

The Scapegoat.

by Andrew Bonar

The sermon explores the significance of the scape-goat in the Day of Atonement ceremony, demonstrating God's satisfaction with the atonement made by Christ and its impact on Israel's conscience.

Scripture: Leviticus 16:7

Topics: "Atonement", "Christ as our Scapegoat"

Description

Andrew Bonar expounds on the significance of the scapegoat in the Day of Atonement, illustrating how it represents both God's satisfaction with the sacrifice for sin and the removal of guilt from the sinner's conscience. He emphasizes that the first goat symbolizes God's acceptance of a substitute, while the second goat, the scapegoat, carries away the sins of the people into the wilderness, signifying their complete removal. Bonar draws parallels to Christ, who bore our sins and suffered alone, ensuring that believers can find peace knowing their sins are forever gone. The sermon highlights the dual aspects of atonement: God's justice and mercy, and the assurance of a cleansed conscience for the sinner. Ultimately, Bonar encourages believers to rejoice in the truth that their sins are removed as far as the east is from the west.

Transcript

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" And Aaron shall take the two goats, and present them before the Lord, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for the scape-goat. And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the Lord's lot fell, and offer him for a sin-offering. But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scape-goat, shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scape-goat into the wilderness. And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited. " Leviticus xvi. 7-10, 22.

One of the most arresting and instructive ceremonies of the day of atonement was the presenting of the double sin-offering. This sin-offering (unlike any other, and resembling only the two birds in the leper's cleansing) consisted of the sacrifice of one goat and the sending away of the other out of sight for ever. It was a sin-offering, which purposely presented two sides or aspects of the truth, namely, how God can be satisfied in the case of a sinner, and next, how the sinner's guilty conscience is to be satisfied.

I. The first goat taught how God can be satisfied in the case of a sinner. Aaron laid his hand on the head of this atoning offering, to show thereby the laying on it the sin of those for whom he acted, and then slew the goat. This done, he carried its blood in a bowl into the most holy place, where, standing right in front of the mercy-seat, he sprinkled it again and again, until seven times. He then repeated his sprinkling upon the mercy-seat itself again and again, until seven times.

And there the shed blood, the outpoured life of this victim, substituted in the room of Israel, was laid down before Jehovah in the most solemn manner, and was left there on the very mercy-seat, as well as in front of it, under the bright cloud of glory. Thus it was presented to the Lord, and lay all the year round under his eye, the glory resting over it, or, in other words, the God of glory accepting it, and saying, by that cloud resting over it, "I am satisfied; I am well pleased to take the substitute's death in room of the sinner, on whom lies the sentence, Thou shalt die."

By this type the sinner is taught that God accepts a substitute. Especially, it shows us how God, in all his truth, and holiness, and righteousness, is able to save a guilty soul to the uttermost, by taking a victim in his stead. The type thus proclaims God satisfied in the death of his beloved Son, whose blood it was that fulfilled all types. And so we have here an aspect of the truth, viz., the certainty that God is well pleased with Christ's being "made sin for us," in order that we might be made "the righteousness of God in him." (2 Cor. v. 21.)

II. The second goat (which we usually call the scape-goat, as in ver.8-10, etc.) was intended to teach how the guilty conscience of a sinner may be satisfied. If a holy and just God sees enough in the beloved Son, "made sin for us," to give him entire satisfaction, it is plain that a sinner's conscience, however deeply awakened, however sensitive and tender, may be satisfied on the same grounds. If only the sinner see in that sin-offering what God sees in it, the sinner could not help being satisfied, being persuaded that God had found all that vindicated his character, and showed him to be just, while justifying the ungodly who made his offering his plea.

The object of the scape-goat, therefore, was to make known to Israel the fact that God was thus satisfied. Everything connected with the scape-goat bore upon this aspect of the truth. It was (so to speak) a re-enacting before all the people of what had been enacted before Jehovah in the case of the first goat. Accordingly, while some of the blood of that first goat was to be "put upon the horns of the altar" (ver.18), that all men might see it as they stood in the courts, Aaron was directed to take the second goat and deal peculiarly with it.

And thus it was: Aaron laid both his hands upon its head, confessing over it all the iniquities and all the transgressions of the children of Israel, in all their sins (ver. 21). The sins that have already been atoned for by the blood of the first goat are anew brought out to view, and all Israel hears what it was that Aaron atoned for, and what it was that the Lord accepted an atonement for, in the most holy place. It was, O Israel, every sin of thine, and every form of sin, - sin in all its aggravations, sin of crimson and and scarlet dye.

Yes, listen, and you will hear that it was not thy merit or worth that Aaron carried in, but thy guilt and wickedness, thy sin, thy transgressions, thine iniquities, "which offend infinite majesty, despise infinite authority, affront infinite sovereignty, abuse infinite mercy, provoke infinite justice, oppose infinite holiness, hate infinite love." Aaron stands before all the people, both his hands resting on the head of the goat, to express the thorough and undoubted transference of guilt.

This done, the goat, with its load of imputed guilt, is led away in sight of all the people, - led out of the camp, away to the wilderness. "A fit man," a qualified person, chosen for the express purpose, leads it away, and as it passes along every eye rests on it with solemn interest. They watch his progress after he leaves the farthest circle of tents, - they continue to follow him till he and the scape-goat are mere specks on the distant horizon, or are hid altogether by some intervening knoll.

Did not that scape-goat (that is, "goat of departing," "goat that has gone away") tell what has been done with Israel's sins? Did it not say that sin has been put all out of sight, never to be seen again? The scape-goat, with its awful load of sin confessed over it, is the substitute for Israel. The lightning of wrath must slope toward its guilty head, leaving Israel untouched. Let us follow it into its rugged, uninhabited land. It is now left alone. Its solitary cry is re-echoed by wild rocks; the howling of beasts of prey terrifies it; the gloom of night settles down upon it, and leaves it shivering with strange fear.

Perhaps it is toward the Dead Sea that it directs its steps; but everywhere is barrenness and melancholy desolation. And then the storm lowers, the thunder roars, and the lightning from the dark cloud may perhaps stretch it lifeless on the ground. At all events, the scape-goat was never more to return; the sin-laden victim was never to reappear; for Israel must know that their sin is put away out of sight for ever. And in proportion as man dwelt upon this fact, his conscience would cease to tremble.

If he saw herein God so satisfied that he had removed our iniquity from us "as far as the east is from the west," then would his peace be complete. And may we not say there is still another view of Christ here? There is in that melancholy scape-goat, led away to its dreary solitude, something represented concerning him who was a Man of Sorrows. There is something here about him who, "made a curse for us," was led away to unknown woes, left to suffer alone, abandoned by all, receiving no sympathy from earth or heaven.

"Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness," is his cry. He looks on his right, and there is none; refuge fails him: no man cares for his soul. And thus it was he plunged into that mysterious darkness of wrath, bearing with him all the sins of all his Israel. "That scape-goat's disappearance is the disappearance of all my sins!" may be the joyful exclamation of the soul whom the Spirit has enabled to accept the Substitute. God is satisfied in him, and thus my soul is at rest.

Jesus shows to the Father nothing but his own blood (never anything whatsoever of worth in the sinner) in pleading for souls; and his Holy Spirit nothing else to a guilty conscience, in order to bring it to perfect peace.

(With grateful thanks to Andrew Oliver for finding and typing this article)

It is interesting to read an entry in the diary at the end of January 1866, around the time he probably wrote the article:

"Our Communion. I felt myself as a minister not for a moment worthy to carry the message, nor at all able to declare the love of Him who died; but I know that the Lord can use me as the man who led away the scapegoat into the wilderness in sight of all the people. He can make me 'a fit man' to do that service if He chooses."

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