

April 19

Scriptures: Read Leviticus 16

Key Verse: “Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it... all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat.” (Leviticus 16:21)

Overview

We read here of the Day of Atonement which could be considered the climax of the Old Covenant’s sacrificial system, for it was the most important and solemn ceremonial day of the whole year. In Hebrew it is known as “Yom Kippur” and in the Jewish calendar it comes on the tenth day of the seventh month, the month called Tishri (October).

From verses 29 and 31 we learn that work was prohibited no matter on which day of the week Yom Kippur fell. We also learn that their having a proper attitude was important, for they were told, “you shall afflict your souls”, meaning they were to be in anguish over their sin, as well as to humble or deny themselves, probably expressed through fasting (cf. Isa.58:3, 5). This was the only day of fasting that Moses required.

God gave Moses precise instructions to be carefully followed on this special day. It was to be the only day the high priest alone could enter into the Most Holy Place and a strict warning was given for Aaron to obey, “lest he die” (16:2). There was only one way of entrance through the inner veil into the Most Holy Place where the presence of God was manifest above the gold mercy seat, and that was through the blood of the sacrifice. We learn from the Day of Atonement that man has no access to God except through the shed blood of a sacrifice (Heb. 9:22). Unless our sins are remitted through the atoning work of Jesus Christ, there is no approach to God.

Firstly, Aaron was to remove his ornate high priestly attire, wash his body, and dress in a simple, pure white linen garment. Before he was able to intercede for the people, he was to sacrifice a bull for his own sins and the sins of his household (in contrast to Christ, Heb.7:26, 27). He was to be totally clean, made holy and acceptable, before he could approach the presence of God (16:6, 11). With the blood of the sacrificed bull and the incense to cloud over the mercy seat, Aaron entered the Most Holy Place. The burning incense represented the prayers of the people (and surely praying is what the people were doing who were waiting in anticipation outside). The cloud which resulted was to perhaps veil the glorious manifestation of the Lord from the priest’s sight, so that he might not die (16:12, 13; Ex.33:20).

Afterward, one of the two goats was sacrificed for the people and Aaron entered a second time into the Most Holy Place with its blood to make atonement for the people and to cleanse the Holy Place, the tabernacle, and finally the bronze altar because of the people’s sins. He sprinkled the blood seven times to symbolize complete purification.

After the first goat had been offered, all the sins of Israel were confessed over the live goat’s head as Aaron, their representative, firmly pressed his hands upon it (16:21). The one who takes the blame for the wrong of others is called the scapegoat. In the Hebrew text, this word is “azazel” which most likely is derived from the root meaning “go”, or “go away”, implying “complete removal”. Sending the scapegoat away into the wilderness symbolized that it was bearing away

all the sins of the people. It served to make evident the great and gracious work of God's atonement.

These two goats are a foreshadowing of Christ's sacrificial death and of His bearing away sin. Here the scapegoat bore away the sins for the nation of Israel, but the most perfect, complete, and final sacrifice, Jesus Christ, who was sent because of God's great love for the whole world, is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the whole world" (John 1:29). In fact, the entire Day of Atonement pointed to the day of the Messiah's eternal removal of sin (Zech. 3:8, 9; Heb.10:14). For believe, the Day of Atonement was the day our Lord Jesus suffered on the cross outside of the city gate to make a holy, sanctified people through His own blood (Heb. 13:12). This He did once and for all, unlike the imperfect sacrificial system of the Old Covenant when atonement was made year after year (Heb. 9:7, 12).

Christ secured access into the very presence of God, not only for Himself (Heb. 9:11, 12, 24), but for all His followers as well (Heb.10:19-22). In the first three gospels we read that all this was symbolized by the inner veil of the temple that was torn in two from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). Christ's death and the torn veil signify that from that time onward mankind was living under the New Covenant of Grace.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, because You are The Eternal High Priest, we can come boldly to the Throne of Grace. May we never neglect the privilege of entering the Holy of Holies where we have an audience with You, O God.