

## The Day of Atonement

"Let us go forth therefore unto him, bearing his reproach, for here have we no continuing city"  
—Heb. 13:13.

Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement. The Jews have been observing this event for over 3,000 years—more than half the time since Creation. This is the central, most important, most solemn day in the whole Israelitish cycle. It is the great yearly occasion of cleansing and reconciling to God.

Natural man is a selfish, foolish, lustful animal—of no value, interest or pleasure to God. But training, and development, and discipline, and divine help can make man fit to become part of the eternal spiritual order.

This is the whole lesson of the Mosaic Law. Law is beautiful. God is a God of order. Law is the training of the mind and character to follow a pattern of harmony and beauty. The High Priest was the apex and embodiment of the Law. His garments, we are told, were "For Glory and for Beauty."

That sums up the Law—for *Glory and for Beauty*—the glory of God and the beauty of holiness. Christ's law is but a further, deeper development of the eternal principles taught in Moses' Law.

The ordinance of the Day of Atonement is recorded in Lev. 16. It is no accident that the first verse tells us that these instructions were given following the sudden destruction of Aaron's 2 eldest sons by God for offering strange fire to Him.

Let us note *why* they were destroyed. They had not forsaken God. They were not serving other gods. They were not even neglecting God's service to follow their own pleasures. In fact, they were *actually serving God* at the very moment they were struck down.

What, then, was their sin? *Careless, presumptuous service*. Not following God's instructions. Doing it as *they* saw fit. God must be honored, and presumptuous service—using our own faulty, human judgment instead of following instructions—dishonors Him. They had been chosen from the world to serve and glorify God in His holy Temple. "Ye are the Temple of the living God"—each one of us, personally and individually, and the lesson is as much for us as for Israel of long ago.

V. 2: Aaron is told never to enter the Most Holy except on the divinely-appointed occasions, and in the divinely-appointed way. Only the High Priest could go into the presence of God; and he only once a year, and then only with solemn and elaborate ritual.

If God wants man to draw near to Him, why did He set up this complicated and burdensome system of barriers and restrictions? Why did Christ—sent forth to man because "God so loved the world"—keep saying such harsh, penetrating things that the vast majority—all but a mere handful—turned against him?

Before man can have intimate companionship with God he must be indelibly impressed with his own worthlessness and God's dreadful holiness and majesty. Let us remember with humility and reverence the rigid, lifelong obedience, and the terrible, agonizing death, of Christ which God considered necessary to manifest the requirements of His holiness and to establish a basis of approach.

The Mosaic Tabernacle was about 60 feet long & 20 feet wide. It was entered from one end and divided into 2 rooms. The outer room (the "Holy Place" where the priests ministered daily) was twice as large as the inner room (the "Most Holy" where only the High Priest could go once a year). Here is the same lesson as the parable of the virgins: there were 10 virgins in the Holy Place, tending

the lamps of God; but when the Most Holy was opened, *only 5 went in*—5 were left outside, beating vainly on the door.

These rooms were separated by the veil. This was the veil that was miraculously torn in half when Christ died on the cross, signifying the opening of the way to the Most Holy—the presence of God. In the Most Holy was the ark of the covenant, upon which were the 2 golden cherubim—representing the eternal covenant-purpose of God-manifestation in a holy, perfected multitude.

The Day of Atonement was the center and climax of the last and greatest ceremony of the year. And every 50 years this Day of Atonement marked the beginning of the joyful Jubilee year of freedom and release. On this day the High Priest made 2 separate sacrifices, and 2 visits into the Most Holy—first for himself and then for the people. For himself the sacrifice was a young bullock—for the people it was 2 goats. What is the difference between these 2 offerings?

In the first place, the bullock was a much more important and valuable sacrifice than the goat. Then the bullock has no implications of waywardness and disobedience, as has the goat. Goats symbolize those on the left hand—the sinners. The bullock, or ox, stands for strength, labor and productiveness.

As befits its greater importance, the bullock is usually considered as an individual unit, but the goat in herds. While the goat symbolizes the waywardness of the flesh, the ox represents the faithful leaders and laborers in the Truth. Isa. (7:25; 32:20) uses the figure of the plowing ox as the Truth-proclaimer, and Paul likewise brings it out when he speaks of the prohibition of muzzling the ox that treads out the corn and applies it to those who devote their lives to preaching the Gospel (1 Cor. 9:9).

So we see that it was fitting that the High Priest (representing Christ) should first offer for himself a *single* bullock, then a *plural number* of goats for the people.

On this occasion (v. 4) the High Priest was not to put on his usual ornamental garments "for Glory and for Beauty," but plain white linen—for on this day he was to offer for himself. The "Glory and Beauty" came later—*after* the offering—but they would be out of place in this time of humiliation and atonement.

But we notice in this v. 4 that he must first *wash himself* before putting on the white linen. And this washing, we are told in Ex. 30:20, is "*THAT HE DIE NOT.*" It meant death if he failed to cleanse himself personally before taking on the Christ-righteousness. All these ordinances are to emphasize eternal principles.

So arrayed, Aaron casts lots between the 2 goats—one for the Lord and one for the "scapegoat." It will be noticed that for "scapegoat" the margin has "*azazel*"—the original Hebrew word. All dictionaries and concordances agree on the general meaning of this word—"sending away, getting rid of, averting, departure, removal, separation."

V. 11: the High Priest kills the bullock which is for himself and his household. Then (v. 12) he takes a censer full of burning coals from the sacrificial altar in the tabernacle courtyard. References to coals of fire appear several times in Scripture—particularly in connection with visions of the glory of God, as in Psalms, Isaiah and Ezekiel.

We know the symbolic meaning of fire: consuming judgment. Coals of fire seem to carry the more particular meaning of controlled, useful fire—a *regulated* purging and trying with a view to cleansing and purifying. For example, in Isa. 6:7 (after Isaiah speaks of his unclean lips) an angel lays a coal of fire on the prophet's mouth, saying:

"This hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged."

Beside the censer of coals (which probably hung by a chain from his arm) the High Priest was to take his hands full of sweet incense beaten small (v. 12). The incense of the Mosaic service had to be made *exactly as God specified*. It was offering strange (incorrect) incense that caused the death of Aaron's 2 sons. And this special kind could not be made or used for any other purpose than the properly-ordained worship of God. Two hundred fifty men of the company of Korah presumed to offer incense contrary to the Law, and were destroyed by fire for their presumption.

In the plague that followed, Aaron (the true, God-appointed priest) ran out with a censer of incense and made atonement— standing between the living and the dead—and the plague stayed. From all this we see that incense is a God-ordained form of atonement and intercession. In the Revelation (5:8; 8:3) incense symbolizes intercession and prayer.

The High Priest had to have his hands *full* (v. 12)—all he could hold. There were to be no limits or half-measures in Christ's intercessory work. Paul says:

"He is able to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

On our part the full hands mean there must be "prayer without ceasing." Our hands, or activities, must be filled with prayer.

It was, we note, "sweet" incense. The process involved in preparing the incense, both for Christ and his brethren, is often far from sweet at the time. But patient endurance is a sweet savor to God, and in the ultimate will produce "*fulness—full hands—of joy for evermore.*"

Then, the incense had to be "beaten small." To be beaten small is to be humbled by affliction. All the lumps of human pride and self-assertion must be pounded to fine powder, so that the whole mass can mix and blend smoothly, and the resultant aroma be a pleasant, balanced harmony of all the elements.

With the censer on his arm, and his hands full of incense (v. 13), the High Priest reverently passed beyond the veil into the divine presence. Then the carefully-prepared incense is placed on the purifying fire, and a cloud of incense-vapor fills the room and covers the cherubim mercy-seat above the ark—"THAT HE DIE NOT"—says the record (v. 13).

Here again we are reminded that it was a matter of life and death. Without the purging, purifying fire, the incense-cloud with its sweet odors would not arise and the High Priest—unshielded— would die before the terrible majesty that dwelt between the cherubim, above the ark. This is why Paul said he "gloried in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience," and causes the sweet prayer-incense to arise acceptably and protectively before God.

Next (v. 14) the High Priest had to sprinkle the blood of the bullock upon the mercy-seat, and before it 7 times. *The very mercy-seat itself is cleansed with the purifying blood.* Then he killed the goat of sin-offering for the people (the one on which the lot for the Lord had fallen) and did the same with its blood as he had done with the blood of the bullock.

V. 16: "And he shall make atonement for the Holy Place."

Why did these holy things need atoning for? "Because" (we read) "of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions." Here are 2 distinct things (though of course related). The original word for uncleanness (*tumah*) means any kind of defilement, regardless of actual sin, and it is applied throughout the Law to death, disease, unclean animals and childbirth. It is constitutional uncleanness—uncleanness that is the result of being part of an unclean system of things. Natural man is naturally unclean before God. There is defilement in the very process of being born.

Beside their uncleanness, there were also their "transgressions" to atone for. This word means (beside "sin") "rebellion." Any act contrary to the Word and Will of God, however well-intentioned or however good it may seem to the doer, is—in God's sight—rebellion. "To obey is better than sacrifice," Saul was told. Saul, in mistaken and presumptuous "mercy," saved Agag—and lost his kingdom and his life. Man's proper—and *only*—course is to obey the commands of God and not presume to use his own fleshly reasonings.

This word "atonement" has taken on a hazy, ecclesiastical meaning, but the basic idea is very simple. The regulations speak in v. 18 of making atonement for the altar. V. 19 says the High Priest shall—by sprinkling the altar with blood—*cleanse* it from the *uncleanness* of the children of Israel. "Atonement," scripturally, is simply cleansing. In v. 30 the whole ordinance of the Day of Atonement is summed up:

"On that day shall the priest make atonement for you to CLEANSE you, that ye may be CLEAN from all your sins."

*Any sin*—anything out of harmony with God's eternal will—is a form of filthiness, infection and defilement; and it clings offensively and corruptingly to a man in God's sight until it has been properly washed away. Cleansing and cleanness make up the great theme of the Scriptures.

Beside the basic meaning of "cleanse," the Hebrew word translated "atone" (kippur, kaphor) also carried the idea of "cover." The shadowy atonements of the Law were a cleansing by covering, a *provisional* cleansing, but the true atonement is a true cleansing:

"How much more shall the blood of Christ CLEANSE your conscience from works of death" (Heb. 9:14).

"He hath washed us from our sins in his own blood" (Rev. 1:5).

"The blood of Christ CLEANSETH us from all sin" (I John 1:7).

V. 17 describes a very significant and unusual fact on this great yearly Day of Atonement. *All this time there must be no man in the Tabernacle.* The usual bustle of priestly activity in the Tabernacle and its court are strangely stilled. Alone and in silence the white-clad High Priest goes about his solemn tasks in the otherwise deserted building. How clearly is foreshadowed the passing away of the Mosaic service, and the lonely, single-handed work of the great High Priest to come!

When everything had been typically cleansed (v. 20), then the High Priest turned his attention to the living goat that remained. He lays both his hands (indicating completeness) on the goat's head (v. 21) and confesses over it all the sins, transgressions and iniquities of the children of Israel, thus symbolically placing these sins on the goat. Then the goat is sent away into the wilderness by the hand of a "fit" (that is, a "ready" or "prepared") man.

It will be noted there is no scapegoat for the High Priest, to carry away *his* sins, iniquities and transgressions—there was just the single bullock for him. It would seem, then, that one aspect of the double-goat symbol was to distinguish between constitutional uncleanness and actual transgression, and to foreshadow that he whom the High Priest typified was free from the latter.

This is the only place in all the sacrificial ordinances that sins are carried away outside the camp. It is very fitting, on this yearly occasion when the great typical cleansing of the camp is enacted, that all sins are—in a figure—taken completely from the nation.

But there seems *more* to the double-goat ordinance than this. If we think upon it, we shall be struck by the fact that—while there are a great multitude of symbols of Christ's *death* in the Law of Moses—*there are practically no symbols of resurrection*, or of life after death. This is not out of

harmony, for the Law was (as Paul says—2 Cor. 3:7-9) a "ministration of death"—a "ministration of condemnation."

The Law ended with Christ's crucifixion. Resurrection was a step beyond the Law—"beyond the camp," so to speak. The Law could not, of itself, bring resurrection, so it is in keeping that this should not be a prominent feature of its symbols.

But still, as a foreshadowing of Christ, it is to be expected that the Law would in *some* way portray resurrection. Two chapters earlier (Lev. 14) there is something similar to the double-goat arrangement, in the law concerning the cleansing of leprosy, which we believe gives us a clue. In this ordinance 2 birds are used. One is killed, then the other is dipped in the first one's blood (identifying it with it) and then SET FREE in the open field OUTSIDE THE CITY. Here clearly is a figure of *life after death*—life from the dead.

Leprosy was the most spectacular and dreaded form of physical uncleanness. The term "unclean" is always applied to it, and the expression "*cleansing*" is used of leprosy, while "*healing*" is used of all other diseases. Leprosy was regarded as a living death. It is understandable, then, that we find very similar symbols in the cleansing of leprosy and in the great national day of cleansing from sin and death.

Christ's resurrection is essential to the cleansing efficacy of his death—he was "delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). So Christ's death did not in itself complete the redeeming work. Therefore somewhere in the shadows of the Law (and most appropriately on this great Day of Atonement) there is needed a symbol showing the taking away of sins by the risen Christ. This we see in the second, living goat taking over where the sacrificed goat ended, and departing to a "land of separation" OUTSIDE THE CAMP.

The significance of this expression "outside the camp" becomes clearer when we see what is done with the remains of the slain bullock and goat. They are carried forth *without the camp* and burned (instead of being eaten by the priests, as was usual with the sacrifices). Why? *Why were the priests strictly forbidden to eat any sacrifice that had sanctified the tabernacle?* Paul gives the answer in the last chapter of his letter to the Hebrews:

First, this indicated that those under the Law had no right to partake of the Christ-sacrifice. This does not mean, of course, that those who lived during the Mosaic dispensation are excluded from the benefits of Christ's death, but that the Mosaic and Christian dispensations are incompatible—the old must be left behind before the new can be entered. (He was speaking to some who were hesitating between the 2 and attempting to embrace both.)

Second, it indicated that Christ would suffer "outside the gate." The great, central, anti-typical sacrifice to which all the others pointed would be OUTSIDE the whole Mosaic sacrificial system, and *not part of it*. His suffering outside the gate was a sign of his rejection by the Jewish nation.

And thirdly—says Paul—the type indicates that we "have no continuing city." It indicates a forsaking (like Abraham) of the comfortable, established present for the sake of the glorious promised future—seen by faith. "Let us go forth to him," is Paul's rallying-cry—to the rejected sacrifice "without the camp, bearing his reproach!"

Now, if these things were indicated (as Paul says they were) by the carrying out and burning outside of the dead bullock and goat, how much more the shameful departure of the living goat shows them! The Jews would regard the scapegoat (upon whom all their sins were symbolically laid) *exactly as Isa. 53 indicates they would regard Christ*—as cursed, and rejected, and banished from God.

As the goat was driven forth (we are informed by historians), they lined the way to heap curses and abuse upon it. In this chapter in Isaiah there is a remarkable parallel with the scapegoat—

"We esteemed him smitten of God . . . the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

How fitting then that—of all the types of the Law—this despised, rejected, sin-laden goat should foreshadow the glorious resurrection that is the keystone of all our hopes!

Following the departure of the scapegoat, Aaron laid aside the holy white linen garments (in which he had come closer than at any other time to his great antitype), and put on again his regular elaborate Mosaic vestments, and took up again his regular duties for another year.

The Temple-veil, after being thus drawn aside to give a brief prophetic glimpse of the future, is closed again—to be disturbed no more until next year's Atonement Day.

The men who burned the slain bullock and goat, and sent the scapegoat into the wilderness, return, wash their clothes, and rejoin the camp, and another yearly cycle begins for Israel.

But—arising out of Paul's remarks—our minds linger with the animals burnt for sin without the camp, and with the goat that has gone away sin-laden and alone into the wilderness—bearing his reproach. For—though Israel did not, and still does not, know it—*therein their salvation lay*.

—G.V.G.

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