

The Message of Yom Kippur (Leviticus 16)

Intro: We've been reading together this week about the feasts or festivals God commanded the Jewish people. On the 10th day of the 7th month the Jews observed "yom kippurim" (The day of atonement). It was what Keil and Delitzsch called "The Good Friday" of the Law. On this solemn day the focus of all the activities was the sin of the nation and all eyes were upon the high priest.

Description of Yom Kippur

Much of what makes the day of atonement significant has to do with the activities of the high priest as he represented the people before God. In Leviticus 16 we see five distinct phases of his work:

He became one with the people!

He washed his whole body in water.

Instead of wearing his regular colorful priestly garments, he wore a robe that was totally white linen.

He presented a bullock as a sacrifice for his own purification and that of his family so that he can be fit to enter the sacred tent where God's presence was. After killing the bull for himself, he passed through the holy place into the Holy of Holies (the only time in the year he would do such) with a firepan and a handful of incense, he placed the pan in the Holy of Holies and put the incense upon it filling the room with a cloud of smoke.

The priest then returned to the court and this time taking with him the blood of the bull went back into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled it upon the lid of the ark of the covenant and seven times in front of it.

With this sacrifice the high priest made atonement for his own sins in the presence of God.

He made atonement for their sins!

Two goats were presented in the court that were to be offered as a sin offering for the whole nation—one by living and one by dying. They are chosen for their roles by the casting of lots. One is set aside for Jehovah (the Lord). The other is set aside for "Azazel". Some translators called this the "scape goat" since it would be allowed to escape death by being taken into the wilderness. Others suggests that this goat is sent back to Satan who is the source of Israel's sin.

Now the priest kills the goat (keep in mind that this is a vicarious offering) and taking his blood into the Holy of Holies he again sprinkles its blood on the lid of the ark making atonement now for the people.

He cleansed the tabernacle.

He then returns to the first section of the tent and cleanses the items of furniture by sprinkling goat's blood upon them. And then coming back into the courtyard he cleanses the brazen altar there and thus makes the whole tabernacle pure again.

He sent away the sins of the people.

Now taking hold of the second goat (the scape goat), he places his hands on its head and confesses the sins of the people over it. It is as if the sins of the people are symbolically transferred to it. This goat is then given to another man who takes it out into the uninhabited territory (wilderness) and turns it loose.

He represented the people before God!

The high priest now bathes again, changes back into his priestly garments and offers to God two rams as a whole burnt offering to God. They symbolized that the priest and the people were offering themselves wholly to God.

But what is the meaning of these unusual customs? Why should we care to know them? What is the message God was conveying by these rituals?

The high priest was acting out the role of Jesus as our High Priest.

As our high priest, Jesus become one with the people.

Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

But unlike the Levitical priests, he did not need to offer sacrifices for himself. He became one with us, but was without sin.

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)

The high priests white linen robes symbolized the perfection of the Christ to come.

As our high priest, Jesus made a sufficient offering for sin.

He offers a sacrifice that cleanses the conscience.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:11-14)

The two goats beautifully portray the sacrifice of the Savior Himself. Two animals were necessary to convey the ideas of redemption:

By the death of the one sin was punished; by the life of the other sin was carried away.

And thus Jesus by His sacrifice not only satisfied the demands of God's justice by dying; he satisfied the demands of God's holiness by living. By his death sin was punished; by His life sin was taken away.

As our high priest, Jesus cleansed the heavenly tabernacle.

Offered a sacrifice for the cleansing of the heavenly tabernacle, the realm in which God's priests now serve.

Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. (Hebrews 9:23)

As our high priest, Jesus forever represents the believer before God.

Do you remember what the priest did after making atonement for the people? Changed costumes, removing the linen garments he put on the office clothes of his high priesthood.

but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him. (Hebrews 9:26-28)

In the same way, Jesus "changed costumes"; he took off the sacrificial garments never to wear them again and put on the clothes of his exalted high priesthood!

For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. (Hebrews 10:14)

He put off his earth clothes that he might wear his high priestly robes and serve as our great priest forever!

Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:25)

Conclusion: It is sad to realize that the Jews still observe Yom Kippur (without the sacrifices, since the temple has been destroyed); but even now still do not perceive the meaning of this day. God was giving advance notice of what He was to do through Jesus Christ!

What powerful lesson these simple ceremonies teach us! Jesus, our great high priest came and lived among us. Taking our nature he faced every temptation without sin. And then he gave as a sacrifice for us. Passing through the heavens he cleansed the heavenly tabernacle, leading the way for all who would follow Him into the presence of God and offered His blood before the Father as the final and sufficient sacrifice for sin for all time. And sitting there at the Father's right hand, with no more sacrifices to offer, he represents us before God forever.

What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.