

“purge away” the transgressions of the people, and the author of Psalm 79:9 entreats him to “purge away” their sins. The verb employed in each case is the one from which the word atonement is derived, as well as the one which is generally used to express the notion of atonement; and it might consistently be rendered “make atonement,” for the thought intended is that of covering or cancelling transgressions so that those committing them may be shielded from the effects of the divine disfavour.

The figure of covering in this connection is equivalent to forgiving, and the verb in the original may be translated by the word forgive. It is actually so translated in Jeremiah 18:23, where the prophet, praying for the overthrow of his enemies, asks Jehovah to “forgive not their iniquity,” meaning that he should not cover or cancel their sin, as the parallelism proves; for the next clause of the verse reads, “Neither blot out their sins from thy sight.”

That which was supposed to be covered or cancelled was the guilt of sin. This is apparent from an expression in Psalm 32:5, where the author says that, when he resolved to confess his transgressions to Jehovah, he forgave “the iniquity” of his sin. The word for iniquity has there, as often elsewhere, the force of guilt; and the Hebrew would be better rendered, “Thou forgavest the guilt of my sin.”¹

¹The word חַטָּאת, which signifies iniquity or guilt, is here used in Delitzsch's Hebrew New Testament.