

The Day of Atonement

Leviticus 16.

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It is important to take account of the place this precious chapter has in the Book of Leviticus; whether we regard it historically in its bearing on the congregation of Israel, in covenant relationship with Jehovah, or in its typical character as shadowing forth the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God had delivered Israel from their enemies and brought them to Himself; He had come down to dwell among them in the tent which Moses had reared up according to His directions. In His mercy He had established a system of sacrifice whereby the uncleanness and transgressions of the people might be met provisionally, and in a way consistent with His holiness, so that He might dwell among them. The uncleanness, transgressions, and sins of the people made blood-shedding and death a necessity (ver. 16). Sins and transgressions were met by the offerings and their laws detailed in Leviticus 1-7, and in Leviticus 11-15. instruction is given in regard to the uncleanness of the flesh. Both are in view in chapter 16.

Chapters 8.-10. give the history of that which was the immediate occasion for the ordinance of the day of Atonement: "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me" (Lev. 10: 1, 2, 3). But it was impossible that God, who is love, and whose love is the mightiest force in the universe, could be limited to one class of men to the exclusion of the rest of mankind; hence, while dealing with Israel in relation to the circumstances of the moment, He gives, in His matchless wisdom, a figurative representation of how the whole question of man's relationship with God would be taken up and settled in Christ in divine righteousness, for His own eternal satisfaction, and the good and blessing of men.

The great theme of the chapter is Christ and His work, for it is true, here as elsewhere, that "Christ is the end of the law," the spirit and substance of it all is found in Him. What He is sacrificially in all His peerless excellence comes first and gives the foundation for all else. But two things claim our attention. First, Aaron's garments, then the distinction between the priestly family and congregation. The linen garments mean holiness and purity. It is no question here of outward display; all these garments set forth in figure what Christ is as come to take up the question of sin, all in Him is in perfect moral accord with the purity and holiness of the throne of God; and although we know Him now in the garments of glory and beauty (see Ex. 28), "crowned with glory and honour," yet this could only be as the result of what is prefigured in the holy linen garments and the work connected therewith. The Holy Ghost unfolds these things for us in Christ in Hebrews 9. We see Him there wearing the holy linen garments, as the antitype of Aaron in the solemn work of atonement (vers. 11, 12). Then in verse 24 of the same chapter we see Him as He now appears in the presence of God *for us*. These words clearly indicate the robes of glory and beauty, as it was in these that the names of the people were set.

The distinction between the priestly family and the nation is doubtless intended to show the distinction between the heavenly saints and the earthly saints, the former, the church composed of His brethren (Heb. 2: 11, 12), are associated with Christ in the sanctuary and have boldness to enter the holiest, whither He has entered, while the earthly company, Israel, await His coming out (Heb. 9: 28).

In the purpose of God, those who form the church are made holy and without blame before Him

in love and in relation to Christ, are brought into the distinctive relationship of His body and His bride, and are now being educated for the day of display (John 16: 14, 15; Eph. 3: 14-21).

In the sacrificial work the sin-offering came first (vers. 11-14). After it was slain the blood was taken into the holiest and sprinkled on and before the mercy-seat. The priest could only enter the holiest enveloped in a cloud of incense, which was symbolic of the fragrance of Christ. Without this he would have died, for no flesh could stand there. The glory of God is secured for Him in His creation in the blood of Christ as sin-offering. The blood of the burnt-offering was not to be taken in. We have here, in figure, a twofold declaration of the truth that God has carried out His own sentence upon man. "For the life of the flesh is in blood," and the blood sprinkled on and before the mercy-seat was witness that life had been given up. The judgment of God has fallen vicariously upon Christ, and if the life is gone the man whose life it was goes too. The only One who ever lived upon the earth who had not forfeited His life and upon whom death had no claim has died, and in that death God has carried out His own judgment, for His own glory, in the removal by judgment of sinful man, so that he can not again have any standing before Him for ever. In the case of the animal whose blood was carried in, the carcass was taken out, "without the camp," and burned (vers. 11-15 and 27; Heb. 13: 11, 12). In this we have the truth, clearly prefigured

that sinful man, in whichever way he may be viewed — learned or ignorant, rich or poor — has come under the consuming judgment of God in the death of Christ, who alone could sustain that judgment. There was also on the part of man that which made death a moral necessity. The creature in which God's highest thoughts were centred lived in enmity (Rom. 8: 7), and it was impossible for Christ to connect Himself with man in such a condition. Clearly "no act of power could e'er atone." But Christ came in the purpose of God to die that the confusion might be removed, consistent with the being of God, and that in His resurrection a new creation might be brought into being where no disorder can come.

We may be conscious that this cuts right across all the lofty dreams of poor fallen man, but being what he is, a lost sinner, dead in trespasses and sins, nothing else is possible. But many believers while trusting in Christ have not learnt the truth of the cross as the immovable basis of divine righteousness from which all blessing flows, and they do not see that it introduces into a new order of life on the other side of death with relationships and affections which all centre in Christ our risen Head. To refuse this side of the truth is to slight God's most cherished thoughts and works in the attempt to connect Christianity with man and his world instead of with the risen Christ.

There is that in the work of Christ and His adorable Person which is beyond description. Human conception and language are of necessity limited; hence, no type can fully show the truth. Christ is before us in the animals of sacrifice, and also in Aaron and his going in to accomplish the work, and still most of all He is seen in the blood-sprinkled mercy-seat — the living, triumphant Saviour in glory — "redemption which is in Christ Jesus." But mark the contrast: "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sin, forever sat down on the right hand of God." Aaron went in *to accomplish* the work, which in its bearing was efficacious for ONE YEAR, But at the cross the work *was accomplished*, and the stamp of divine approval put upon it, and His going in is the result of having obtained *eternal redemption*.

In the case of the people, though the act of atonement was identical with that of the priestly house, yet there are certain differences which are of interest.

The goat, though of a lower order of sacrifice, is duplicated. On one upon which the Lord's lot fell is connected the great truth of propitiation; the other, called the scapegoat, was for the people, and

sets before us substitution.

These blessed truths — so largely developed in the New Testament, in which Christ has glorified God in regard to sin, and also borne away the sins of the believer — have often been dwelt upon.

But there is a hint here by the Spirit of God as to the difference between the church and Israel which may yield profit. As already noted, the bullock is the highest order of sacrifice and indicates the fullest measure of communion with the death of Christ on the part of those who form the assembly. This truth, involving the counsels of God in regard to the heavens and the earth, shows us that the divine intention is that the church should apprehend the cross in its relation to God, Christ, the Holy Spirit; to men, angels, and devils, to the universe at large; to apprehend that wondrous, amazing scene, where we get the full moral display of God in a way creation never could display Him, where the great problem of the universe is solved — the question of good and evil — to the everlasting glory of God. What wondrous thoughts fill our hearts as in silent adoration we gaze on that cross!

Though this may show the moral distinction between the two, there is also a dispensational touch of great beauty in the ways of our God. The place of association and nearness peculiar to the church is known and enjoyed by faith during the moment of the long-suffering of God with the world. Not so with the earthly company; for when He — the true Aaron — comes out, it is then the scapegoat aspect is seen: sin is taken away and they are brought into the enjoyment of forgiveness and righteousness in virtue of that wondrous work so long before accomplished at the cross. This is the time of which prophets have spoken and psalmist has sung, when "they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me . . . said the Lord," and the time when Jehovah says "I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; And the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel" (Jer. 31: 34; Hosea 2: 21, 22; Ps. 96 - 100).

The work of propitiation and cleansing being past, Aaron put off the holy linen garments and washed his flesh in water, and proceeded to offer the burnt-offering for himself and the burnt-offering for the people, significant of the divine acceptance of the work of that day. This was a sweet savour as it was burnt on the altar, and with it the fat of the sin-offering, whose carcass had been burned without the camp, there was signified the complete identification of the two, and that He who "was made sin" is, in the internal excellencies of His being, the same One who is acceptable to God as a sweet-smelling savour (Eph. 5: 2; 2 Cor. 5: 21). It may be remarked that though there are different families in the divine order of blessing all are brought into supreme happiness for the glory and praise of God. Then the praises of the Lamb shall vibrate through the vast extent of creation "unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills;" and then shall He "see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied."

"Oh 'tis His due — that worthy One
Tastes now the fruit of love's blest ways;
Eternal is His joy in us,
Eternal is our song of praise."