

The Day of Atonement

From Sinai to Canaan

Study 7

Warmup



If you needed to dispose of some sensitive documents, what method would you use? Ignoring? Black-lining? Encoding? Hiding? Burying? Shredding? Burning?

Introduction

This seventh study picks up something that was delivered earlier to Moses in the first year of the exodus from Egypt. When the Israelites were camped at Mt Sinai, they received things like the Ten Commandments, the pattern for the Tabernacle, laws concerning the duties of priests, instructions about the feasts and festivals, and detailed penalties for sin. But along with all of those important things, came this precious word of grace, called the Day of Atonement.

What we have in Leviticus 16 is a beautiful gospel picture of something that illustrates and anticipates the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus. That is why the writer to the Hebrews is so bold as to say that the Israelites had the gospel preached to them (4:1,2):

¹ Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. ² For we also have had the gospel preached to us, *just as they did*; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.

Read Leviticus 16

¹ The Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the Lord. ² The Lord said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.

³ This is how Aaron is to enter the sanctuary area: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. ⁴ He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body; he is to tie the linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These are sacred garments; so he must bathe himself with water before he

puts them on. ⁵ From the Israelite community he is to take two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

⁶ Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household. ⁷ Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the Lord at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ⁸ He is to cast lots for the two goats - one lot for the Lord and the other for the scapegoat. ⁹ Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the Lord and sacrifice it for a sin offering. ¹⁰ But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the Lord to be used for making atonement by sending it into the desert as a scapegoat.

¹¹ Aaron shall bring the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household, and he is to slaughter the bull for his own sin offering. ¹² He is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the Lord and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain. ¹³ He is to put the incense on the fire before the Lord, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover above the Testimony, so that he will not die. ¹⁴ He is to take some of the bull's blood and with his finger sprinkle it on the front of the atonement cover; then he shall sprinkle some of it with his finger seven times before the atonement cover.

¹⁵ He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull's blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it. ¹⁶ In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been. He is to do the same for the Tent of Meeting, which is among them in the midst of their uncleanness. ¹⁷ No one is to be in the Tent of Meeting from the time Aaron goes in to make atonement in the Most Holy Place until he comes out, having made atonement for himself, his household and the whole community of Israel.

¹⁸ Then he shall come out to the altar that is before the Lord and make atonement for it. He shall take some of the bull's blood and some of the goat's blood and put it on all the horns of the altar. ¹⁹ He shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times to cleanse it and to consecrate it from the uncleanness of the Israelites.

²⁰ When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the Tent of Meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. ²¹ He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites - all their sins - and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. ²² The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert.



First Impressions

Record some of your own first impressions about the passage you have just read.

Commentary

The sixteenth chapter of Leviticus is very detailed and very complex, and there is a lot going on! So much so, that it is not only difficult to follow the many orders given to the priests and people, but difficult to know whether the lessons taught are only for Old Testament believers, or for all Christians.

The fact that there is a connection between the sacrificial and substitutionary animals in Leviticus 16, and the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ, is set forth in the Book of Hebrews. In Hebrews 13, with reference to Leviticus 16:27, we find the following words:

¹¹ The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. ¹² And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.

We are therefore on safe ground to draw gospel applications for ourselves from this important chapter.

Question 1

Have you ever heard of a scapegoat? Can you think of a synonym for the word? Can you think of a time, perhaps even from your own life, of being a scapegoat?



Commentary

The text describes two goats (v8): One chosen to be sacrificed, and the other chosen to be banished, yet both goats play a part in the removal of Israel's sin. One is used to meet the just demands of sin (through bloodshed), and the other is used to carry away the feelings of guilt and shame. The apostle John in his first letter mentions these two removals of sin: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will... (1) forgive us our sins and... (2) purify us from all unrighteousness."

The Gospel then holds out this hope in Christ: That not only are our sins forgiven, but that the shame associated with our sins is also removed. It is not surprising then that the result is a profound and stunning peace.

Question 2

What is suggested in the priest laying both his hands on the head of the goat (v21)?
Have you ever gone “all-in” in committing your sins to Christ?

Question 3

What picture in this passage presents the wonderful truth that all of our sins have not just been black-lined, or shredded, or hidden, but disposed-of completely? (See also these verses for confirmation: Psalm 32:1,2; Psalm 130:3,4; Micah 7:18,19)

Question 4

What is taught in God’s instruction to Aaron to only enter the Most Holy Place in a certain way (v2,3)? There is a sense where this is also true for us. What is the only way that we may come to God? And why can there not be another?

Question 5

The Book of Hebrews, which naturally makes much of the association between the Books of Moses and the life of Christ, makes the strong point that the death of Christ far exceeds what is foreshadowed here in Leviticus 16. Can you think of at least three of these points of ‘exceeding’? (Hebrews 10:1-7)

<i>OLD TESTAMENT SACRIFICES</i>	<i>CHRIST</i>
(1) _____	_____
(2) _____	_____
(3) _____	_____

Conclusion

Most of us imagine that our sins are simply moved to the Trash file – that is, still there and easily retrieved. Perhaps it’s time to think through and apply the work of the great Sacrifice and Scapegoat, and to push the blue botton.



Sing this pertinent verse from old Spafford, and rejoice as you finish in prayer:

*My sin, (O the bliss of this glorious thought)
My sin, not in part, but the whole,
Is nailed to the Cross, and I bear it no more
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul.*