

6. The Day of Atonement (4Q 2013—The Sanctuary)

Biblical material: Leviticus 16, Lev. 23:27–32, Deut. 19:16–21, Matt. 18:23–35, Isa. 6:1–6; Micah 7:18, 19.

Quotes

- The beginning of atonement is the sense of its necessity. *Lord Byron*
- What atonement is there for blood spilt upon the earth? *Aeschylus*
- The first and greatest punishment of the sinner is the conscience of sin. *Lucius Annaeus Seneca*
- The first step in a person's salvation is knowledge of their sin. *Lucius Annaeus Seneca*
- All human sin seems so much worse in its consequences than in its intentions. *Reinhold Niebuhr*
- I live in sin, to kill myself I live; no longer my life my own, but sin's; my good is given to me by heaven, my evil by myself, by my free will, of which I am deprived. *Michelangelo*
- No evil dooms us hopelessly except the evil we love, and desire to continue in, and make no effort to escape from. *George Eliot*

Questions

How does the Day of Atonement affect us today? What can we learn from the high priest's ministry in the sanctuary? What does the sanctuary tell us about God and his intentions to us? How can sin really be transferred? How does all this affect our picture of God? What does this tell us about the resolution of the great controversy?

Bible summary

Leviticus 16 stresses the seriousness of entering the Most Holy Place, and gives strict instructions on how to prepare for the Day of Atonement. Lev. 23:27–32 gives instructions to the people on how they are to observe the Day. Deut. 19:16–21 details the old law of justice: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Jesus' parable of the unjust servant in Matt. 18:23–35 speaks to the whole issue of judgment and how we are to treat one another. Isaiah's guilt is taken away by God—see Isa. 6:1–6. In Micah 7:18, 19 God's compassion and forgiveness is reaffirmed.

Comment

The whole point of the sanctuary was to make people think. But they missed the point and turned it all into ritual and requirement. Instead of seeing that sin kills, they thought that God wanted blood, and so provided plenty of it. Instead of recognizing the toxic effects of sin in their lives and choosing to accept God's healing, they entered into a business relationship. Most of all, the sanctuary and its services became a mechanism by which they *didn't* have to deal with God, because they thought by obeying the ceremonial requirements it was all taken care of.

Even the Day of Atonement with its serious judgment tone became another regular ritual. While the people were meant to humble themselves and confess, it was the high priest who had to go before the Lord in the Most Holy Place. It became another

ceremony by which things were taken care of, and it seems that for many this was just another yearly observance. Maybe this is why there is little commendation in the Old Testament by God to his people for their participation in the sacrificial system. Generally God is taking his people to task for their meaningless offerings, saying that he doesn't want the rituals without thought, without the people taking seriously issues of social justice and living right, without their religious actions actually making a difference!

The Day of Atonement is the climax of the sanctuary rituals—the annual event during which the sanctuary was “cleansed.” It has great significance in pointing to the consummation of history and the final disposition of sin and evil, as well as to the role of Jesus in healing and saving all those who trust in him.

However some very significant questions need to be respectfully raised. Can sin really be transferred from one person to another, or to some other life—like a goat? Only symbolically, for sin is a broken relationship and such abstract relational ideas are not capable of being “moved around.” So we should see in the Day of Atonement some acted parables of how God ends sin, and how sinners are “cleansed.” We need to think beyond the symbols to understand that God is trying to help us understand, to picture his healing love by which the broken relationship we are in is healed, how our sins-sickness is cured so we can live forever in God's presence.

Ellen White Comments

That which was type and symbol to the Jews is reality to us. {COL 317}

We are in the antitypical day of atonement, and not only are we to humble our hearts before God and confess our sins, but we are, by all our educating talent, to seek to instruct those with whom we are brought in contact, and to bring them by precept and example to know God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. {CE 157}

We are in the great day of atonement, and the sacred work of Christ for the people of God that is going on at the present time in the heavenly sanctuary should be our constant study. We should teach our children what the typical Day of Atonement signified and that it was a special season of great humiliation and confession of sins before God. The antitypical day of atonement is to be of the same character. Everyone who teaches the truth by precept and example will give the trumpet a certain sound. You need ever to cultivate spirituality, because it is not natural for you to be heavenly-minded. The great work is before us of leading the people away from worldly customs and practices, up higher and higher, to spirituality, piety, and earnest work for God. It is your work to proclaim the message of the third angel, to sound the last note of warning to the world. May the Lord bless you with spiritual eyesight. I write this in love, seeing your danger. Please consider these things carefully and prayerfully. {5T 520.1}

Once a year, on the great Day of Atonement, the priest entered the most holy place for the cleansing of the sanctuary. The work there performed, completed the yearly round of ministration. . . . {FLB 198}

In the typical service, when the high priest entered the most holy place, all Israel were required to gather about the sanctuary, and in the most solemn manner humble their souls before God, that they might receive the pardon of their sins, and not be cut off from the congregation. How much more essential in this antitypical day of atonement that we understand the work of our High Priest, and know what duties are required of us. {GC88 430}

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