

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

Leviticus 16:1-34; 23:26-32

INTRODUCTION

- Life is full of questions
- But some questions are more important than others
- The most important question that has ever been asked is: “How then can man be justified with God?” (Job 25:4)
- It does not matter how many great questions of science or mathematics you can answer, if you get this question wrong, you are lost forever
- Many completely ignored the question, and live their lives with no acknowledgement of God or eternity, no better than brute beasts
- Others do grapple with the question, and have contrived methods and means by which they hope to become accepted with God
- The true gospel, the true means of justification is not by what man does for God, but by what God has done for man
- In our studies of the seven feasts of the Lord we have come to sixth, the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*)
- Of all the holy days of the Hebrew calendar, this was the holiest
- So solemn and sacred this feast is to the Jews that it has become known simply as “The Day” (*Yoma*)
- It differed from the other six feasts which were times of great joy and rejoicing; this feast was a day of mourning and affliction of the soul

- This feast finds its fulfilment in both the first and second comings of Christ
- The Lord Jesus did all the work of atonement in his bloody sacrifice at Calvary
- Yet for Israel, the atonement is yet to be applied; they remain in unbelief, and in rejection of Christ's atonement.
- The brief description of the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 23:26-32 focusses on the responsibilities of the people on that day, while the detailed description in chapter 16 the emphasis is on the sacrifices and the ministry of the priest
- The purpose of the day is summarised in Leviticus 16:30 – “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.”
- Every detail of this solemn feast points to the finished work of Jesus Christ, who, on the day of his death made atonement for us, to cleanse us from all our sins before the LORD

I. THE SAVIOUR'S IMMACULATE RENDERING OF ATONEMENT BY HIS BLOOD

A. The need for atonement

1. The instructions of Leviticus 16 are given after the deaths of Nadab and Abihu for offering strange fire before the Lord in the tabernacle (Leviticus 10:1-2)
2. The Lord shows to Israel *who* may come before the Lord, *when* he may do it, and *how* he must do it, lest others die also
3. The sacrifices of atonement were necessary because of sin, which is described by three terms in 16:21
 - a. Sin – falling short of the mark of God's standard

- b. Transgression – crossing the line of God’s standard
 - c. Iniquity – crookedness, perverseness, a moral distortion from God’s standard
4. Where these three terms are found together, they have reference to the Day of Atonement in some way (Exodus 34:7; Psalm 51:1-13; 103:1-18; Isaiah 53:1-12; Daniel 9:24; Micah 7:18-19)
 5. Because of God’s absolute holiness, he cannot dwell with sin, or even look upon it (Habakkuk 1:13), sin has separated man from God (Isaiah 59:2)

B. The meaning of atonement

1. The Hebrew word *kippur* comes from a root (*kaphar*) meaning “to cover”
2. This word is used of the “pitch” that Noah applied to the ark (Genesis 6:14)
3. The English word “atone” is a contraction of “at” and “one”, attributed by some to Tyndale
4. The atonement enables sinful man and the holy God to be “at one”

C. The means of atonement

1. On the Day of Atonement a strict order was to be followed
2. Central to the atonement is the blood sacrifice (Hebrews 9:22)

D. The fulfilment of the Levitical atonement by Jesus Christ

1. The high priest laid aside his garments of glory and beauty, and put on the plain linen garments (16:4)
 - a. Christ left laid aside his divine glory when he came to this earth for our salvation (Philippians 2:7-8)
 - b. As the priest's garments were called "holy", so Christ our high priest is "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (Hebrews 7:26)
 - c. These garments portray Christ's righteous obedience to God as our representative (John 17:4)
2. Only after the atoning work was completed did the high priest put back on his glorious garments (16:23-24)
 - a. So Christ, having purged our sins, has returned to glory at the right hand of the Father (Hebrews 1:3)
3. The high priest took incense before the mercy seat (16:13), picturing Christ's intercession for us (John 17; Hebrews 7:25)
4. On this day, the high priest alone did all the work
 - a. So Christ had no assistance in his atoning work at Calvary, suffering alone on the cross, even forsaken by the Father, as he "by himself purged our sins" (Hebrews 1:3)
5. The blood of the bullock and goat brought into the holy place and sprinkled upon the mercy seat (16:14-16)
 - a. Christ's has entered the holy place in the heavenly tabernacle by his own blood (John 20:17; Hebrews 9:12)
6. The high priest laid his hands upon the scapegoat,

confessing the sins of the nation, which was then led into the wilderness (16:21-22)

- a. The first goat represents *propitiation* – the payment to satisfy God’s righteous anger
- b. The second goat represents *expiation* – removal of sin and its guilt
- c. All our sins have been laid on Jesus, our substitute (2 Corinthians 5:21)
- d. Christ “taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29)
- e. “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.” (Psalms 103:12)
- f. Note that the SDA religion blasphemously teaches that Satan is the scapegoat who will bear their sins

E. The sacrifice of Christ is far better than the Levitical offerings

1. The high priest needed to offer sacrifice for his own sins, but Christ had no sin (Hebrews 7:27)
2. The Jews must offer these sacrifices continually, year after year, but Christ’s sacrifice is once for all (Hebrews 9:25-26; 10:11-12)
3. The blood of animals could only cover sin, but never take it away; Christ’s blood cleanseth us from all sin (Hebrews 10:4; 1 John 1:7,9)

II. THE SINNERS INVITED TO RECEIVE THE ATONEMENT BY BELIEVING

A. The children of Israel were to “afflict their souls”

1. Those who would not be afflicted were to be cut off from the nation (Leviticus 23:29)
 2. This affliction is considered to be a time of fasting, self-examination and acknowledgement of sin
 3. Those who come to God, must come with conviction of sin (John 16:8; Acts 2:37)
 4. A godly sorrow for sin works repentance to salvation (2 Corinthians 7:10)
 5. The Jews were rebuked for their outward observance of this feast, but failing to repent in their hearts (Isaiah 58:3-6)
 6. God desires rent hearts, not rent garments (Joel 2:13)
- B. Confession of sin (16:21)
1. Those who would have their sins atoned, must confess their sins to God (Psalm 32:5)
 2. As the high priest laid *both* hands on the scapegoat, not merely one hand, so the sinner who comes to Christ must hold nothing back from him (Leviticus 16:21)
- C. The atoning sacrifice became effectual by faith exercise by the people
1. Romans 4 shows that under the law, as now, God forgives sins in those who *believe*
 2. For a sinner to be saved, he must place his trust in the atoning work of Jesus Christ for his sins, trusting in his blood alone for salvation
 3. Salvation comes not through “asking Jesus into your heart”, or “turning your life over to God”, but through repenting of sin, and believing the gospel – that Christ died for our sins

D. The people were to do no work at all (23:30)

1. All the work was done by one person, the high priest
2. The Lord Jesus did all the work, and then cried, "It is finished" (John 19:30)
3. Our salvation requires no work on our part, only faith (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5)

III. THE SONS OF ISRAEL REPENT AT THE APPEARING OF THE BRIDEGROOM

A. The prophetic fulfilment of the Day of Atonement will take place at the Second Coming of Christ

1. Christ will descend with his saints to destroy his enemies and establish his earthly kingdom (Revelation 19:11-15; Matthew 24:30)
2. At that time, the saved, believing nation of Israel will receive their Messiah
3. "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." (Zechariah 13:1)
4. It will be a day of great mourning, when "they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn" (Zechariah 12:9-14)
5. Isaiah 53 will be the confession statement of the repentant nation, as they acknowledge their former despising and rejection of the Christ who bore their griefs and carried their sorrows, and on whom was all their iniquity laid

CONCLUSION

1. Isaac Watts wrote:

*My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine,
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin.*

2. Have you laid your “hand of faith” on the bloodied, thorn crowned head of the Lamb of God and trusted him to bear your sin?
3. Do you know what it is to be afflicted in your soul, to mourn and lament over your sins against God?
4. “Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.” (James 4:9)
5. As the nation of Israel will one day come face to face with Jesus Christ, and lament their disobedience, unfaithfulness and wasted opportunities, so we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, where many will lament the wood, hay and stubble of wasted days and years of selfish living (2 Corinthians 5:10)
6. The Jews’ of old had access to the presence of God in the sanctuary of the earthly tabernacle, through their high priest, on one day of each year
7. The Christian now has access to the presence of God in heaven, personally through Jesus Christ, at any time in prayer
8. Are you making use of this blessed privilege daily?