

two interpretations of atonement: a discussion between the common christian/messianic view and the 'followers of the way' perspective.

part 1 – hebrews 9:22

- **the core difference:**
 - o **christianity / messianic belief:** teaches that yahusha's (jesus's) physical death and blood save you, serving as a final substitutionary sacrifice for sin.
 - o **followers of the way belief:** hold that yahusha's life - his perfect obedience to the torah; saves you, by providing the pattern for how to live a life reconciled to elohiym.

we will be looking at different verses christianity / messianic believers use to proof their point, starting with a key one.

1) **ib`rim (hebrews) 9:22**

"and, according to the torah (law), almost all is cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."

christianity / messianic believes:

we absolutely believe this because of what it says in the tanakh ('ot'):

- **leviticus 17:11:** *"for the life of the flesh is in the blood, and i have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life."*

this is the verse that the author of hebrews is building upon. the key concept here is **substitution**. an innocent animal's life (its blood) is offered in place of the life of the sinner, who deserves death. the animal dies as a symbolic bearer of the penalty. this system was elohiym's ordained, temporary method for dealing with sin and maintaining a relationship with his people. it was a grace, a way for repentance to be visually and ritually expressed, ultimately pointing to the perfect sacrifice of the messiah.

followers of the way respond:

while the substitutionary view is common, a closer look at leviticus 17:11 in its full tanakh context reveals a different primary meaning: that the verse is about the sanctity of **our own life** and its offering to elohiym on the altar of the earth.

let's first look at leviticus 17:11 in its context. the verse states:

*"for the life of the flesh is in the blood, and i myself have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your lives; **for it is the blood, by reason of the life, that makes atonement.**" (leviticus 17:11)*

a. proof that the "blood" is our elohiym-given life

the tanakh is clear that blood is the essence of life for all creatures, especially humans.

- **genesis 9:4-6** (given to all humanity through noah):
 - *"but **you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood**. and for your lifeblood i will require a reckoning... for elohiym made man in his own image."*
 - **proof:** directly equates "life" with "blood" (*nafsho damo*). the blood *within* a person is their sacred, elohiym-given life.
- **deuteronomy 12:23:**
 - *"only **be sure that you do not eat the blood, for the blood is the life**, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh."*
 - **proof:** a clear, universal statement: "the blood is the life" (*ha-dam hu ha-nefesh*). the sanctity of life itself is the principle.
- **psalm 139:13-15:**
 - *"for you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb..."*
 - **proof:** describes elohiym as the creator who intimately places the life-sustaining blood within the human body.
conclusion: the "blood" is first and foremost the sacred life elohiym has placed within us.

b. proof that the "altar" is symbolically the earth

the "altar" is a representation of the earth itself, the place of our existence.

- **exodus 3:5 (the principle revealed):**
 - at the burning bush, elohiym commands mosheh, *"take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is set-apart ground."*
 - **proof:** the common earth becomes a sacred altar due to elohiym's presence. we are to live with reverence on the ground he has made set-apart.
- **exodus 20:24-25 (the principle codified):**
 - *"an altar of earth you shall make for me..."*
 - **proof:** the most basic altar is an "altar of earth" (*mizbach adamah*), directly linking atonement to the ground itself.
- **isaiah 66:1 (the principle universalized):**
 - *"thus says yhv'h: 'heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool..."*

- **proof:** the entire **earth** is yhvh's footstool - his altar. our entire life is lived on this ultimate altar.
our life is to be "poured out" (lived in obedience) on this altar of the earth.

c. proof that "atonement" (kapor) is done by the individual

atonement is fundamentally about reconciliation achieved through repentance and obedience.

- **exodus 19:5-6 (the foundational calling):**
 - *"you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a set-apart nation."*
 - **proof:** the entire nation was called to a priestly function, implying direct responsibility for their own spiritual state.
- **the book of jonah (a powerful example):**
 - **jonah 3:10:** *"when elohiym saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, elohiym relented of the disaster."*
 - **proof:** atonement was achieved **without blood sacrifices or a temple**, through genuine, collective repentance - a "pouring out" of their old lives.

the process of atonement (kapor): from individual to priest and back

to fully understand, we must see how the *kapor* (cleansing) ritual worked and to whom it was entrusted. the process involves distinct steps:

1. **teshuvah (repentance - our responsibility):** this is the first and essential step. the individual or nation must recognize their sin, feel remorse, confess it, and commit to turning away from it and back to elohiym. this is a matter of the heart and will, something no one can do for another. without *teshuvah*, no ritual has any value (psalm 51:16-17; isaiah 1:11-17).
2. **kapor (cleansing/atonement - the priest's role):** once repentance is genuine, the *kapor* ritual cleanses the defilement caused by the sin from the sanctuary, the altar, or the person. this is the procedural step that *restores the relationship* that was broken by sin. it makes the person or object ritually pure again so that the set-apart elohiym can dwell among his people.
3. **forgiveness (salah - solely yhvh's prerogative):** the ultimate granting of forgiveness is an act of grace from elohiym alone. it is his response to a repentant heart and the completed cleansing process (psalm 130:4; isaiah 55:7).

the shift in responsibility: from a nation of priests to the levitical priesthood

critically, the responsibility to perform the *kapor* cleansing was not always with a separate priesthood.

- **originally - a kingdom of priests:** at mount sinai, **before the sin of the golden calf**, yhvh's plan was for the entire nation to be a "kingdom of priests and a set-apart nation" (exodus 19:5-6). in this model, the head of each household would have likely functioned as a priest for his family, responsible for leading in repentance and performing *kapar*.
- **after the golden calf - the levitical priesthood instituted:** after the idolatry of the golden calf (exodus 32), the tribe of levi stood with mosheh. following this, the priesthood was formally taken from the firstborn of every family and given exclusively to aaron and his sons, the levites (numbers 3:11-13, 41; 8:16-18). the *kapar* ritual became the specialized duty of the aaronic priesthood. this was a **concession**, not the original ideal.

the restoration through messiah: the work of the messiah restores the original ideal. he is the ultimate high priest who perfectly executes the *kapar* for us, not with animal blood, but through his righteous life and ministry. more importantly, he restores **us** to our original calling. through him, believers are again constituted as the "kingdom of priests" (1 peter 2:5, 9; revelation 1:6). this means that, with messiah as our high priest, we resume the personal responsibility of living a life of continual *teshuvah* and offering ourselves as living sacrifices (romans 12:1), understanding that our life is the offering on the altar of the earth.

synthesis: bringing it all together

therefore, reading leviticus 17:11 through this lens is entirely valid:

- **"for the life of the flesh is in the blood"** - elohiym has given each of us the gift of life (blood in our veins).
- **"and i myself have given it to you upon the altar"** - he has placed us on the altar of the earth.
- **"to make atonement for your lives"** - the purpose of our life is to achieve atonement/reconciliation with him by how we live - through *teshuvah* and a life of obedience, "pouring out" our selfish desires. we are called, as the restored priesthood, to active participation in this process.

this reading powerfully emphasizes personal responsibility and the cosmic significance of a life lived in conscious relationship with elohiym.

addressing hebrews 9:22 directly

a common response is: "but the book of hebrews is inspired and explains the *true* meaning of the old testament."

our response is this: the author of hebrews uses the *pattern* of the levitical system to make a case for messiah. however, **if our understanding of the original pattern itself is incorrect**,

then the conclusion drawn from it may also be flawed. we argue that the foundational pattern in leviticus, understood in light of the entire tanakh, was never primarily about a substitute bearing a penalty *for* us, but about the sinner acknowledging the cost of sin and surrendering **their own life** to elohiym. the system, especially after the golden calf, was a temporary concession and a lesson in responsibility and the sanctity of life, pointing to a messiah who would perfect obedience and restore us to our original priestly calling, not nullify the principle of individual responsibility.