

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Scripture Memory		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	105		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	1 Corinthians 5:7-8; Leviticus 23:26-33; Hebrews 9:1-28		
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YOM KIPPUR: THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

The late Leon Morris, one of the truly great Biblical scholars of the 20th century, pointed out that the Hebrew people “were fond of using *blood* in vivid metaphorical ways. Thus David complained that Joab shed the blood of war in peace and put the blood on his belt and in his shoes (1 Ki. 2:5). If blood = life, what are we to make of this? Again, the Psalmist speaks of the righteous as bathing their feet in the blood of the wicked (Ps. 58:10; cf. Ps. 68:23). Job exclaimed, *O earth, do not cover my blood* (Jb. 16:18) and Isaiah passed on the word of the Lord, *Your hands are full of blood* (Is. 1:15). There are some well-known words in Joel which speak of God showing wonders in heaven and on earth, *blood and fire and billows of smoke* and which go on to speak of the moon being turned to blood (Joel 2:30-31). Examples could be multiplied. The Hebrews tended to use the term *blood* in picturesque metaphors, more particularly as a vivid way of referring to death. When a sacrifice was offered we should see it as a killing of the animal in place of the worshipper and the manipulation of the blood as the ritual presentation to God of the evidence that a death has taken place to atone for sin. When the New Testament writers refer to the death of Christ as a sacrifice, we should not understand them to be making some far-fetched identification of his blood with his life. Rather they are solemnly referring to the significance of his death.”¹ Yom Kippur, commonly translated as the Day of Atonement, was an appointed fast that occurred on the tenth day of the seventh month. Of all the days marked out in Leviticus 23, this was the high point. On the Day of Atonement, the entire sacrificial system was rebooted. After a year of accumulating sin and impurity, symbolically polluting the system and its ministers, the Day of Atonement cleanses and reestablishes the whole system. The Day of Atonement was the only day when a priest could enter the Most Holy Place (or the Holy of Holies), the inner room of the tabernacle or temple that contained the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat. On that day, the high priest entered the Most Holy Place with incense and sprinkled the mercy seat with the blood of both purification offerings – a bull for the high priest and the goat on which the lot had fallen for the people. While the flesh of other purification offerings was destroyed by fire in a clean place outside the camp, the second goat – the so-called scapegoat – of the Day of Atonement was expelled into the wilderness, the realm of formlessness, demons, and death. Before it was sent out, the high priest confessed the iniquities and transgressions of Israel over it. The goat would bear the sins of Israel into the wilderness’s vast emptiness.

The author of Hebrews reflects on the significance of the Day of Atonement in Hebrews 9, considering it in relation to the structure of the tabernacle and temple. The Most Holy Place was the divine throne room, containing the ark of the covenant, above which the Lord was enthroned between the cherubim. Its cleansing on the Day of Atonement ensured the Lord’s wrath would not break out against his people and marked the climax of the sacrificial system’s graciously given process of ascent to the Lord and enjoyment of communion with him. Yet the fullness of peace and communion couldn’t be experienced through the old system. According to the author of Hebrews, the tabernacle and temple were reality-filled types of heavenly archetypes. Only one person on only one day of the year was able to enter the Most Holy Place. This means the “way into the holy places [was] not yet opened” (Heb. 9:8). With the advent of Christ, however, the way through the veil into the Most Holy Place has been opened (Heb. 9:11-12).

- I. **THE SERVICES.** The greatest day of the Jewish year was Yom Kippur (lit. the day of covering, or propitiation), which points onward to Calvary, the true Yom Kippur (cf. Jn. 19:30; Zech. 3:9).
- A. **The propitiation,** cf. Lev. 16:1-16, 20-22. We will do well to give considerable thought to this great Biblical word. “To propitiate,” says John Murray, “means to *placate; pacify; appease; conciliate*. And it is this idea that is applied to the atonement accomplished by Christ. Propitiation presupposes the wrath and displeasure of God, and the purpose of propitiation is the removal of this displeasure. Very simply stated the doctrine of propitiation means that Christ propitiated the wrath of God and rendered God propitious to his people.” Murray goes on to properly define the implications involved. (1) to love and to be propitious are not convertible terms. It is false to suppose that the doctrine of propitiation regards propitiation as that which causes or constrains the divine love. (2) Propitiation is not turning of the wrath of God into love. . . . It is one thing to say that the wrathful God is made loving. That would be entirely false. It is another thing to say the wrathful God is loving. That is profoundly true. But it is also true that the wrath by which he is wrathful is propitiated through the cross. This propitiation is the fruit of the divine love. (3) Propitiation does not detract from the love and mercy of God; it rather enhances the marvel of his love. For it shows the cost that redemptive love entails.³ Let me once again quote from Leon Morris: “The Bible is insistent that the wrath of God is the grim reality which the sinner must ultimately face. God is not neutral in the face of evil but is strongly and personally active in opposition to it. Probably a good part of the modern objection to the use of the term *propitiation* arises from the widespread feeling that *wrath* is not a good word to use about God. He is above our petty angers and what he feels must be so different from human anger that we easily come to think that we should abandon the concept when we talk about God. I for one feel the strong attraction of such a view. Nobody wants to attribute to God the weakness we know so well from human anger. But such an approach is not fully convincing. What it amounts to is no more than the reminder that we cannot attribute to God an anger like our own. With us anger always involves elements of passion and lack of self-control. We speak of losing our temper and the like. No one wants to attribute to God the worst elements in human anger. But whenever we say anything about God there must always be the implied qualification, *of course, without the defects that we see in people even at their best*. This applies not only to wrath but to everything we say about God. We do not hesitate to speak of the love of God. But can anyone say that puny thing human love is at best is really what we mean when we speak of God? And is it not the same with goodness, mercy, and indeed every quality which we ascribe to God? The use of a term in human life may well be a guide to the quality in God of which we wish to speak, but in no case can it be said that God exercises the quality with all our human weaknesses. It is the same with wrath. We know among men a quality which we speak of as *righteous indignation* and this gives us a glimpse of what a pure and selfless anger might be. It is something like this that is in mind when we speak of *the wrath of God*. We mean *wrath without the imperfections that characterize human wrath at its best*.⁴
- II. **THE SPRINKLING OF THE BLOOD.** Our English Bible almost without exception translated the Hebrew word *zarak* with the word *sprinkle*, which gives the impression of using a water sprinkler used to water flowers in the garden. The Hebrew word is much more forceful and vivid. For example, it is used in Exodus 9:8 where Moses *threw* dust into the air to bring the plague of boils upon Egypt. Robert Alter repeatedly underscores the fact that the term means to throw or hurl with force.⁵ John J. Davis captures it this way, “After the lamb was slain the Israelites were to take the blood of that lamb and to *strike* it on the doorpost of their houses (cf. Exod. 12:22).”⁶

III. **THE PARDON** cf. Lev. 16:5-10, 20-22. Aaron was to take two goats; one was to be slain as a sin offering for the people; and the second goat, called the scapegoat (Heb. *azazel*), Aaron was to lay his hands on and confess the sins of the people, and the *azazel* was to be released into the wilderness, which signified the removal of their sins far away, both from the people and out of God's sight, or from the place of His presence with Israel. A grand expositor many years ago wrote, "The two goats were placed at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting *before the Lord*, and the latter phrase is naturally used here in its most literal sense, for the Lord was to see what took place (cf. Gen. 11:5). Two lots were then made ready, one of these having inscribed on it *lyahweh*, and the other, *lazāzēl*. The latter inscription has given rise to a host of questions. The Greek translators did not regard *zāzēl* as a proper name, but rather connected it with *āzal*, a verb whose derived form *zalzēl* allegedly changed to *zāzēl*. The verb *āzal* does not appear in the Old Testament, but it supposedly means *go away*, and in the *pilpel*, *send away*. The phrase *lazāzēl* would therefore have the meaning *in order to send away*. The phrase *lazāzēl* would therefore have the meaning *in order to send away*. The same understanding of this appears in the Latin translation, which has *capro emissario*. Such an interpretation leads to a contorted and forced translation, however. Verse 10b would read *in order to send it into the desert lazāzēl* [i.e., in order to send away], and verse 26a would be *the man who releases the goat lazāzēl* [i.e., in order to send away]. Since such readings are of course not possible, the translation is simply altered to *in order to send the goat 'for carrying away' into the desert* in 10b, and to *the one who releases the goat 'for carrying away'* in 26b. In this manner, the phrase *lazāzēl*, which was originally understood as a statement of purpose, is made into something like a proper name, and *send* is at the same time changed to *carry*."⁷

CONCLUSION: Note the expression in 9:8 – *The Holy Spirit indicates* (ESV). The KJV has *The Holy Spirit signifying*. The Greek word *delountos* means to "make plain" or "make known" and conveys the idea of unfolding. The purpose of which, as Pink has written, was to make evident that "the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest." How did He thus "signify" this fact? By the very framework of the tabernacle: that is, by allowing the people to go no farther than the outer court, and the priests themselves only into the first compartment. "For things in His wisdom were thus disposed, that there should be the first tabernacle whereinto the priests did enter every day, accomplishing the Divine services that God required. Howbeit in that tabernacle there were not the pledges of the gracious presence of God. It was not the especial residence of His glory. But the peculiar habitation of God was separated from it by a veil, and no person living might so much as look into it on pain of death. But yet, lest the church should apprehend, that indeed there was no approach, here, nor hereafter, for any person into the gracious presence of God; He ordained that once a year the high priest, and he alone, should enter into that holy place with blood. Hereby he plainly signified, that an entrance there was to be, and that with boldness thereinto. For unto what end else did He allow and appoint, that once a year there should be an entrance into it by the high priest, in the name of and for the service of the church? But this entrance being only once a year, by the high priest only, and that with the blood of the covenant, which was always to be observed whilst that tabernacle continued, he did manifest that the access represented was not to be obtained during that season; for all believers in their own persons were utterly excluded from it."⁸ What the 53rd chapter of Isaiah is to Christ in His Messianic prophecies that, we may truly say, is the 16th of Leviticus to the whole system of Mosaic types – the most consummate flower of the Messianic symbolism. All the sin offerings pointed to Christ, the great High Priest and Victim of the future."

ENDNOTES

¹L. Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning & Significance* (IVP, 1983), p. 62.

²I am indebted to Alastair Roberts for this summary. Cf. the “Day of Atonement: How Yom Kippur Points to Salvation in Christ,” *The Gospel Coalition, Bible & Theology*, October 25, 2022.

³J. Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Eerdmans, 1956), p. 30

⁴Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

⁵Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A translation with Commentary: The Five Books of Moses* (Norton, 2019), p. 314.

⁶J. J. Davis, *Moses and The Gods of Egypt: Studies In Exodus* (BMH Books, 1986), p. 147.

⁷A. Nooratzij, *Leviticus: Bible Student's Commentary* (Zondervan, 1982), p. 161.

⁸A. W. Pink, *Exposition of Hebrews* (rpt. Baker, 1954), p. 477.