

Atonement and the Cross of Christ ***Atonement in Symbols: Part 2***

Lesson #7 for November 15, 2008

Scriptures: Leviticus 16; Numbers 18:1-8; Psalms 28:2; 132:7; 138:2.

1. This lesson focuses on the meaning of the Day of Atonement and Christ's priestly ministry.
2. The Day of Atonement consisted of a number of elaborate ceremonies to symbolize the "cleansing" of the "entire camp" from sin.
3. In what sense did the priests in the times of the Old Testament function as mediators or intercessors between the children of Israel and God? What is a mediator or intercessor? Do we need a mediator today? For what purpose?
4. God said, "The people must make a sacred Tent for me, so that I may live among them." (Exodus 25:8, *GNB*) The individual Israelites were allowed to go to the entrance of the tabernacle with their sacrificial offerings. There they would have an interaction with the priests and thus, symbolically, have an interaction with God. In how many different ways do you see the ancient ceremonies and symbols of the tabernacle representing the true plan of salvation? This presents a problem to us in modern times because it depends on what one thinks the plan of salvation involves. If one believes that God is very far removed from us and completely Sovereign—even a little scary—then it seems like a very good idea to have an intercessor like the Israelites requested. (Exodus 20:18-21) Some modern Christian churches even have numerous intercessors! But if one thinks the plan of salvation has more to do with correctly representing the character of God in the great controversy, how do the ancient sanctuary and the sanctuary services fit in? In that wilderness system, animals were brought and blood was shed which, in turn, was placed on two different altars. The life of the animal was thought to be a "substitute" for the life of the sinner. The only way for the people to have received forgiveness was through the "shedding of blood." (Hebrews 9:22) Many of our Christian friends basically ignore the Old Testament. They wonder how it is relevant to us today. But they love Hebrews 9:22—which, of course, is in the New Testament—because it seems to support their views of the atonement! But that verse is talking only about the Old Testament system! Ellen White adds a very interesting note on the subject:

As Jesus came into the temple, He took in the whole scene. He saw the unfair transactions. He saw the distress of the poor, who **thought** that without shedding of blood there would be no forgiveness for their sins. He saw the outer court of His temple converted into a place of unholy traffic. The sacred enclosure had become one vast exchange.... He had given directions in regard to the offerings. He understood their symbolical value, and He saw that they were now perverted and misunderstood. Spiritual worship was fast disappearing. No link bound the priests and rulers to their God. Christ's work was to establish an altogether different worship. *The Signs of the Times*, September 16, 1897; *Desire of Ages* 157 (1898) [emphasis supplied]

5. What does the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* mean when it says, "God would accept the death of the innocent animal in place of the sinner's death"? (Sunday, November 9) Are we in trouble if we do not bring an animal sacrifice? Was God the one who was refusing to forgive sins before the sacrifice of the animal? Does God demand blood? Was God ever the problem? The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* further suggests:

The heavenly sanctuary is the dwelling of God within the cosmos and the place from which He rules as King of the universe; it's also the place in which the sin problem is being resolved. (Sunday, November 9)

We need to remember that the “heaven sanctuary” is also the place where the sin problem began! It is very important that we recognize that sin did not begin with human beings; and it will not end with human beings. The very center of the universe was the place where sin began and where sin will end. That puts things in the great controversy setting. So, we must ask the essential question: How do the events which took place during the life and death of Jesus here on this earth relate to what is happening in the “sanctuary” in heaven? Is there a “sanctuary” in heaven? Or is the “sanctuary” just a symbol for what God is doing in heaven? Is God demanding that someone must die before He will forgive sinners? When we look at the cross, do we understand how God resolved the issues in the great controversy which began in the sanctuary in heaven? What happened on that Passover weekend in Jerusalem that makes any difference in the sanctuary in heaven? Is there a literal sanctuary building in heaven? (Revelation 21:22) If God is omnipresent, what is the relevance of a building?

6. Today, the cross is almost a symbol for Christianity. People will proudly wear a cross to suggest their religious orientation. But in the times of Jesus, the cross was a means of torture used on those who were considered traitors to the Roman government.
7. Review the sequence of events that took place on the Day of Atonement. (Leviticus 16) Was the Day of Atonement an essential part of the worship experience of the Jews down through the centuries? (2 Kings 23:21-23) How seriously did they take any of those ceremonies?
8. As we know, the priests performed many important services in the tabernacle. (Exodus 28:9-12,29; Numbers 18:1-8; 27:21; 28:3-8; Deuteronomy 1:5-9; 4:25,26,34,35) Were there times when the priests sat down with the people and tried to explain what all the services and symbols meant? Or did they just routinely carry out the ceremonies? We instinctively turn to the book of Hebrews. How do you think the priests were regarded in the days of Moses? The judges? The kings? Were they regarded as trusted friends? Impartial judges? Spies for God? An unnecessary expense? Did they represent God well? They sometimes acted as if Moses was their “god.” At the foot of Mt. Sinai as they were dancing around the golden calf they said, “Israel, this is our god, who led us out of Egypt!” (Exodus 32:4, *GNB*) Were they just completely confused? Did any of them get the message that God was trying to communicate? Many years later the Old Testament prophets got the message quite clearly! At least they spoke and wrote about that message very clearly. If God had been able to have His choice, wouldn't He have come as Jesus came?—sat down on a mountainside, gathered the people around Him, and explained everything.
9. As mediators and intercessors, the priests served several important functions:
 - 1) The fact that God had appointed them to their work suggests that there was a way to reconcile God and man and to close the gap created by sin.
 - 2) God's desire to dwell among the children of Israel at the tabernacle where the priests officiated suggests that He wanted to be close to His people.
 - 3) The symbolic sacrifices of the tabernacle services gave the children of Israel a means for reaching out to God. And it suggested that in the end, God would “deal with” their sins. (Romans 8:3)
10. For those of us who live many years after the life and death of Jesus, what do we see in the ceremonies of the old system that clearly represents the life and death of Jesus? Was there anything in that whole system that clearly represented the great controversy? Hopefully they got the general concept that their sins were transferred to the temple and later to the scapegoat. Did they

recognize that the symbols implied that Satan was ultimately responsible for sin? We get that message clearly from Ellen White.

11. As we study these symbols, we must constantly remind ourselves that the symbols are not reality. In fact, Paul said these symbols were only “a faint shadow” of the things to come. (Hebrews 10:1)
12. Read Leviticus 16:16-34. What are these verses saying to us? These verses seem to suggest that *all* of the sins of *all* the people were “dealt with.” Is that true? What really changed on the Day of Atonement? What had really changed by the end of the day? Did it change God?
13. Notice that during these sacred hours everyone was supposed to be completely at rest.
14. When is the antitypical day of atonement? How do you personally feel about that day of atonement? Do you fear it as a day of judgment? Or do you look forward to it as a day of reconciliation? How many different roles did the priests fill? They were mediators, teachers, revelators, judges, representatives, court officials, and those charged by God with blessing the people.
15. If we are “in” the antitypical day of atonement starting in 1844—as most Adventists believe—do we need the constant mediation and intercession of Jesus Christ today? Is the antitypical day of atonement equal to the investigative judgment which is also known as the pre-advent judgment? What is Christ doing right now in heaven?

Daniel 7:9,10,13,14 (GNB):

⁹While I was looking, thrones were put in place. One who had been living for ever sat down on one of the thrones. His clothes were white as snow, and his hair was like pure wool. His throne, mounted on fiery wheels, was blazing with fire, ¹⁰and a stream of fire was pouring out from it. There were many thousands of people there to serve him, and millions of people stood before him. The court began its session, and the books were opened...¹³During this vision in the night, I saw what looked like a human being. He was approaching me, surrounded by clouds, and he went to the one who had been living for ever and was presented to him. ¹⁴He was given authority, honor, and royal power, so that the people of all nations, races, and languages would serve him. His authority would last for ever, and his kingdom would never end.

Zechariah 3:1-5 (GNB):

In another vision the LORD showed me the High Priest Joshua standing before the angel of the LORD. And there beside Joshua stood Satan, ready to bring an accusation against him. ²The angel of the Lord said to Satan, “May the LORD condemn you, Satan! May the LORD, who loves Jerusalem, condemn you. This man is like a stick snatched from the fire.”

³Joshua was standing there, wearing filthy clothes. ⁴The angel said to his heavenly attendants, “Take away the filthy clothes this man is wearing.” Then he said to Joshua, “I have taken away your sin and will give you new clothes to wear.” [Notice that the old sins were removed and not just covered over!]

⁵He commanded the attendants to put a clean turban on Joshua’s head. They did so, and then they put the new clothes on him while the angel of the LORD stood there.

John 16:25-27 (GNB):

²⁵ “I have used figures of speech to tell you these things. But the time will come when I will not use figures of speech, but will speak to you plainly about the Father.

²⁶When that day comes, you will ask him in my name; and I do not say that I will ask him on your behalf, ²⁷for the Father himself loves you.”

Does this statement by Jesus “cancel out” everything we have studied in our lesson today? Notice that at the point Jesus spoke those words, just before going to the Garden of Gethsemane for the final time, Jesus, having spent years with these disciples, still said, “I have much more to tell you, but now it would be too much for you to bear.” (John 16:12, *GNB*) Why was it so hard for Jesus/God to get through to His disciples? What else did Jesus have to tell them? Have we learned the things that He did not tell the disciples? Or are they too much for us to bear?

16. One unusual attribute or aspect of the ceremony taking place on the Day of Atonement was the goat for Azazel or what is sometimes called the scapegoat. (Read Leviticus 16:20-22) Seventh-day Adventists, because of the belief that the “typical ceremonies” of the Old Testament are symbolic of what God is doing in the heavenly sanctuary even now, have been accused of making the Azazel goat—which represents Satan—our “savior”! What do you think that part of the ceremony specifically symbolized? The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* points out that this goat was not “bearing” the sins of the people in any sacrificial way. The goat was not slaughtered, and no blood was available. This goat served only to bear or carry the sins of the people far away from the camp. (Leviticus 16:22) The Azazel goat was merely an “elimination rite.” Is that how to “quarantine” sin?
17. Do you believe that the great controversy is clearly represented in any part of the ceremonial system? If so, in which part? At the conclusion of the Day of Atonement, the children of Israel were supposed to be completely “free of sin,” and the camp was rededicated for the beginning of the new year. But is it even possible to move sins around like some physical burden? If we do not believe that is possible, then what do all those ceremonies mean? The Hebrew people were living and thinking at a very basic, very concrete level. One physically took a lamb to the sanctuary. The priest carried the blood into the sanctuary. Then, on the Day of Atonement, those sins were “carried” out of the sanctuary and placed on the head of the scapegoat, and the people could watch as that goat was led off into the wilderness, never to be seen again. That is a very simple and very concrete way of suggesting that our sins need to be “dealt with” and removed from us. This system suggests that God had a plan to “deal with” sin.
18. Are the Jewish people still offering sacrifices? If not, why not? They were told to sacrifice only at the temple. That spot is now occupied by two Muslim mosques. What would you do if it was announced in church one day that we had misinterpreted a portion of Scripture and, in fact, God wanted us to continue making such sacrifices?
19. The Hebrew word *kipper* used for “atonement” or “covering” implies that a complete restoration to its original condition was brought about by all of those ceremonies. Was sin completely eliminated? Is the elimination of sin all that needs to take place? What about healing?
20. If God thought it was necessary to come down in our day and establish a symbolic plan of salvation, what do you think He would use for the symbols?
21. How is God best represented through the sanctuary system? Is a picture of the true gospel clear? Are there areas in the books of Moses that clearly explain to us what the ceremonies were supposed to mean? Was Moses given that instruction but did not write it down? Was it possibly written down in some kind of handbook which has since been lost?

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