

## Lesson 4: THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

**READING:** Leviticus 16; Numbers 29:7-11; Romans 5:8-11; Hebrews 9:6-12.

**AIM:** To consider the Day of Atonement and the atoning work of Jesus.

### 1. BACKGROUND

Under the Law given through Moses, the Day of Atonement was the most important day of the whole year for Israel. It was the day that atonement was made for the sins of the nation. Atonement (at-one-ment) literally means "a covering". The same Hebrew word occurs where Noah covered the ark with pitch to make it waterproof (Gen. 6: 14). When Israel brought sacrifices to God, the blood of the sacrificed animals was accepted by God as a covering or atonement for sin. Repentance was necessary before God forgave sins and accepted the life (the blood) of the sacrifice on behalf of the sinner (Lev. 17:11).

The tenth day of the seventh month was set aside for this great day of national humiliation (Lev. 16:29-31). It was the only "fast" day Israel had to observe. It was the only day of the year when the priest entered the Most Holy Place. It was symbolic of the time of Israel's full repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation to God (Lev. 23:27, 32; Psa. 35: 13; Isa. 58:3-6; Acts 27:9

### 2. A DAY OF NATIONAL HUMILIATION Lev.16; Num.29: 7-11.

The High Priest bathed himself and dressed in a special clean, white linen garment. All his costly garments were put aside because it was a special day of fasting and repentance (Lev.16:4, 32). This was in preparation for his entry into the Most Holy Place and God's presence. Two goats were brought to the door of the Tabernacle. Lots were cast to choose: (i) the sin offering for Israel (the goat upon which the Lord's lot fell) and, (ii) the scapegoat.

The High Priest made an offering for himself and his household and sprinkled the blood of the sacrificial bullock seven times on the Mercy Seat (Lev. 16:6, 11-14; Num. 29:9; Heb. 9:7). Then the goat for the sin offering was killed and its blood was taken by the High Priest into the Most Holy Place and sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat (Lev. 16:15-16). The carcasses of the bullock and the goat were burnt outside the camp (Lev.16: 27-28; Heb. 13: 11). In order that the High Priest did not die when he entered the Most Holy Place he had to envelop the Mercy Seat in a cloud of incense from the Altar of Incense (Lev.16:12-13).

The scapegoat (Lev. 16:21-22) was the second goat, upon whose head Israel's sins were placed (figuratively). The goat was brought to the door of the Tabernacle where the High Priest laid both his hands upon its head and confessed all the sins of Israel. This signified that the sins of Israel were transferred, figuratively, onto the live scapegoat, the sin-bearer. Then the goat was led into the wilderness carrying away Israel's sins. By this the people understood that God would no longer remember their sins.

Following this ritual the High Priest bathed himself in the Holy Place, dressed in his usual garments and completed the ceremony of sacrifice. The burnt offerings for himself and for the people and the fat of the sin offering were burned on the altar (Lev.16:23-25). With the completion of these sacrifices the people of Israel were cleansed and sanctified, ready to begin a new year with their God.

### 3. CHRIST'S WORK OF ATONEMENT. Rom. 5:8-11; Heb. 9:6-12

The sacrifices and the ceremonies of this day typified Christ in a very special way. They pointed forward to the great work Christ was to perform in making atonement for the sins of the world. A detailed treatment of the relationship of the Day of Atonement to the Work of Jesus is given in Hebrews 9 and 10.

The High Priest foreshadowed the great work Christ is doing now as **our** Mediator. Christ makes intercession for us before God and through him we ask forgiveness for our sins. The close relationship between the ritual kept by Aaron and the work of atonement of Jesus can best be seen in parallel:

Aaron

1. As High Priest and Mediator for the people, he performed this ceremony every year.

2. He was robed in clean, white linen as a symbol of righteousness.
3. He went through the veil with blood into the Most Holy Place.
4. He was hidden from the glory of God by the cloud of incense.

#### Christ

1. Our Great High Priest and Mediator was offered once to bear the sins of many (Heb. 9:28).
2. He was likewise robed in white - the righteousness of his own spotless character (Rom5: 18).
3. He took his own blood into the Most Holy Place, i.e. the very presence of God (Heb. 9:12).
4. In contrast, he went into God's presence and the earthly veil of the tabernacle ceased to exist (Heb. 9:24).

Now Jesus lives to make intercession for those who are sanctified by his blood. The price paid for the covering of our sins was this precious blood of the only begotten Son of God. He came to save us (Phil. 2:7-8; Heb. 2:17). He suffered and died for us (Isa. 53:4-6; I Pet. 2:21-25). He entered heaven for us (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 9:12).

Thus the two goats on the Day of Atonement typified Christ: the blood of the one brought reconciliation by restoring the way into the presence of God, and the other obtained forgiveness for the people by bearing away sin. "Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows... the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all ... he bare the sins of many" (Isa. 53:4, 6 & 12).

#### 4. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

May we always remember what Christ has done for us, as our Sacrifice and our High Priest. Let us be thankful and realize that, although we sin, God has promised forgiveness if we approach Him in the appointed way. Let us draw near to God with our hearts cleansed by the sprinkled blood of Christ. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God, 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." (Heb.10:19-22).

#### REFERENCE LIBRARY

- "The Law of Moses", chapter 21.
- "Witness for Christ", part 2, chapter 2.
- "The Letter to the Hebrews", section 4.
- "Faith in the Last Days", page 117.

#### QUESTIONS

1. What was the Day of Atonement and when was it held?
2. Explain, by referring to Israel's Day of Atonement, how Jesus can be our Atonement.
3. Compare Aaron and Christ in their office as High Priests.