Hebrews chapters 8-10 when you finish this article. (*And notice the focus on purity/cleansing and the complete lack of a discussion about punishment or substitution.*) **When God sees fit to include commentary on scripture in scripture, it's best to pay attention.**

Objects were "atoned" (*kaphar*) for

In verses 16, 18, and 20, the priest "made atonement" (*kaphar*) for objects. Verse 20 summarizes and lists three objects:

- The Holy Place
- The tent of meeting

- The altar (*Yes, the one that made everything that touched it holy, more on that in a moment. Interestingly, unlike the other two, the altar is never stated to be defiled.*)

From a PSA perspective, I don't see how this makes sense.

I don't see how — according to PSA — you can “atone” (*kaphar*) for objects, because objects can't sin. It's not like God needs to “overlook” the sin of an object. It also doesn't make much sense from Athanasius's perspective either.

From the Hebrew perspective of purity and cleansing, it makes perfect sense. These objects were in the midst of a sinful people and thus became defiled, and the remedy for that was to cleanse them with the one thing that — according to the Jews — was always holy: (*sacrificial*) blood.

But how does PSA understand this?

Seriously.

If the purpose of sacrifice is penal substitution as PSA says, then why does “atonement” need to be made for objects? It's a good question, but not one we'll spend much time on because I haven't found an answer. Further, I'm not sure the answer would be decisive either way since it would neither prove nor disprove PSA, so we'll move on.

The reconsecration of the altar

As we saw before, once the altar was consecrated, anything that touched it became holy. It's most interesting then that on the “Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation” (*kaphar*), the altar was reconsecrated. If we look at the Book of Hebrews, it says that:

Hebrews 9:24 For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;

So the “mere copy” on Earth needed to be rededicated/reconsecrated to God once a year, the same isn't true of the “true one” in heaven. The “mere copy” on Earth apparently needed a “refill” on its ability to make anything that touched it holy once a year. This doesn't bear directly on PSA, but it's worth mentioning because we talked about its cleansing ability earlier.

Moving on.

The Ark would be both beautiful and disgusting

So first, conjure up an image of the Ark in your mind. (*The version from “Raiders of the Lost Ark” immediately comes to my mind, despite its inaccuracies*). It’s gold-plated on every side and incredibly beautiful.

Now remember that every year, the priest brings the blood of the sin offering behind the veil and sprinkles it on the lid of the Ark (*the “mercy seat”*). Blood is a liquid, and thus it flows. It would run down the Ark’s lid and over the side and run down to the floor. Maybe the priest only sprinkled a little bit, but then you still have the Ark flecked with blood.

There was no provision to clean the Ark.

None.

In fact, touching the Ark was a death sentence. (*See the story of Uzzah in 2 Samuel 6:1-7 and 1 Chronicles 13:9-12*) **Therefore, the ark was never cleaned, and year after year, more and more blood would accumulate on the Ark, especially right below the mercy seat.**

But it wouldn’t cover the whole thing. Remember, the blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat (*center of the lid*). Thus, you would likely have a section of the ark in the center that was covered with the accumulated dried blood of decades and centuries, while the ends would still likely be golden and beautiful. Can you picture it? The absolutely gorgeous, gold-plated Ark of the Covenant stained with centuries-old blood in the center?

Not a pretty sight to imagine, is it?

Israel would’ve seen this whenever they moved, since the Ark was carried by men on long poles.

(Personally, I think this is a picture of mankind being created in the perfect image of God, but we defiled it with our sin. Thus you have the gorgeous Ark stained with the blood of a sin offering. That’s a pretty vivid picture if you think about it.)

This has no relevance to PSA.

I just thought it important enough to include since we’re on the topic. It makes you think, doesn’t it?

(Another thing that makes you think: [The Ark of the covenant went missing](#) when the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem almost 600 years before Christ came. When the Jews returned, the ark was still missing. Thus, when they performed the ceremonies of the “Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation” (kaphar) after returning from exile — which includes up until Jesus’s day — there was no Ark, and thus no mercy seat on which to sprinkle the blood. They basically just threw it on the ground since there was no Ark in the Holy of Holies.)

The “scapegoat” concept and underlying word

The four occurrences of the word “scapegoat” are all the same Hebrew word, which is “?????????” ([azazel](#)). Unfortunately, the word is only used four times in the entire Bible and all four are in Leviticus

16, so we can't do a word study on it like we have other words in this series. However, we can look at the lexical definition:

????????? noun [masculine] **entire removal** (reduplicated intensive (Ges§ 30 n. Sta§ 124 a), abstract, ? [???] = Arabic remove, see BährSymb. ii. 668 Winii. 659 ff. Me SchenkelBL. i. 256; > most, proper name of spirit haunting desert, Thes Di DrHastings, DB [a fallen angel, Leviticus 16:8ff. being late, according to CheZAW xv (1895), 153 ff., Ency. Bib., who derives from ??????; compare BenzEncy. Bib.], as in Jewish angelology, where probably based on interpret. of Leviticus 16:8ff.; name not elsewhere); — ?? Leviticus 16:8,10 (twice in verse); **Leviticus 16:26 in ritual of Day of Atonement, = entire removal of sin and guilt from sacred places into desert on back of goat, symbol of entire forgiveness.**

So the “goat of removal” would be a good translation of the Hebrew word. Notice that this lines up perfectly with the lexical definition above, and also the usage in the passage.

Now, some of you probably noticed that mention was made of Jewish folklore which says that “Azazel” was actually a spirit/demon. This primarily comes from the Book of Enoch (*an apocryphal book*) and Jewish folklore, thus we'll ignore it in this article. I see no Biblical evidence for it and I don't plan to build theology/doctrine on apocryphal books or Jewish folklore.

Now, the modern word “scapegoat” has a different meaning than the Hebrew word. Here's a definition of scapegoat from the Cambridge Dictionary:

scapegoat

a person who is blamed for something that someone else has done:

– *The captain was made a scapegoat for the team's failure.*

someone who is blamed or punished for another's faults or actions:

– *When things don't go well, people always look for a scapegoat.*

[Source.](#)

So while the Hebrew means something like the “goat of removal” (*in the sense of removing something from Israel*), our modern understanding of “scapegoat” is effectively PSA in a single word.

Interestingly, the same thing happened with “atonement”. Many modern Western Christians conflate the word “atonement” with Penal Substitutionary Atonement, even though “kaphar” doesn't have that understanding intrinsic to it. That misunderstanding is part of the reason for this article, and part of the reason we'll need to tackle “propitiation” next. (*Though not in this article because it's already quite long.*)

So, the “scapegoat” is actually the “goat of removal”.

Thus, it has a different nuance than our modern term “scapegoat”. We'll examine this in detail in the next section.

Transferring sin to the “goat of removal”

One of the core claims of PSA is that sin and/or the guilt for sin can be transferred from one person to another. One of the primary passages used to support this is the “Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation” (*atonement/kaphar*) in Leviticus 16.

Leviticus 16:21-22

21 “Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the **iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions** in regard to all their sins; and **he shall lay them on the head of the goat** and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who *stands* in readiness.

22 “The goat **shall bear on itself all their iniquities** to a solitary land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness.

We spent a lot of time on the word translated “iniquities” in my article [How To Do a Word Study of a Greek or Hebrew Word in the Bible](#). It’s the word “?????” ([avon](#)) and it means “crookedness”, almost always in the sense of “moral crookedness” which is why it’s usually translated “iniquity”. It can also mean the “guilt for moral crookedness” (*guilt in a judicial sense of being guilty*), or the “consequences of moral crookedness”. See the article for details.

The words translated “transgressions” and “sins” are “?????” ([pesha](#)) and “?????????” ([chatta’ah](#)) respectively, and are considerably less interesting because they mean exactly what they are translated as.

Thus, it seems nigh incontrovertible that the sins and/or guilt for the sins were transferred to the live goat.

There are counter-arguments which we’ll look at in a minute, but a simple reading of the text seems to clearly state that the sins were transferred from the people to the live goat. Now again, animals can’t actually do this otherwise Jesus’s work would’ve been unnecessary because the animal sacrifices would’ve been enough. However, that doesn’t harm the PSA position at all because again, PSA would say that the picture is what matters. Again, that’s a good argument.

PSA would say that the sins being transferred to the “goat of removal” is like our sins being transferred to Christ, and then Him being punished for them.

Now, the first part of that — our sins being transferred to Christ — seems like it’s consistent with the “goat of removal”, at least in picture form. PSA’s #4 pillar is that the sins of one person can be transferred to another, and thus, the righteousness of one person can be transferred to another as well. **Based on these two verses alone, that’s an entirely legitimate position.**

To say that it’s not legitimate, we would need a clear and explicit statement from somewhere else in

the Bible — preferably the New Testament — that clearly states that it’s impossible, or that the “Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation” meant something else. However, just because a understanding is legitimate doesn’t mean it’s correct.

There are other understandings of the “goat of removal” and this “sin transference”.

We’ll look at that now.

Other understandings of the “goat of removal”

So first, remember that the live goat is the “goat of removal”. With that in mind, we’ll examine the passage again.

Leviticus 16:20-22 (*modified*)

20 “When he finishes atoning (*kaphar*) for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall offer the live goat.

21 “Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and **he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness** by the hand of a man who *stands* in readiness.

22 “**The goat shall bear (*nasa*) on itself all their iniquities to a solitary land**; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness.

Now, The word translated “bear” above is “???????” ([nasa or nasah](#)), and it means:

?????? verb **lift, take, carry** (compare Biblical Hebrew; rare in Aramaic; see ?????, ????? ChWB, NHWB); —

Pe`al Perfect3masculine singular ?? Daniel 2:35 **carry away** (of wind, with accusative of thing); Imperative masculine singular ???? Ezra 5:15 take (accusative vessels).

Hithpa. make a rising, an insurrection: Participle feminine singular ?????????????? Ezra 4:19, ??? person

Notice that it can mean to “carry away”. If you look at how it’s used, “carry/take away” appears to be one of the primary meanings. (You can see how it’s used [here](#).)

In fact, the phrasing of “*The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a solitary land*” has parallels in other places using the same Hebrew word “nasa”.

Leviticus 10:16-17

16 But Moses searched carefully for **the goat of the sin offering**, and behold, it had been burned up! So he was angry with Aaron's surviving sons Eleazar and Ithamar, saying,

17 "Why did you not eat the sin offering at the holy place? For it is most holy, and **He gave it to you to bear away (nasa) the guilt of the congregation**, to make atonement for them before the LORD.

In the context of a sin offering, "bear" (nasa) appears to mean "bear away"/carry away.

This makes sense since the "goat of **removal**" is about removal; i.e., removing/taking away sins. It also makes sense with the word definition, and also the usage in Leviticus 10 that we just saw. **The word "nasa" is also used in Isaiah 53, which is indisputably about Christ.** Also relevant in the verse is the word "?????" (**sabal**) that's I've highlighted in the verse. Please remember it because it'll be important.

Isaiah 53:4

4 Surely our griefs **He Himself bore (nasa)**,
And our sorrows He carried (sabal);
 Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
 Smitten of God, and afflicted.

This verse is especially notable because of what God inspired Matthew to write about it in the New Testament:

Matthew 8:16-17

16 When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and **healed all who were ill.**

17 ***This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: "HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES."***

According to God's own Holy Spirit-inspired interpretation, "nasa" does **not** mean "to carry" in the sense of "shouldering a load" in Isaiah 53:4, but rather that He "carried away" our infirmities and diseases.

What if "nasa" (bear) in Leviticus 16:22 — since it's the same Hebrew word, and being used to prefigure Christ just like in Isaiah 53 — what if it means "bear away" (carry away) just like in Matthew 8?

Remember, we have a Holy Spirit-inspired interpretation of Isaiah 53:4. **God specifically stated in Matthew 8 that Isaiah 53:4 means that Jesus "took" (away) and "carried away" respectively.**

We can't ignore that!

It's important!

According to God himself, both “nasa” and “sabal” in Isaiah 53:4 were intended to mean “take away” and “carry away” respectively.

Don't miss or ignore that!

Now, there will be some push back from the PSA camp since “sabal” does mean to “carry a load”:

[?????] verb **bear a heavy load** (Late Hebrew id.; Arabic ????? id.; compare also below ??? above); —

However, since we have God Himself saying in Matthew 8:17 that “sabal” here was intended to mean “carry away”, she should at least admit this as a legitimate understanding of “sabal”. If God Himself says that a word means something, that's what it means. Period. Additionally, there's nothing to say that someone can't “bear/carry a heavy load away”.

There's more to this argument as well, since “sabal” is used elsewhere in Isaiah 53. Notice the parallels between the two following verses:

Isaiah 53:4 and 11

4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore (nasa),
And our sorrows He carried (sabal);
 Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
 Smitten of God, and afflicted.

...

11 As a result of the anguish of His soul,
 He will see it and be satisfied;
 By His knowledge the Righteous One,
 My Servant, will justify the many,
As He will bear (sabal) their iniquities.

Now, even in English literature, we have parallelism in poetic compositions, and Hebrew does this far more than English. So when you have the same word used in a similar context, it's entirely appropriate to understand them with the same/similar meaning.

We know from Matthew 8:16-17 that “sabal” in Isaiah 53:4 means “carry away”. Thus, could “sabal” a few verses later in Isaiah 53:11 also mean “carry away”?

Scripture clearly records that Jesus did take away/carry away our sins:

1 John 3:5 You know that **He appeared in order to take away sins**; and in Him there is no sin.

John 1:29 The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, **the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**”

So Jesus definitely came to “take away sins”; thus, is the live “goat of removal” supposed to take away sins? (At least in picture form.)

Maybe?

Remember, the live goat is the “goat of removal”; could it be removing/taking away sins? There’s all of this, plus the fact that the live goat is called the “goat of removal”, and it “bears” (*away?*) the iniquity (*sin*), and the verses which say that Jesus appeared to “take away” sins.

There are two other verses that bear on this, one is a quotation of Isaiah 53, and the other is in Hebrews 9.

1 Peter 2:24

24 and He Himself **bore our sins** in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; **for by His wounds you were healed.**

Notice that the phrase “bore our sins” is a direct reference to Isaiah 53:11, and please keep that in mind.

The phrase “*for by His wounds you were healed*” is an obvious reference to Isaiah 53:4. Thus — since we have the Holy Spirit inspired interpretation of of Isaiah 53:4 and it means to “bear/carry away” — it’s reasonable again to think that “bore our sins” here also means to “carry away.”

This is reinforced by the Greek word used, which is “???????” ([anapheró](#)), and it means:

399 anaphér? (from 303 /aná, “up” and 5342 /phér?, “bring, carry”) — properly, **bring up to the goal (end point)**, i.e. carrying something through its sequence to reach its needed consummation (note the prefix, ana).

So the word means to carry something somewhere... perhaps away? 1 Peter 2:24 seems to concretely tie Isaiah 53:4 to Isaiah 53:11. **Thus, we know from God’s own interpretation of Isaiah 53:4 (in Matthew 8:17) that “bear/carry” means “bear away/carry away”, and we have verses about Jesus having come to “take away sin”. Thus, it seems very likely that “bear our sins” in 1 Peter 2:24 means “bear away/carry away” our sins.**

This understanding could also be applied to other “bear the sins” passages, like Hebrews 9:28

Hebrews 9:28 so Christ also, having been offered once **to bear the sins of many**, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

Again, as indicated by the “goat of removal” and other places, could this mean to “bear/carry away”?

These verses are the centerpiece of the argument that the “goat of removal” — and more importantly Jesus — didn’t “bear iniquities” so He could be punished for them, but rather so He could “carry them away” in the sense of removing them from the people.

This is further reinforced by the fact that the live “goat of removal” was never harmed.

(In later Rabbinic tradition, the goat was taken to the edge of a cliff and thrown off of it, but God never commanded that. Thus, we’ll go with what God inspired and not on the practices that the pharisees added to the law.)

Remember, the goat of the sin offering doesn’t have the sins of the people put on it. If it did, the case for PSA would be near-ironclad. However, that’s not what happens. Instead, the live “goat of removal” has the sins placed on it and then it’s never harmed.

How can it be Penal Substitution if the goat on which the sins were placed never has anything even remotely penal (punishment-related) done to it?

This leads to the biggest mistake that I constantly see PSA supporters making about the “Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation”: conflating the sacrificed goat of the sin offering and live “goat of removal”.

Thus, we need to talk about the difference between the two goats.

The two goats and Christ

First, it does make *some* sense to conflate the goats because they *both* picture Christ. That is, they both represent what Christ did in different ways. **However, the problem is that the slain goat isn’t the goat that “bears” (away?) the sin of the people; instead, that’s the live goat.** The typical exposition I hear from PSA teachers on the “Day of Overlooking” is that a goat had sins placed on it, and a goat was sacrificed, therefore, this is PSA. However, again, that conflates the two goats.

Some of the better teachers (*like Mike Winger*) will just simply assume that the slain goat was a penal substitutionary sacrifice, but will talk about how the “goat of removal” takes away sin. **The trouble is again that the slain goat doesn’t have the sins put on it; that’s the live goat.**

Remember, there were two goats.

- The slain goat is the sin offering and it does not have the sins of the people laid on its head.
- The “goat of removal” has the sin laid on its head, and then it’s sent alive into the the wilderness.

Where is the penal substitution?

If the goat of the sin offering had the sins of the people placed on it and then it was slain, that would be a slam dunk for PSA. It would be undeniable. **But that’s not what happened.**

Remember, it’s **Penal** Substitutionary Atonement. The thing that sets PSA apart from all other understandings is the element of punishment. The goat on which the sins were laid was not punished. It wasn’t even killed, and the text clearly states that it shouldn’t be killed. In fact, it wasn’t to be harmed at all. The text clearly states that the goat on which the sins were laid is to remain alive and to be released.

PSA advocates often conflate the two goats, acting like the slain sin offering goat and the living “goat of removal” (on which the sins were placed) are the same goat.

But they aren’t.

They are different goats.

Now, we already looked at how the goat of the sin offering cleanses. The idea that Jesus’s blood cleanses us is all over the New Testament so I’ll just quote one verse while you think about the dozen that are in your head:

1 John 1:7

7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and **the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.**

As we already know, Jesus’s blood cleanses us from sin, just like the slain goat of the sin offering cleansed the people.

Now, if we view the “Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation” as foreshadowing, then we might expect that somehow, Jesus’s life – i.e. His resurrection – “takes away sin”.

Well, there is a verse which says that:

1 Corinthians 15:12-19

12 Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised;

14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.

15 Moreover we are even found *to be* false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.

16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised;

17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.

18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

Please read verses 14 and 17 again, especially verse 17.

Almost no commentary is needed because the meaning is obvious. I'll only point out that if Jesus wasn't raised, God (*writing through Paul*) says that we are "still in our sins".

According to the clear teaching of scripture, Jesus's death — by itself and without His resurrection — was not enough to deal with our sin problem.

Jesus's death alone didn't do it; Jesus's death AND resurrection were BOTH necessary to deal with our sin problem.

(And of course, I'm am categorically not saying that salvation is a result of our works or that Jesus's work was insufficient. Our salvation is by grace through faith and not a result of our works, but rather solely because of Christ's completed and all-sufficient work. Yet it seems that Christ's work to deal with our sin was done by both His death and His resurrection.)

Shockingly, this isn't the only place that teaches something similar. **My jaw about hit the floor when I read the following verse while studying for this article** even though I've read it many times before; I simply missed the significance when it comes to PSA. *(That happens often, where a verse/passage leaps off the page at me even though I've read it many times before; I love that about scripture.)*

Romans 5:9-10

9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Those last few words really hit me hard! “We shall be saved by His life”. Apparently, we aren’t exclusively saved by his death as PSA says, but by His life.

Now, a careful reading of this passage reveals a few things.

- Notice that **reconciliation and justification are linked to Jesus’s blood/death**
 - **Conversely, “saved” is linked to Jesus’s life/resurrection.**
- Notice that both verses say that we are saved.
 - The first verse says that we are “saved from the wrath of God”.
 - The second verse says that we are “saved by His life”
 - Logically speaking, we can infer that “saved by His life” in verse 10 is also “saved from the wrath of God” in verse 9.
 - **Logically speaking — given the high degree of parallelism and contrasts in the two verses — does that mean we are saved from the wrath of God by Jesus’s life/resurrection, not His blood/death?**

Maybe?

At the very least, His life/resurrection is just as important to dealing with our sins as His blood/death is.

We see this explicitly stated in 1 Cor 15:17 since: “*if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins*”. It’s also strongly hinted at in Romans 5:9-10, though not *quite* explicitly stated. Those aren’t the only places either, there’s one more. Normally I quote it in the NASB 95, but here, the ESV is worded in a much less confusing way:

Romans 4:23-25 (ESV)

23 But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone,

24 but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,

25 **who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.**

The NASB 95 is:

25 He who was delivered over **because of** our transgressions, and was raised **because of** our justification.

The word translated “for” in the ESV and “because of” in the NASB is “???” ([dia](#)). It’s a common preposition in the New Testament, occurring well over 600 times. It’s translated both “for” and “because of” many times in the NT by many translations. Here’s the relevant entry in Thayer’s lexicon, definition II.2.b

b. used, with the accusative of any noun, of the mental affection by which one is impelled to some act (English **for**; cf. Winer's Grammar, 399 (372))

(*Note: emphasis original, not added by me. Thayer's puts words in bold when they are good translations of a word. And yes it's followed by an accusative noun here, specifically the one translated "justification".*)

The NASB 95 is a bit wordy and unclear here, but the ESV is clear that Jesus was "raised for our justification". The lexical definition makes it clear that "our justification" was the purpose for which Jesus was raised. Additionally, justification appears to be equally connected to both Jesus's blood/death and life/resurrection, as comparing the two Romans passages reveals.

Romans 5:9 Much more then, **having now been justified by His blood**, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

Romans 4:25 who was delivered up for our trespasses and **raised for our justification**.

This reinforces what we've been seeing:

Jesus's death and His resurrection were both necessary to deal with our sin problem. Not only His death, and not only His resurrection.

Both were necessary.

This makes **perfect** sense when you consider the "Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation" because there were two goats; one who died, and one who lived. If the "Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation" is a picture of Christ's work (*as Hebrews clearly indicates*), then the two goats make perfect sense if **both** Jesus's death and life/resurrection are important for dealing with our sin.

PSA's answers to these passages

According to PSA, God's wrath was poured out on Jesus at the cross, and once the sin was punished, we were reconciled to God. So here's the problem with that: **PSA's understanding doesn't allow for Jesus's resurrection to also help deal with our sins**. There's literally no room in PSA for Jesus's resurrection to have an effect on our sins because according to PSA, that was all dealt with when Jesus died on the cross.

PSA advocates will obviously agree that the resurrection was important, and obviously they'll agree that Jesus couldn't stay dead because He's God. PSA does **not** say that the resurrection is unimportant any more than it says that the teachings of Jesus are unimportant. However, just like PSA

would say that His teachings are vitally important but didn't deal with our sin problem, PSA would also say that Jesus's resurrection is vitally important, but that it also doesn't deal with the specific problem of our sin or salvation.

How does PSA account for the verses above then?

Well, let's look, one verse at a time.

1 Corinthians 15:17

To answer that question, I'll quote a commentary on the 1 Corinthians passage:

Ye are yet in your sins – Your sins are yet unpardoned. They can be forgiven only by faith in him, and by the efficacy of his blood. **But if he was not raised, he was an impostor; and, of course, all your hopes of pardon by him, and through him, must be vain.**

[Source](#). (*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*)

This is the best response to 1 Cor 15:17 from PSA that I've found, and it sounds like a decent one... Unless you read the passage carefully and give it some thought.

Why?

Because it ignores the context. I actually recommend that you read all of 1 Cor 15 to get the full context, but remember: **God (through Paul) is talking to Christians here, not unbelievers, nor those denying the faith, nor those saying that Jesus was a fraud.**

God (through Paul) was addressing the fact that some Christians were saying there's no resurrection. Notice Paul's response:

1 Corinthians 15:12-13

12 Now **if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead**, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised;

Paul assumes that they believe that Jesus was raised; notice the beginning of verse 12. Paul says that the teaching is that Jesus was raised from the dead, which they believed. Apparently, some Corinthians thought that we wouldn't be raised, but Jesus was. Paul uses the fact that Jesus was raised as a counterargument in the next verse

1 Corinthians 15:13 But **if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised;**

Paul is pointing out the absurdity of the assertion that there's no resurrection from the dead by effectively saying: "Your entire faith is built around a guy who was raised from the dead, so how can you say the dead aren't raised?"

So Paul isn't arguing that Jesus was raised; he's assuming that as a fact and using that fact in his argument.

Thus, the PSA response lacks contextual understanding of the passage and so doesn't answer the crux of the issue. I've heard other explanations, but they're mostly so silly that they aren't worth examining. The one exception fits better as an answer to Romans 5:10, so we'll look at that response now.

Romans 5:10

This next quote is a commentary on Romans 5:10

We shall be saved by his life; i.e. by the resurrection to life. Salvation is ascribed to the resurrection and life of Christ, because he thereby doth perfect our salvation, **he ever living to make intercession for us**, Hebrews 12:25; and because by his resurrection and life we shall be raised to eternal life at that day.

[Source](#). (*Matthew Poole's Commentary*)

Now, I must point out that the verse reference here is wrong; it should be Hebrews 7:25, which is our next quote. However, it was the most concise quote I found so I kept it, even despite the incorrect verse reference. Here's the correct verse:

Hebrews 7:23-25

23 The *former* priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers **because they were prevented by death from continuing**,

24 but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently.

25 Therefore **He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.**

This isn't a bad response from PSA, but it has problems.

Why?

Because again, it ignores the context of both passages. If you read the verse by itself, it bears some weight. But if you back up just a few verses, you'll see that **the point here is that Jesus can serve as a priest forever because He'll never die**, thus He "*He always lives to make intercession*" because "*He continues forever*"

” in the sense of never dying.

However, it isn't about Jesus's life saving us according to PSA. According to PSA, this is only about Jesus going to the Father continually to remind Him of His sacrifice. That's not really salvific according to PSA, it's merely Jesus reminding someone who is all knowing (*God the Father*) of what what He did at the cross. Jesus's life isn't saving anything according to the PSA understanding, it's still Jesus's death alone. Jesus's life just means He can continually remind the Father — who again is all knowing — of His sacrifice. So while the PSA understanding of Romans 5:9-10 does make some sense, it seems to ignore the context.

I'll grant that this PSA understanding is legitimate, but personally, I also find it wholly unsatisfying.

Further, it ignores a short phrase in the verse as well:

Romans 5:9-10

9 Much more then, **having now been justified** by His blood, **we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.**

10 **For** if while we were enemies **we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.**

Notice the phrase “much more”. I don't see another legitimate way to read the passage other than to say that Jesus's life/resurrection saves us “much more” than His death. Perhaps it exists, but I don't see it.

Romans 5:10 makes it sound like Jesus's life/resurrection saves us “much more” than His death.

(I would love to sidetrack into a discussion of how reconciliation doesn't appear to equal salvation in this verse, but this article is already too long. I'll probably address it in another article later though.)

None of these touch Romans 4 though.

Romans 4:25

Here's the verse again, followed by PSA's response to it:

Romans 4:25 **who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.**

There's one commentary that has a response that's applicable.

for our justification] Lit. **because of our Justification.** **The construction is identical.** This,

and the balance of the clauses, seem to demand the exposition: “**He was raised, because our justification was effected;**” not, “in order to give us justification,” as many interpret it. The parallel is complete: “We sinned, therefore He suffered: we were justified, therefore He rose.”

[Source.](#)

Now, here’s the lexical entry we looked at above from Thayer’s lexicon, definition II.2.b, and yes it’s used with an accusative noun.

b. used, **with the accusative of any noun, of the mental affection by which one is impelled to some act** (English **for**; cf. Winer’s Grammar, 399 (372)

*(Note: the **bold** emphasis is original, not added by me. Thayer’s puts words in bold when they are good translations of a word in a given context. I added the **red** emphasis.)*

So our justification was the “mental affection by which one (God) was impelled to act.” That means — as we saw above and as the text plainly/clearly states — that Jesus’s resurrection was accomplished for the purpose of attaining our justification.

Here, the commentary is just plain wrong.

(The commentary goes on to say: “he means not individual justifications, but the Work which for ever secured Justification for the believing Church.” So this commentator prefers the meaning: “He was raised because he had secured justification for the church.” However, that ignores the lexical definition in this context. Again, the commentary is just plain wrong.)

So we have four verses which seem to clearly indicate that Jesus’s life/resurrection saves us.

Romans 4:25: who was delivered up for our trespasses and **raised for our justification.**

Romans 5:9-10: **Much more then**, having now been justified by His blood, **we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.** For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, **much more**, having been reconciled, **we shall be saved by His life.**

1 Corinthians 15:14: and **if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.**

1 Corinthians 15:17: and **if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.**

Again, I see no way to reconcile these verses with the PSA understanding. It might exist, but I haven't seen it. (*Please leave a comment if you see one.*) And even worse, it seems to entirely contradict the PSA understanding. Honestly, these 4 verses are some of the strongest anti-PSA passages that I've seen, mostly because I can't find a good answer to them from the PSA school. I can't think of one myself either.

PSA and the live goat / Jesus's resurrection

We have the live goat on the "Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation", plus the four verses above that seem to indicate that Jesus's life/resurrection was necessary to deal with our sin problem. I'm unaware of any understanding of PSA that can make sense of those verses. I might've missed something in my research — and if I did, please leave a comment below telling me what — but **I have never seen a response to these verses from the PSA position that explained them.**

None.

Not one.

Further, if the PSA position is correct, Jesus's resurrection can't "save us", because according to PSA, salvation is all about being saved from God's wrath through Jesus's penal substitutionary death on the cross. That is literally the core and foundation of PSA. From a PSA perspective, saying that something other than punishment/penal substitution can save us makes about as much sense as saying "*I'm an atheist who believes in God*".

I'm going to keep an open mind in case I missed something, but those four verses make PSA's understanding of the cross woefully incomplete at the very least, and they (*potentially*) completely repudiate it at the most.

Further, Romans 5:9-10 seems to indicate that we are saved **from God's wrath** through Jesus's life/resurrection, not his death. It's very heavily implied, but note *quite* explicitly stated. If it was explicitly stated, it would be a "nail in the coffin" for PSA. However, since it's not explicitly stated, it's not final. I see it as a strong indication that PSA is wrong, but it's not ironclad.

Returning to the sin offering

We previously examined if the regular sin offerings were penal substitution because if they were, they are the only place in the Old Testament where forgiveness was given after punishment. **After studying the "Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation", it appears that the sin offerings weren't penal substitution.**

However, that is not ironclad.

You can clearly see in the "Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation" that the sin was placed on the live "goat

of removal". However, prior to that, there was a sin offering for Israel. **Since the sins were placed on the live "goat of removal" instead of the goat of the sin offering, then it doesn't make sense to say that the sin offering was penal or substitutionary.** There's simply no reason to think it was, other than reading PSA into the text where it's not taught.

This is important because it destroys any possible Old Testament foreshadowing for PSA's position of "forgiveness/pardon after death" that must be true in order for PSA to be true.

Perhaps more importantly, it turns every verse about God's forgiveness into an anti-PSA verse. (For more details on why, see [the article about PSA's #2 pillar.](#))

However...

A thoughtful PSA adherent will likely say that it's clearly taught in the New Testament in passages like 1 Peter 3:19 and 2 Corinthians 5:21. Obviously if it's clearly taught somewhere in scripture, then it's true. However, we'll save an in-depth examination of those verses for a future article, likely the one on PSA's 3rd pillar. (Which says that it's acceptable for God to punish an innocent substitute instead of the sinner.)

Here's the relevant part of the sin offering passage again:

Leviticus 4:31

31 'Then he shall remove all its fat, just as the fat was removed from the sacrifice of peace offerings; and the priest shall offer it up in smoke on the altar for a soothing aroma to the LORD. **Thus the priest shall make atonement (kaphar) for him, and he will be forgiven (salach).**

I see no reason why God couldn't have forgiven the sinner at that moment. We saw in the previous article that there's no scriptural basis to say that God must punish sin, so then, why couldn't God simply forgive the sinner?

Returning to the reason for the "Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation"

As we saw above, the reason for the Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation is "to cleanse" the people from their sins.

Leviticus 16:30 for it is **on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you ; you will be clean from all your sins** before the LORD.

We've looked deeply at the day and concluded that there's no element of penal substitution for two primary reasons:

1. The goat of the sin offering that was slain didn't have the sins of the people put on it.
2. The goat on which the sins of the people were put was never harmed, or had anything remotely

“penal” done to it.

Now, remember that God Himself told us the purpose of the Day of Overlooking: it was to cleanse the people. Hebrews makes extensive use of the Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation to describe what Christ did. **Thus, a logical inference — not a deduction, but an inference — follows from that: If the Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation was to cleanse the people of their sins, then it makes sense that Jesus’s work was also to cleanse us from our sins.**

This is not ironclad because it is based on inference.

For this inference to be confirmed, we would need to see some confirmation of it in the New Testament, preferably in a place that simultaneously talks about the Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation and also Jesus’s work to save us. There seems to be such a place:

Hebrews 9:13-14

13 For if **the blood of goats and bulls** and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled **sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh,**

14 **how much more will the blood of Christ,** who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, **cleanse your conscience from dead works** to serve the living God?

Is it a perfect parallel? No, not at all. However, Hebrews chapter 8-10 talks a lot about the new covenant, Jesus’s salvific work, and the Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation. The concept of cleansing is repeatedly mentioned in those chapters, while any mention of wrath, punishment, or substitution is completely absent.

Consider:

- “Cleansing from sin” is the explicitly stated purpose of the Day of Overlooking,
- Hebrews chapters 8-10 clearly indicates that the Day of Overlooking was foreshadowing for Jesus’s work for our salvation,
- Hebrews 8-10 clearly puts cleansing at the forefront of Jesus’s salvific work as well.

Given this — and a few other things that I’ve found in my research but haven’t written about yet — it seems that any understanding of Jesus’s salvific work that doesn’t place “cleansing from sin” at/near the forefront is unlikely to be true.

Such an understanding would also need to account for scripture saying that it’s Jesus’s life/resurrection that saves us.

PSA does neither.

In fact, it’s worse; PSA makes both of those effectively impossible.

Now, it’s entirely possible that I’ve misunderstood something because there are some New Testament passages to examine yet. (Like 1 Peter 3:19 and 2 Cor 5:21) I intend to reserve final judgement on PSA until I’ve finished this series and I suggest you do the same. Sometimes, a sports

team can look down/out in the first half, only to come back incredibly strong in the second half. That may or may not happen here, but I plan to see this “game” to its conclusion before I decide definitively.

However, as a point of intellectual honesty, I should mention that the more I dig, the more evidence I find that PSA is wrong. I started this series leaning slightly that way (*because of Ezekiel 18*), but as of now, I lean that way strongly because of verses like 1 Cor 15:17, Romans 5:9-10, Romans 4:25, Leviticus 16, and Ezekiel 18 as well. But again, I’m trying to withhold judgement until the end.

(And some of you might be wondering why Jesus died if PSA is wrong. Well, I’m slowly getting an alternate picture that makes sense based on my research. I won’t provide a full explanation here because I’m still puzzling it out. However, it combines elements of [this previous article of mine](#), with the “blood = life” connection we saw above, plus the ability of what is Holy (Jesus and His blood) to cleanse what is sinful (us). And if we share in what Jesus has, then Him being alive is vital because He can’t share His life with us if He’s dead. It also involves Jesus rescuing us from the clutches of Satan and his dominion over us. Ironically, I found that the understanding that I’m slowly coming to is actually ancient, held by many Christians from the early church fathers up through today.)

Conclusion

The “Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation” is explicitly stated to be for the purpose of cleansing Israel. Additionally, the slain goat of the sin offering doesn’t have the sin placed on it, while the living “goat of removal” is never harmed in any way. Thus, it makes almost no sense to see penal substitution in the ritual. It appears based on word usage and especially God’s inspired commentary on Isaiah 53 in Matthew 8, that the “goat of removal” didn’t “bear” the sin in the sense of shouldering a burden, but rather “bore it away”/took it away.

The New Testament seems to clearly indicated that Jesus’s life/resurrection is what saves us, not His death as PSA requires. Without His resurrection, we are “still in our sins” as 1 Corinthians 15 says, and Romans 5:9-10 seems to indicate that it’s Jesus’s life that saves us from God’s wrath, not His death as PSA requires. It’s not explicitly stated, but it’s heavily implied.

PSA understands the sin offering in the Old Testament to be a penal substitution. However, the sin offering on the “Day of Overlooking/Reconciliation” clearly isn’t penal substitution, so why would the regular sin offering be? There are other understandings, including Athanasius’s view which involves substitution without penal substitution. There’s also the Hebrew understanding of cleansing, which involves no substitution at all.

There is a connection between blood and life in scripture. Additionally, “atonement” (*kaphar*) can be made by things other than blood, and “atonement” (*kaphar*) was made for objects as well. Neither of these things makes much sense from a PSA perspective.

Despite the seemingly large body of evidence against PSA in this article, there are still New Testament verses to consider.

All it takes is a single clear statement in the New Testament affirming PSA to overturn the — admittedly large — body of softer evidence against it that we've seen.

PSA adherents will say that they have such verses in 1 Peter 3:19 and 2 Corinthians 5:21 to prove PSA. We will examine those verses and others in detail in a future article in the series.

The next article will be on the definition of “propitiation”, and the underlying Greek words as well.

Thankfully, that article should be much shorter than this one... hopefully. (*I thought this one would be short too...*)