

11 -- The Day of Atonement in the Old Testament

(This Study Covers [Leviticus 16:1-28](#); [23:26-32](#), [Numbers 29:7-11](#))

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Thus far in our studies we have learned that the work in the courtyard and the holy place was performed every day. The work of the most holy place, however, was performed only once a year. Day by day, the repentant sinner brought his offering to the door of the sanctuary and, placing his hand upon the victim's head, confessed his sins, thus, in symbol, transferring them from himself to the innocent sacrifice, and then to the sanctuary through the work of the priest. Such was the work that went on each day, throughout the year. The sins of Israel were thus transferred in symbol to the sanctuary, and a special work became necessary for their removal. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the most holy place for the cleansing of the sanctuary. Let us examine the events of this, the most solemn day in the life of ancient Israel, for we shall see that the work of the Day of Atonement in the most holy place on earth symbolized the third and final phase of the ministry of Jesus in the most holy place in heaven.

1. What was contained in the second apartment, or the most holy place?

Exodus 40:20, 21 He took the Testimony and put it into the ark, inserted the poles through the rings of the ark, and put the mercy seat on top of the ark. And he brought the ark into the tabernacle, hung up the veil of the covering, and partitioned off the ark of the Testimony, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

Note: The second apartment, or most holy place, contained the ark of the covenant (Exodus 26:33). Between two cherubim was the glory of the Shekinah, the Presence of God (Exodus 25:22; 40:34). Beneath it was the mercy seat, a solid gold slab that covered the top of the ark, wherein lay the foundation of God's government: the moral law of Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-17) which was written by the finger of God on stone (Exodus 24:12) and then placed in the ark (Exodus 40:20). All of mankind is to be governed by those holy precepts, even down to the end of time (Revelation 12:17; 14:12) and beyond (Revelation 22:14; Isaiah 66:22-23).

2. Where was God, by the symbol of His presence, to meet with Israel's high priest?

Exodus 25:22 And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony,...

3. Who only was allowed in the second apartment? How often and for what purpose?

Hebrews 9:7 But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year; not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins...

4. After the accumulation of the sins of the year, what took place on the tenth day of the seventh month?

Leviticus 16:29, 30 This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you. For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you...

5. What happened at the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement?

Leviticus 16:19, 30 Then he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, cleanse it, and consecrate it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel. ...For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the LORD.

NOTE: The purpose of the Day of Atonement was to cleanse both sinner and sanctuary. The cleansing of the sanctuary was achieved through the work in the most holy place.

6. How many goats were chosen on the Day of Atonement?

Leviticus 16:5 And he shall take from the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats as a sin offering, and one ram as a burnt offering.

NOTE: One goat was chosen to be offered to the Lord, the other was to be a scapegoat (verse 8), which was for "Azazel." The Azazel goat was to represent Satan. Thus, on this particular day, two goats were chosen: one for the Lord and one to represent Satan.

7. What happened to the Lord's goat?

Leviticus 16:9 And Aaron shall bring the goat on which the LORD'S lot fell, and offer it as a sin offering.

NOTE: The Lord's goat was sacrificed on the altar of burnt offerings.

8. Where did the priest sprinkle the blood of the Lord's goat?

Leviticus 16:15 Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which is for the people, bring its blood inside the veil, do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat.

NOTE: The mercy seat was located in the most holy place upon the ark of the covenant. Rather than sprinkle this blood upon the altar of incense, this blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat.

9. The sprinkling of the blood of the Lord's goat on the mercy seat was to make atonement for what part of the sanctuary?

Leviticus 16:16 So he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, ...

NOTE: Note again that the high priest is in the most holy place, but he is making an atonement for the holy place.

10. Why does the holy place need to be cleansed?

Leviticus 16:16 ...because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins; and so he shall do for the tabernacle of meeting which remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness.

NOTE: The reason the high priest went into the most holy place once a year was to cleanse the holy place from all the sins of the children of Israel that had been symbolically transferred there all year long through the work of the daily service.

11. While the high priest was involved in cleansing the sanctuary, what were the people to be doing?

Leviticus 16:29 ... you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you.

Note: The Day of Atonement was understood by Israel as a solemn day of judgment. Every sin had to be confessed and forsaken. Those who refused were on that very day “cut off” forever from the camp of Israel (Leviticus 23:29). Remember, sin separates the sinner from God. The Day of Atonement means “At/one/ment!” That is to “cleanse,” “forgive,” “pardon,” “purge” or “reconcile.” In other words, the goal is to restore the sinner totally and completely to his Creator! “Afflict your souls” means more than just fasting. It includes soul searching, a review of one’s progress in holy living, a seeking of God, confession of sin, making amends for neglected duties; in short it is making things right with God and man.

12. What happened to the live goat when the work of cleansing the sanctuary was complete?

Leviticus 16:20, 21 And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place, the tabernacle of meeting, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat. Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man.”

NOTE: Please note that the live goat is *never* slain. The live goat only enters the picture when the work of the sanctuary is *complete*. Thus it is shown to Israel that Satan is the final responsible agent for sin.

13. Did the old Day of Atonement in the earthly sanctuary foreshadow the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary?

Hebrews 9:23 Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

Note: Yes! That day's services pointed to the blotting out of sin by Jesus, our High Priest in the *heavenly* sanctuary. He is there to mediate for His people and stands ready to blot out the sins of all who will exercise faith in His shed blood. The ancient day of atonement foreshadowed the final atonement to be made for the repentant sinner. The final atonement points us to the final judgment, which will forever settle the sin question in the life of every individual.

Note: Thus, removal of sin from the heavenly sanctuary is the final act of the sanctuary sacrificial services. Only Christ bears the *penalty* for sin, which is death. The earthly service simply showed that Satan is the final responsible agent for sin; he is charged with the sins that he led the redeemed to commit. In order for Christ to remove sin from the heavenly sanctuary, a work of judgment is needed. That is why this service in ancient Israel was known as the Day of Judgment. It was the most solemn day in the history of Israel, because the Israelites knew that their sins were being removed from the sanctuary, and it is to be the most solemn day in the life of a Christian as well.

What We Have Learned So Far: The sanctuary has symbolized for us the three phases in the ministry of Christ:

1. **His work of sacrifice** (outer court - Completed on the cross).

Justification: "Victory over the record of past sin." Christ's atoning sacrifice makes forgiveness possible for the repentant sinner. (Romans 3:25).

2. **His work of intercession** (holy place - Began when He ascended into heaven).

Sanctification: "Victory over the power of sin." Here Jesus mediates His own blood and merits, applying the *benefits* of His atoning sacrifice to the surrendered sinner.

3. **His work of final judgment,** (most holy place - Dealing with the final removal of the record of sin). This is symbolized by the work of the most holy place, the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. Thus, the cleansing of the sanctuary refers to Christ's final work of judgment in the heavenly sanctuary.

Glorification: "Victory over the presence of sin!" This is the day when the work of atonement is completed and finalized for the redeemed sinner.

14. When does Christ perform this final phase of His ministry, the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary?

Daniel 8:14 And he said to me, "For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed."

Note: In our next lesson, we will look at a prophecy in the book of Daniel that sets the frame work for our next two lessons. In those two lessons, we will discover that God set the date for the heavenly judgment to begin!

Your Response to Jesus

Are you willing to place your life in Jesus' hands so He can work the miracles needed to completely cleanse you and your life record of sin?

Answer _____

The High Priest's Duties on the Day of Atonement:

(The service at a glance.)

The high priest performed all the regular morning rituals of the continual burnt offering, the trimming of the wicks on the lampstand, and the offering of incense in the holy place.

- A. Changed clothes, taking off his special garments, and putting on the priestly white linen tunic, linen trousers, girded with a linen sash, and linen turban.
- B. Confessed his own sins and those of his household on the head of a bull which was to be sacrificed.
- C. Accepted from the people two white goats, as perfect and nearly identical as possible. Lots were cast to decide which of the goats would become the “Lord’s goat,” and which would be the scapegoat.
- D. Sacrificed the bull and caught its blood in a bowl.
- E. Entered the most holy place with two handfuls of incense and the golden censer filled with coals from the altar of burnt offering. The smoke from the incense provided a fragrant cloud which would partially shield him from the radiance of the Shekinah. The censer was left on the ground in front of the ark.
- F. Retrieved the bull’s blood from the courtyard and returned to the most holy place. This blood was sprinkled once on the mercy seat and seven times before the ark.
- G. Returned to the courtyard and sacrificed the “Lord’s goat,” catching its blood in a bowl. He then went the third time into the most holy place, and sprinkled the blood of the goat as he had that of the bull.
- H. Passed through the holy place, making atonement for the golden altar of incense and the separating veil with the blood of the bull and the goat, now mixed together in a single bowl.
- I. Left the tabernacle and went to the altar of burnt offering where he applied the blood of the sacrifices to the horns of the altar and sprinkled blood on the altar itself. (All the while the people have ceased their work and are searching their hearts.)
- J. Confessed the guilt of all the sins of the people--just now removed from the sanctuary--over the head of the scapegoat, and turned the goat over to a “ready” man who was to take it away into the wilderness.
- K. Completed the services of the day by offering the normal evening burnt offerings and seeing to the proper disposal of the various animals which had been earlier sacrificed.

“Azazel”

(Additional Notes)

The Name "Azazel."—The testimony of many scholars of the past, both Jewish and Christian, as well as many of the present, is to this effect:

The Jewish authority Dr. M. M. Kalisch.—There can be no doubt whatever that Azazel is a personal, a superhuman, and an evil being—in fact a wicked demon. . . . It was approved of by early Christian writers who identified Azazel with Satan (*Origen*, C. Cels. VI. 43, p. 305 ed. Spencer; *Iren. Adv. Haer.* 1. 12; *Epiphan.* Haeres XXXIV. 11), and by many later and modern scholars.— *A Historical and Critical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 2, pp. 328, 329..

Smith and Peloubet's "A Dictionary of the Bible."—The best modern scholars agree that it designates the personal being to whom the goat was sent, probably Satan.—Page 65.

Samuel M. Zwemer (Presbyterian).—The devil (Sheitan, or Iblis) has a proper name—Azazel. He was expelled from Eden.—*Islam, a Challenge to Faith*, p. 89.

E. W. Hengstenberg (Lutheran).—The manner in which the phrase "for Azazel" is contrasted with "for Jehovah," necessarily requires that Azazel should designate a personal existence and if so, only Satan can be intended. If by Azazel, Satan is not meant, there is no reason for the lots that were cast. We can then see no reason why the decision was referred to God, why the high priest did not simply assign one goat for a sin offering, and the other for sending away into the desert. *Egypt and the Books of Moses*, pp. 170, 171.

J. B. Rotherham (Disciples of Christ).—"And one lot for Azazel" (Lev. xvi. 8).—It seems impossible to dissent from the opinion that "Azazel," instead of being a name for the (e)scape goat, is the name or title of an evil Being, opposed to Yahweh, to whom the live goat on the great Day of Propitiation was sent.—*The Emphasized Bible*, vol. 3, p. 918.

William Jenks (Congregationalist).—Scapegoat. See different opinion in Bochart. Spencer, after the oldest opinions of the Hebrews and Christian, thinks *Azazel* is the name of the *devil*, and so Rosenmuller, whom see. The Syriac has *Azzail*, the "*angel (strong one) who revolted.*"—*The Comprehensive Commentary of the Holy Bible*, p. 410.