

## 9. Yom Kippur – The day of atonement

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We all have heard this word – Yom Kippur. Many people know that it is a Jewish holiday, but if you ask them about the meaning or the background of the Yom Kippur, most of them could not answer.

In our last study of the Book of Leviticus, we learned how leprosy represents our sins and how Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice was portrayed throughout the cleansing process of a former leper.

In this extremely spiritual chapter 16, we get to learn about the most important day of the year for the Old Testament Jews – Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. God graciously atoned for all the sins of all the people and gave the nation a new beginning.

However, today the Jews cannot celebrate Yom Kippur in the appointed way of the Old Testament because they do not have a temple, nor a high priest. But those who have received Jesus Christ can see a picture of the redemption of Jesus Christ on the cross in this ancient ritual.

### A. AN APPOINTED TIME

*Leviticus 16:1-2* Now the Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they offered profane fire before the Lord, and died; 2 and the Lord said to Moses: "Tell Aaron your brother not to come at just any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat.

*Leviticus 16:29* "This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you.

In other words, the Israelites, including the priests, could not just pop into the tabernacle anytime they wanted to talk with God. There was a great gulf between God and man. Today God allows us to come to Him anytime through Jesus Christ His Son. We can come to Him with boldness in our hearts because Jesus is the Way to the Throne of Grace.

*Hebrews 10:19-22* Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

The appointed day was the tenth day of the seventh month in the Jewish calendar which is around mid-September to mid-October. On the first day of the seventh month, the trumpets were blown to announce the beginning of a new year – Rosh Hashanah. The tenth day was the Day of Atonement, and then came the Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths), which started on the fifteenth day of the month and lasted a week.

The tenth day of the seventh month – these numbers are significant in most of Scripture. The seventh is the sabbatic month and denotes rest from works. This month was chosen to set forth the preview of redemption that is in Christ.

Ten is another prominent number in Scripture, and seems to convey the idea of that which expresses God's complete will and way. There were the Ten Commandments. God requested the tithe, the tenth. Ten expresses God's mind and purpose.

In Hebrew, Yom Kippur can be divided in two words – 'Yoma' which means "the day" and 'Kaphar' which means "to cover". God did not take away sins in the Old Testament. He covered them until Christ came and removed them.

*Romans 3:24-25 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed*

## **B. THE HIGH PRIEST'S PREPARATION**

*Leviticus 16:3-5 Thus Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with the blood of a young bull as a sin offering, and of a ram as a burnt offering. 4 He shall put the holy linen tunic and the linen trousers on his body; he shall be girded with a linen sash, and with the linen turban he shall be attired. These are holy garments. Therefore he shall wash his body in water, and put them on. 5 And he shall take from the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats as a sin offering, and one ram as a burnt offering.*

Note one thing from the beginning of this portion of Scripture. There is no mention of Aaron's sons' names, nor anyone else for that matter. That means that there was no one else except the high priest in this process.

Another very important point we must note is mentioned in v4. The high priest was not wearing his own beautiful high priest garment for this sacrifice, rather wore a simple priest's garment.

Laying aside his glorious robes was an act of humility, and washing at the laver was an act of sanctification. He was setting himself apart to serve the Lord and His people on this special day.

In a much greater way, our Lord Jesus Christ did all of this for us.

*John 17:19 And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.*

Jesus never needed to be cleansed from sin because He was sinless, but He did set Himself apart to serve us. He laid aside His glory and came into this world as a poor, helpless baby. As God's Suffering Servant, He humbled Himself and died on the cross. His work completed, Jesus returned to heaven and "dressed Himself" once again in the glory that is rightfully His. Our Lord did not lay aside His deity, but He put aside His glory when He came down to this earth and became a man.

## **C. THE OFFERINGS FOR HIMSELF AND THE PEOPLE**

*Leviticus 16:6-14 "Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering, which is for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his house. 7 He shall take the two goats and present them before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. 8 Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot for the Lord and the other lot for the scapegoat. 9 And Aaron shall bring the goat on which the Lord's lot fell, and offer it as a sin offering. 10 But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make atonement upon it, and to let it go as the scapegoat into the wilderness. 11 "And Aaron shall bring the bull of the sin offering, which is for him-*

*self, and make atonement for himself and for his house, and shall kill the bull as the sin offering which is for himself. 12 Then he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, with his hands full of sweet incense beaten fine, and bring it inside the veil. 13 And he shall put the incense on the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the Testimony, lest he die. 14 He shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; and before the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.*

Since the cloud of incense symbolized the glory of God, the high priest put God's glory ahead of everything else. We need to remember that the ultimate goal of God's great plan of salvation is not for the good of people but the glory of God.

The high priest needed a sacrifice because he was a sinner, but Jesus didn't need a sacrifice for Himself because He is sinless. Then you may say, "Oh, yes, His parents brought two turtle doves to the temple when He was a baby." Yes, they did, but not for Him, but for His mother Mary for her cleansing after the delivery of Jesus. That means that she was a sinner just like any one of us unlike the Roman Catholic's doctrine.

In v14, we find the high priest sprinkled the blood of the bull on the ark as a sin offering. Why did he do that? Why on the mercy seat? The idea was that God was above the mercy seat as it is mentioned in v2, and as He looked down upon the ark of the covenant, He saw the sin of man. Man's sin was represented by the items in the ark of the covenant: Manna Israel complained about, tablets of law Israel broke, and a budding almond rod given as a response to Israel's rebellion. Then, the high priest sprinkled atoning blood seven times on the mercy seat – covering over the emblems of Israel's sin. God saw the blood cover over the sin, and atonement was made and His mercy was extended to the Israelites another year.

But our Savior Jesus' blood was shed for us and through His own atoning sacrifice our sins were not covered, but washed away. The throne of God would be the judgment seat to the unbelievers of Jesus Christ, but it is the mercy seat to the born-again Christians.

#### **D. THE DEAD GOAT AND SCAPE GOAT**

*Leviticus 16:15-16 "Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which is for the people, bring its blood inside the veil, do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat. 16 So he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins; and so he shall do for the tabernacle of meeting which remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness.*

*Leviticus 16:20-22 "And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place, the tabernacle of meeting, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat. 21 Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man. 22 The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness.*

The two goats together constituted one sin offering, even though only one goat was slain. The high priest cast lots over the goats, and one of them was chosen to die. According to the Talmud – the collection of ancient Rabbinic writings, the two goats are supposed to be as alike as possible – in size, color and value. The released goat is called ‘scape goat’ which is short for ‘escape goat.’

I know that many denominations don’t like to hear of the blood, because it sounds gory and crude. But according to the Bible, the blood Jesus shed for us was precious and extremely important. I believe that the blood of Christ will be at the throne of God to remind us throughout the endless ages of eternity that our salvation was purchased at a tremendous price.

### **E. BACK IN THE HIGH PRIEST GARMENT**

*Leviticus 16:23-24* “Then Aaron shall come into the tabernacle of meeting, shall take off the linen garments which he put on when he went into the Holy Place, and shall leave them there. 24 And he shall wash his body with water in a holy place, put on his garments, come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people, and make atonement for himself and for the people.

Once the high priest was sure that the scape goat was officially lost in the wilderness, the high priest went into the holy place of the tabernacle, took off the linen garments, bathed, and put on his official robes. This reminds us of our Lord Jesus’ return to heaven, where He received back the glory He had laid aside when He was here on earth.

The idea of the scape goat is God’s way to let His Old Testament people know that their sins were forgiven. Forgiveness and the fear of the Lord go together, because the privilege of forgiveness carries with it the obligation of commitment and obedience. Jesus offered Himself up to the Father in total obedience, and we cannot do less than follow His example.

Faith that is prompt by the Holy Spirit transfers our sins to Jesus; Christ removes them with His atoning sacrifice on the cross; God the Father forgives and forgets them.

### **F. A SABBATH OF SOLEMN REST**

*Leviticus 16:31* It is a sabbath of solemn rest for you, and you shall afflict your souls. It is a statute forever.

The Day of Atonement is the only day of mourning and fasting which God gave His people. On this day you don’t say, “Happy Yom Kippur” because that is not the way the day is celebrated. It was the day to afflict the soul because of sin. It was mourning for sin. This is the basis for fasting in the Old Testament.

It was a common practice for the ancient Jews to use their right fists to beat their left chests and lament. You may remember the scene from Luke 18. Jesus told another parable to the legalistic people about a self-righteous Pharisee and a tax-collector:

*Luke 18:13* And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’

## **G. APPLICATIONS**

- 1) For anyone to think that he or she can make a way to heaven with individual righteousness and good behavior is an extreme insult to God's grace and mercy. He would not tolerate it.
  
- 2) Forgiveness and the fear of the Lord go together, because the privilege of forgiveness carries with it the obligation of commitment and obedience.