

Hints on the Day of Atonement Leviticus 16

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's sermon explores the theological significance of the Day of Atonement, emphasizing Christ's role in atonement and reconciliation with God.

Scripture: Leviticus 16:6-15

Topics: "Atonement", "Sacrifice of Christ"

Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on the Day of Atonement as described in Leviticus 16, emphasizing the dual role of Aaron's sacrifices: the bullock for sin and the scapegoat for transgressions. He illustrates how these offerings represent Christ's atoning work, highlighting the necessity of both meeting God's holiness and the removal of sin. Darby warns against the extremes of focusing too much on either the scapegoat or the sin-offering, stressing that true reconciliation with God requires understanding both aspects. He explains that the blood on the mercy-seat signifies God's nature being satisfied, while the scapegoat symbolizes the complete removal of sin from the people. Ultimately, Darby calls believers to recognize their standing before God as cleansed and reconciled through Christ's sacrifice.

Transcript

Aaron appears with a bullock for himself and for his house, and then with an offering for the people. Israel, strictly speaking, were represented by the goats. In the sacrifice for Aaron and his house together are the two parts of a sacrifice. When they are together, it is Christ taking our place. When Aaron is taken alone, there is no sacrifice for him. He shall put on the linen garments, and wash in water, and so put them on. He was to have a bullock for a sin-offering, and a ram for a burnt-offering. The ram was always for consecration, or in case of desecration, which was the opposite of consecration.

The sin-offering is taken as a whole, the greater including the less; but the detail is wanted. The first idea is meeting God in His absolute holiness. It is Christ "made sin," and we the righteousness of God according to that. As there is a danger of stopping short at the scapegoat, so there is the other danger too. Some do not use the scapegoat enough, others use it too much. Some preach more in connection with the necessity to go into the presence of God than of getting oneself the value of the scapegoat. Preaching the scapegoat shews sins put away; preaching the bullock brings us to God.

There is a difference between presenting sins in the light of the law that way, and bowing souls by grace. I never come to God till I get the second part. One hears, "I am here in the world forgiven, and I am very glad of it"; you will sometimes, but not often, hear people say, "I am before God as white as snow in His

presence." Too often they take other ground altogether and say, "If I am to be saved, I am; and if I am to be damned, I am," and so evade the real question whether they honestly thought they were lost. If you really felt in your present state that you were going to be damned, you would not take it so quietly. The fact is, it is all dogma, and not conscience. Supposing I put the question and say, "Which are you now, saved or lost?" there is no "if" in that.

It is not substitution when I say to all, "The blood is on the mercy-seat"; I do not say "your sins are put away," because I do not know that they are. And coming to detail, I can not only say, "Come and welcome," but, "God beseeches you to come, for the blood is on the mercy-seat." The scapegoat goes a step farther; for if the man does come, it declares that it is impossible for God ever to tell you about your sins again, for they are all put away. I do preach this as truth generally; for scripture never says Christ has borne the sins of everybody. You have lost certainty the moment you make that assertion.

243 I always say "our sins," which scripture does say, and then they by faith take it for themselves. "Our sins" is strictly for believers. Paul is there (1 Cor. 15) preaching the gospel from his own point, as his experience. The word "our" is on purpose used vaguely there.

The meaning of Azazel is the scapegoat; it is the goat that carries away. There is no limit here.

There is an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and so on. And no man was to be in the tabernacle while the high priest went in with the blood to the mercy-seat. It is done all alone; the people were all looked at as having defiled the place.

First the place is cleansed as to all that referred to God who had been dishonoured. This must be set right first; and Christ has by death perfectly done it. He has "passed through the heaven"; He descended and ascended that He might fill all things. This goes farther, but it refers to the going through.

God dwells in light that no man can approach unto. That is God's nature, it is true; but the heavens are all the things we look at as something under God. It is light inaccessible in itself; neither man nor angel can get there. "Above all heavens" is as in Ezekiel, where we see the cherubim and their surroundings; then the vault which expresses the heavens; and God is at the top of all, though He "humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth."

But here it is a question of defilement, not of guilt; it was unbearable to God; and no man goes in while he is then occupied, nor till he comes out. He first goes in with a censer full of burning coals off the altar; "and he shall put the incense upon the fire before Jehovah, that the cloud of the incense cover the mercy-seat, that he die not." And Christ first goes in, in the grace of His person, which is before all the offerings; that is, when you take Himself before He begins any other part, He goes in with sweet incense. It is all "before the Lord"; and this gives Himself as a person absolutely perfect, the person before the work. But when we take Aaron and his house, we must have the bullock: those who are connected with him need that; and then the blood of the bullock is taken and sprinkled on all the unclean places, he all alone, until he comes out. But after having the incense in the most holy place, he sprinkles with his finger the blood on the mercy-seat and before it. There are two ceremonies, one with the blood of the bullock, and one with the blood of the goat, consecutively; and then, in verse 18, the two are taken together.

244 "That he die not" is always connected with what is absolutely necessary. If it had been possible for a moment that Christ had not been an absolutely sweet savour, then that must have been the result.

"The altar that is before Jehovah," verse 18, seems the brazen altar, for it is described in this way. After the blood is sprinkled on the mercy-seat, then atonement is made for the holy place, and next for the tabernacle of the congregation; then "he shall go out unto the altar that is before Jehovah, and make an atonement for it." On the mercy-seat God Himself was met. In fact that made it a mercy-seat, for it was a throne of judgment but for that. Now it is a throne of government for, instead of a throne of judgment against.

After he has made atonement for the tabernacle of the congregation (which would include, I suppose, what was in it), then he is to go out to "the altar that is before Jehovah." The golden altar was put "before the veil that is by the ark of the testimony, before the mercy-seat that is over the testimony where I will meet with thee." God met Moses for Himself there before the mercy-seat, and He met Moses for the people at the door of the tabernacle, and therefore the blood of the red heifer was sprinkled outside in Numbers 19. But the brazen altar was "before Jehovah"; in Exodus 29:42 you have the words so used, and in verse 43, "there I will meet with the children of Israel." In Numbers 7:89 when Moses went into the tabernacle, he heard the voice of one speaking to him from off the mercy-seat. This makes two meeting places clearly. The people had nothing to do with going inside. Moses went in and spoke with God, and put a veil on to come out and speak to the people. Moses went into the holiest of all whenever he liked, but he put his veil off to do so. Individually he went in and had no veil, and came out and put the veil on; but whether the glory on him died away in the wilderness is not said. The object of the Spirit of God was to give this character of the law, which is afterwards contrasted with the gospel; and the veil is upon Israel still; but when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. It was only when Nadab and Abihu sinned that Aaron was prevented from going into the holiest of all; and this chapter is the exceptional time once in the year with blood.

245 In reading verses 6 and 11, "which is for himself" and "make an atonement for himself and for his house," one sees that it is for himself along with his sons, not alone.

In verse 20 "to reconcile" is the same word as "to make atonement for." It is the act of the application of the blood here; it is the same idea as in Colossians, "to reconcile all things unto himself." The word "atonement" is brought clearly out in what is done in this chapter. "Make reconciliation for the sins of the people," in Hebrews 2, should be "make propitiation" for them; but in Romans 5:10, where the word "atonement" is used, it ought to be reconciliation. "Blotted out" is used of transgressions and means to wipe them out.

Then Aaron was to bring the live goat and lay both his hands upon its head and confess all the transgressions of the people over it, and send it away, by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness, to a land not inhabited. That is the other part of sin-offering, substitution evidently. Just as in the blood on the mercy-seat God was met in His nature and character; so in the scapegoat you have substitution for transgressions. Substitution does not include everything, not the full glorifying of God, I mean, but our sins borne by Christ.

If substitution were for the whole world, it would save the whole world. Propitiation was dealing with God's nature and character. There are two things: blood brought to God in respect of God's character, and a scapegoat for the people's sake. One constantly sees two things in this way, a double figure for a whole. There is the wilderness and Canaan; there is Moses and Aaron, and these two are one Christ. So here, in the first part God's nature is met; in the second, the sins are put away. The first goat is called "Jehovah's lot," the people's sins are confessed over the second (as Christ confesses the sins of His people on His

own head as His own, and can call them "mine iniquities "). I see what God is in blood on the mercy-seat; but the moment you have substitution, and individual acts of transgression, you have a scapegoat.

246 "Atonement" occurs but once in the New Testament, and there it should be (Rom. 5:11) reconciliation; and expiation occurs but once in the Bible (Num. 35 33), and that is in the margin, "no expiation for the land": so we may drop that word. Propitiation is towards God. There is the holy and righteous character of God to be met; and this is propitiation. God is not changed by it; but, being righteous and holy, this is responded to, that His love might go out according to righteousness and holiness, and mercy and righteousness be consistent. Atonement is more when the blood is applied. Blood was sprinkled upon the altar, because sin was there, blood of atonement, It is the actual putting away of sin by the sprinkling of the blood. The idea is, a thing or person is in a state in which they cannot have to say to God, as here "the iniquities of the children of Israel among whom I dwell"; and that condition must be dealt with. You must have the blood where the sin has been, you must have it for God to be in relationship with such. The blood is brought in, and the thing sprinkled, and so the thing is put right. Here reconciliation is the same word.

In the two goats are the two aspects of what Christ did. The twofold view is most interesting; as in Christ the Apostle and High Priest, like Moses and Aaron. Atonement signifies life given and accepted as sacrifice for life forfeited; remission is the deliverance of those who appeal from the sentence of death, and thence it is the forgiveness of the sins that caused their condemnation.

"Atonement" is the greatest blunder in Romans 5:11 We are said to be "reconciled" in verse 10. Then verse 11 speaks of "our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation," not the atonement, which has nothing to do with the sins on our side; atonement is for God.

When I think of propitiation, I think more of the person propitiated and what is due to him; reconciliation deals with circumstances too. It has nothing to do with our nature in the Old Testament. We have a nature that always like to break the law; and we learn what that is. When I find I have a nature that cannot be subject, I say, Here is a pretty business; and this all comes out in the New Testament. The remedy is, not merely that Christ has died, and whatever Christ did is mine, but that I am dead with Him (Rom. 6).

247 Atonement is for guilt. When I look in the Old Testament, I see guilt blotted out, and not a nature judged; that is the thing for which the atonement provides, and I do get the blood put upon the mercy-seat where God Himself sits; and when I know what His nature is, I get the fact that here God's nature is met, not my own dealt with as in the cross of Christ. For nature, my nature, is not known under law to be dealt with. So, if David says, "Create in me a clean heart," would he have spoken thus, if he had known that his heart in the flesh could not be made clean? Again, if Naaman was clean altogether, it is a figure for now. But then there was no flesh lusting against the Spirit, nor even the two natures contrary one to the other, as a state existing and explained to the believer. With the new nature, I have now the privilege of knowing that the old is dead. I have the new man and the old; but the old is condemned in death. "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin condemned sin in the flesh"; and I not only die daily, but know that I am crucified with Christ.

The atonement is another thing; in it God's nature is met, and this is the point. I have nothing about man's nature; God's nature has been dishonoured by sin, and He is there sitting with things before Him which He will not stand. This is the fact, and therefore the blood is put under His eye; that is, Christ has done it, and God says, "When I see the blood, I will pass over"; but sin is all considered in the lump, so to speak here. When we find nature and conflict with nature, it is a question of the Holy Ghost. This applies to nature only

in the way that it applies to sin at large.

Sending to a land not inhabited means out of sight, remembrance, and everything. "To make an atonement with him" in verse 10 is said of the scapegoat. By the seven times sprinkling constant communion was secured, as well as God's nature met by the blood upon it. God was looked at as a holy God, if not understood.

Then, when Aaron comes back, he lays aside his linen garments, and takes his ordinary ones again: so Christ will come back from heaven in garments of glory and beauty.

248 The absolute defilement of sin is shewn. The touch of the carcase of the sin-offering defiled: so, if a man walked over a grave, he was unclean; or if a man died in a tent, it was unclean: indeed it was very hard to avoid being unclean.

The scripture that made the question, whether Christ was a sin-bearer all His life, quite clear to me was, "he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." He must be proved all His life to know no sin, and then He can be made sin. To bear sins in life makes atonement without blood, but "without shedding of blood is no remission." Why should the Lord be saved from "that hour" if it had been going on all His life? And there is another thing if followed up: it takes a person back and unites him to Christ before He died, which is false. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

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