

HEBREWS 19

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

By Ron Harvey
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For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord.

Leviticus 16:30

INTRODUCTION

The Jews had many ceremonies which foreshadowed the person and work of Jesus Christ. Every day they sacrificed lambs. And they sacrificed lambs and goats both morning and evening to remind the people that they always needed a sacrifice to atone for their sins.

But there was one day during the year in Israel that was a very special day and it was called the Day of Atonement. (v.34)

On that Day of Atonement, the High Priest would do all of the work in the tabernacle. For all the other priests and for the people it was a Sabbath Day. (v.31) The other priests were not allowed to do the work as they usually did. Only the High Priest worked on the Day of Atonement. He performed all the sacrifices; he maintained the lamps; he burned the incense. The other priests were not allowed to work on this day.

And when this routine work was done for the day, he changed out of his beautiful High Priestly garments and he put on simple white linens and he prepared to do what no other human being was allowed to do – he prepared to go behind the veil - into the Holy of Holies - into the very presence of God.

Now this Holiest Place, called the Holy of Holies, was that little cubicle at the west end of the tabernacle. It was 10 x 10 x 10 cubits in size. It was no bigger than a typical bedroom. And it had a chest in it. And in the chest were the stone tablets with the ten commandments. And there was Aaron's rod and a sampling of manna.

And on top of the chest was a gold plate which was called the mercy seat. And there was a cloud upon the mercy seat and God would appear in the cloud. (v.2) And the High Priest would go inside the veil and he would sprinkle blood on the mercy seat and he would meet with God on behalf of the people.

Now let me say right here the true Day of Atonement was not that one day each year when the High Priest would go into this cubicle and sprinkle the blood of an animal on top of a gold-plated chest, but it was that one day in history, that one appointed day, that day at Calvary, that great day of vengeance of our God, when he poured out his awful wrath against sin. It is that day when that true Lamb of God hung on a cross and his blood was shed. That is the true day of atonement.

And for Jesus, that Day of Atonement was an awful day. It was the day of God's wrath.

But for us, the Day of Atonement is redemption day. It is that one day in all of history when the sins of the world were laid upon our Savior and we went free. The Day of Atonement is that day when my sins were imputed to Him and his righteousness was imputed to me.

The Day of Atonement is that day that Jesus Christ made atonement for your sins and my sins. It was not on that one day of the year when the High Priest entered behind the veil and sprinkled the blood of an animal on the mercy seat in the presence of God, but it was on that day when our true Lamb of God was slaughtered. That was the true Day of Atonement.

But Israel's Day of Atonement was their most important and significant day of each year. It was the religious day of all religious days. And it was so because their day of atonement pre-eminently typified that true Day of Atonement that was yet to come, when Jesus Christ really and truly made atonement for sins.

Now this morning I would like to consider Israel's Day of Atonement in order that we might further be instructed about our true Day of Atonement.

The Day of Atonement happened only once during the year.

Now sacrifices were made every day in the year in Israel, but the Day of Atonement only once during the year. This is to teach us that it is only necessary for Jesus Christ to die once. There is only one atonement. There is only one day of atonement. The death of Jesus Christ was all sufficient. He died once for all and once for all time.

Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many . . .

Hebrews 9:25-28

Jesus will never suffer again. His sacrifice was once for all. This shows how much better his sacrifice was than the sacrifice of bulls and goats.

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? Because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

Hebrews 10:1-4

But the sacrifice of Jesus Christ takes away sins once and for all and forever. And there are no more sacrifices because the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, unlike the sacrifice of animals, was not deficient but it was efficient and it was sufficient. And there is no need of any other sacrifice.

The Day of Atonement was at an appointed time during the year

It was on the tenth day of the seventh month during the year. (v.29) It was on the day appointed by God. Moses didn't choose the day and Aaron didn't choose the day, but God appointed the day.

And this is to show us that that great Day of Atonement, that true Day of Atonement, that day that Jesus died, was appointed and predestinated by God himself. It was not by any chance that Jesus was put to death, but God settled it before the foundation of the world. And on the very day that God decreed that Christ should die, he was led as a lamb to the slaughter.

The Bible says that in the fullness of time Jesus came into the world. (Gal.4:4)

And he was delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. (Acts 2:23)

And just as Israel's Day of Atonement was on a fixed day, the sacrifice of Christ was on a day fixed in the decree of God.

Now we want to take a look at the person making the atonement.

The person making the atonement for Israel was Aaron

Now notice first that,

I. Aaron did his work of atonement alone.

Aaron was the high priest. There were other priests who on a daily basis did almost all the work of the tabernacle. But on this day, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest did all the work. Even the lighting of the candles and the fires and the incense was done by the High Priest. And he alone slaughtered the lambs on this day. All the labor was left to him. And then when it was time to go behind the veil the High Priest went alone. No one else was allowed to go in. And he alone sprinkled blood on the mercy seat and he alone made atonement for the sins of the people.

And so it was with our great High Priest, Jesus Christ. It is Jesus and Jesus alone who worked the atonement. No one could assist him in his work of atonement. One of his disciples betrayed him and the other disciples fled and Jesus was left alone in the hands of sinners and this was ordained by God because Jesus was the great High Priest and it was necessary that he should walk up Calvary alone. All the work on that day was done by our great High Priest.

II. Aaron put off his resplendent clothing and put on humble clothes.

And I want you to notice that on the Day of Atonement, Aaron laid aside his golden garments. On other days he was arrayed in purple and gold. His garments were adorned with gems and with precious stones and with tinkling bells and with other ornaments. And he was resplendent in glory on all other days.

But on this day, the Day of Atonement, he laid aside his glory and he put on humble clothes and he wore simple white linens. He put on the clothes of a pauper. (16:4)

And this is significant, because Jesus laid aside his glorious garments and took the form of a servant in order to make atonement for his people. The Son of God did not come to earth arrayed in all the glories of his heavenly home, but he dressed himself in earthly rags to make atonement. When Jesus made atonement he came as a humble priest.

And on that true Day of Atonement, not Aaron's but Christ's, Jesus was not crowned with jewels, but rather, he was crowned with thorns. He did not come into the courts wearing purple robes, although they put one on him in mockery. He was not dressed like a king. His sandals were not lined with gold. There were no gems and precious stones because he laid those heavenly garments aside when he came to redeem men. And when he came into the Roman courts and before Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate on that Day of Atonement he was dressed in common rags of the common people. What a humble priest we had on the Day of Atonement.

And they even stripped him of those simple rags and they hung him in shame on a cross. Look at your great High Priest and see how low he humbled himself on the Day of Atonement.

The angels who were looking down and who had known him in his glory must have marveled at the glorious, divine robes which he had laid aside and the earthly rags that he put on for this day just as Aaron had done as a figure in the Old Testament.

III. Aaron washed himself continually before making atonement.

He shall put on the holy linen coat, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired: these are holy garments; therefore shall he wash his flesh in water, and so put them on.

Leviticus 16:4

And he shall wash his flesh with water in the holy place, and put on his garments, and come forth, and offer his burnt offering . . .

Leviticus 16:24

And it was required of Aaron that he be a spotless High Priest. The only way a high priest can make atonement for others, is if he is spotless himself. Now since there was no one who was morally spotless, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, it was necessary for Aaron that he at least make himself spotless ceremonially. So he followed all the requirements of God and he washed himself over and over before he made atonement.

But also see that in addition to washing himself, it was necessary that Aaron make an offering first for himself. (v.6) Why is it that Aaron must first offer a sacrifice for himself and then for the people? It is because he that makes atonement must be spotless himself. May a sinner make atonement for sinners? No, says God. So Aaron was required to at least make himself ceremonially clean by washing himself and by offering sacrifices for himself. And when he became ceremonially clean, then he could make a ceremonial offering and a ceremonial atonement. But he could never make a true atonement, for Aaron was a sinful man, like you and like me.

But we have a spotless High Priest, a great High Priest, and his name is Jesus. Aaron needed constant washing to be ceremonially spotless so that he could be a type of Christ who is in all ways spotless. We have a great High Priest who needs no washing. He is spotless already. There is no filth to wash away with him. What a High Priest we have who is qualified by his own spotlessness to make an atonement for us. Jesus needed no atonement for himself, as did Aaron. Jesus needed no incense to be waved before the mercy seat for himself. God was not angry with Jesus for Jesus was pure and clean and he could march right in to the presence of God and make atonement for others, because he himself was spotless.

But now, notice the means by which atonement was made.

The atonement is shown by means of a goat

And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for the scapegoat. And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the Lord's lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering. But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness.

Leviticus 16:7-10

It is easy to see that the first goat is a great type of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is this goat that was slaughtered and killed. It is this goat whose blood was shed. And so, we consider this first goat so that we may learn of Christ.

I. It was required under the law that the goat be a perfect goat, that is, an unblemished goat. And furthermore, it must be a goat who was in his first year. It must be in the prime of life.

And even so, our Lord was a perfect man, without the slightest blemish. And he was likewise taken in the prime of life. He was in full vigor when he was taken and killed.

II. The goat to be killed was chosen by lot. (vs.7-9)

It is interesting here that the people of Israel brought these two goats to Aaron. Nevertheless, the that was to be killed, the goat that was to be the atonement was selected by lot – that is, by the Lord.

The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.”

And likewise, Jesus was brought by the people of Israel to Calvary. They supposed that they had dragged him there. Yet, Christ had been appointed once to die. Christ's death after all was said and done, was accomplished by the foreordination of God. The lot was cast into the lap and God chose Christ to die for sins. So it is true that men put Christ to

death, but it was by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God that he was killed. And men brought the goats to Aaron and Aaron cast lots and God chose the sacrifice.

III. The goat was killed.

Aaron took the knife and he stabbed the goat. And he watched the goat struggle against the knife. It struggled and flailed away for a moment and then the blood gushed out.

And here we have a picture of our Savior. The Father took out his sword of vengeance and he plunged it into the heart of his own Son. And the blood gushed out. And when he was hanging on the cross we see the sweat upon his brow. We see the tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth. We hear his sighs and groans. And we hear him shriek, "My God, My God. Why hast thou forsaken me?"

Now if we had witnessed the death of Aaron's goat, it might have given us pause to think of the cost of our atonement. But how much more should we consider the cost of our atonement when we see Jesus who died?

IV. The blood of the goat was taken behind the veil and sprinkled on the mercy seat.

Had the blood of the goat been left on the altar or on the ground, it would have been of no avail to the people. And so God instructed Aaron to take the blood of the goat and to go within the veil and to sprinkle it before God.

You see, the blood is effective because it is brought to God. It is the propitiation for our sins. It is the substance that propitiates God. It changes God's disposition toward us. But without the blood, there is no propitiation.

And so, Aaron took the blood of the goat and sprinkled it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. (v.15)

Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the analogy, is not only the goat which was sacrificed, but he is also the High Priest who goes within the veil and sprinkles the blood before God.

Jesus is our great High Priest. And he didn't take his blood behind the veil in the tabernacle, but he passed into the heavens (Hebrews 4:14) That is, Jesus took his own blood and went in to see God where God really lives and he sprinkled his own blood on the real mercy seat (the throne of God) and he caused that God should be really propitiated and that there should be a real atonement once for all.

And those for whom Christ died walked out of prison that day as free men.

The effects of the atonement are shown by means of the second goat

And when he hath made an end of reconciling the holy place, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat: And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited, and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.

Leviticus 16:20,21

Much speculation has been made about the meaning of the second goat. It is very clear that the first goat was the sacrifice. And the first goat is a clear representation of Christ. But the second goat was not killed. His blood was not spilled. He did not suffer and die.

And so, I take it that the second goat does not typify Christ who died, but rather the second goat shows us what becomes of our sins when Christ dies.

And so, the first effect of the atonement is that,

I. Sins are taken away.

Remember, Aaron was to place his hands on the head of the goat and confess the sins of the people. And then, the goat is led out of the city. And the people watch as the goat is led away by a fit man.

Perhaps the fit man does represent Christ. For Christ does take away our sins.

But the man leads the goat away and the people watch as the goat rounds the corner and is gone. And the goat is taken into the wilderness and the man lets the goat go free.

And this is a good picture of salvation. There are two goats. One goat is slaughtered and the other is set free. They said crucify Jesus and let Barabbas go. And so here, the one goat is killed and the other is let free.

When the goat is let free, the man watches as the goat skips here and there over the mountains and into the distance, a little farther, and then it is gone.

And when the man returns to the city and reports that the goat is gone, the people clap their hands for joy, for their sins are gone too.

Oh, my! What a picture of the effects of the atonement. All of our sins are gone away. They have fled away into the wilderness. They are scattered as far as the east is from the west. Gone now and gone forever!

And I would have you know that all kinds of sins were carried away that day; sins of omission and sins of commission; sins of rebellion and sins of ignorance; little sins and big sins; moral sins and ceremonial sins; my sins and your sins. All of them were carried away.

Oh, how I hope each of you have a share in that atonement. I hope each of you can see him bleeding for you on the cross. I hope each of you are afflicted in your hearts for your part in the death of Christ.

And I hope each of you are overcome with joy that your sins have been taken away and you have been set free.

Example: In Leviticus 25:9, God instituted the year of Jubilee. And every 50 years was to be a year of Jubilee when all debts were forgiven and slaves were to be freed. And notice when the year of Jubilee was to begin.

Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land.

Leviticus 25:9

Isn't that a great picture? In the fiftieth year, on the tenth day of the seventh month, on the Day of Atonement, all slaves and debtors go free.

On the true Day of Atonement, all sinners go free. We are no longer spiritually bankrupt. Our possessions have been returned to us. We have inherited all things through Christ!

But then there is another effect of the atonement.

II. And entrance is opened into the presence of God.

The veil prevented the people from coming in to see God. But when Christ died, the veil was rent in two and the way was opened up. And now sinners may come in to see God.

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in the time of need.

Hebrews 4:16

Now, because of the atonement, you may come. Though your sins are red like scarlet, they shall be white as snow.

Would you have your part in the atonement? Then all you must do is believe in that great atoning work of Jesus and you may come to the very throne of God with your petitions. And if you come claiming the atonement, then it will be a throne of grace to you.

You see, Jesus has sprinkled his blood on and around the throne. And now, you may come and you may come boldly for mercy and grace in time of need.

How we adore our great High Priest.

Now when Aaron came out of the Holy of Holies after making atonement for the people, he would put back on his glorious priestly garments. And the people had great joy and they offered praise to God because he had not been killed in the presence of God and he had made atonement for the people.

And our Great High Priest has once again put on his glorious garments. He laid them aside for his atoning work. But now, he is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. And he has taken once again his rightful place on the throne. And he is clothed with all power and authority. And he is clothed with the glorious and beautiful garments of priesthood.

He is a great High Priest. And he has redeemed his people from their sins.