

# The Day of Atonement Leviticus 16

by John Nelson Darby

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*John Nelson Darby's sermon on the Day of Atonement explores the significance of atonement, the role of the high priest, and the fulfillment of these concepts in Christ's sacrifice.*

**Scripture:** Leviticus 16:30, Colossians 1:20, Hebrews 9:12, Hebrews 10:19

**Topics:** "Atonement", "Christ's Sacrifice"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on the significance of the Day of Atonement as described in Leviticus 16, emphasizing the dual aspects of atonement: maintaining the relationship between God and His people despite their sins, and the foreshadowing of Christ's ultimate sacrifice. He illustrates how the high priest's actions, including the sprinkling of blood on the mercy-seat and the confession of sins over the scapegoat, symbolize the complete reconciliation and cleansing of believers through Christ. Darby highlights that while the Day of Atonement provided a temporary means of purification, it pointed to the greater reality of Christ's atonement, which fully satisfies God's justice and love. He also contrasts the position of the church, which has access to God through Christ, with that of Israel, who awaits their recognition of the Savior. Ultimately, the sermon underscores the glory of God revealed through Christ's sacrifice and the believer's secure standing in Him.

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## Transcript

Provision being made for such defilements of the people as allowed of it, we have the revelation of the general provision for the purification of the sanctuary which was in the midst of a people who defiled it, and for the atonement of the sins of the people themselves. In general, there are two great ideas; first, that the atonement was made, so that the relationship of the people of God was maintained notwithstanding their sins; and then, in the second place, in the difficulties which surrounded the entrance of Aaron into the holy place, there was the testimony (according to the Epistle to the Hebrews itself) that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest during that dispensation. It is important to examine this chapter under these two points of view. It stands alone. No mention is made anywhere else of what took place on that solemn day. The sacrifice of Christ, as redemption, was typified by the passover. It was here a question of drawing near unto God who revealed Himself on His throne, of cleansing defilements, of taking away the sins of those who would draw near, and of purifying their consciences. Now, while presenting to us in figure the means of doing this, it signified indeed that the thing was not done.

As to the general idea of its efficacy, the high priest drew near personally, and filled the most holy place with incense; then he took some blood, which he put on the mercy-seat and before the mercy-seat. Sins were atoned for according to the requirement of the majesty of the throne of God Himself, so that the full satisfaction made to His majesty rendered the throne of justice favourable, grace had free course, and the worshipper found the blood there before him when he drew near, and even as a testimony before the throne. Then the high priest cleansed the tabernacle, the altar, and all that was found there. Thus, in virtue of the sprinkling of His blood, Christ will reconcile all things, having made peace through the blood of His cross. There could be no guiltiness in the tabernacle, but God would cleanse away the defilements, that they might not appear before Him. In the third place, the high priest confessed the sins of the people over the scapegoat, which, sent off unto a land not inhabited, bore all the sins away from God never to be found again. It is here that the idea of substitution is presented most clearly.

250 There are three things: the blood on the mercy-seat, the reconciliation of all things, and the sins confessed and borne by another. This order is found in Colossians 1 - peace made, reconciliation of all things by Christ, and of believers it is said - "You hath he now reconciled in the body of his flesh, through death." It is evident that, though the scapegoat was sent away alive, it was identified as to the efficacy of the work with the death of the other. The idea of the eternal sending away of sins out of remembrance is only added to the thought of death. The glory of God was established and His rights vindicated, on one side, in the putting of the blood on the mercy-seat; and, on the other, there was the substitution of the scapegoat, of the Lord Jesus, in His precious grace, for the guilty persons whose cause He had undertaken; and, the sins of these having been borne, their deliverance was full, entire and final. The first goat was Jehovah's lot - it was a question of His character and His majesty. The other was the lot of the people, which definitively represented the people in their sins.

These two aspects of the death of Jesus must be carefully distinguished in the atoning sacrifice He has accomplished. He has glorified God, and God acts according to the value of that blood towards all. He has borne the sins of His people; and the salvation of His people is complete. And, in a certain sense, the first part is the most important. Sin having come in, the justice of God might, it is true, have got rid of the sinner; but where would then have been His love and His counsels of grace, pardon, and even the maintenance of His glory according to His true nature as love, while righteous and holy too? I am not speaking here of the persons who were to be saved, but of the glory of God Himself. But the perfect death of Jesus - His blood put on the throne of God - has established and brought into evidence all that God is - all His glory, as no creation could have done it: His truth, for if He had passed sentence of death, it is made good in the highest way in Jesus; His majesty, for His Son submits to all for His glory; His justice against sin; His infinite love. God found means therein to accomplish His counsels of grace, in maintaining all the majesty of His justice and of His divine dignity; for what could have glorified them like the death of Jesus?

251 Therefore this devotedness of Jesus, the Son of God, to His glory, this submission, even unto death, that God might be maintained in the full glory of His rights, has given its outlet to the love of God - freedom to its action; wherefore Jesus says, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished?" His heart, full of love, was driven back, in its personal manifestation, by the sin of man, who would it not; but through the atonement it could flow forth to the sinner in the accomplishment of God's grace and of His counsels unhindered, and Jesus Himself had, so to speak, rights upon that love - a position we are brought into through grace, and which has none like it. "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again." We speak with reverence of such things, but it is

good to speak of them; for the glory of our God, and of Him whom He hath sent, is found therein established and manifested. There is not one attribute, one trait of the divine character, which has not been manifested in all its perfection, and fully glorified in that which took place between God and Jesus Himself. That we have been saved and redeemed, and that our sins have been atoned for in that same sacrifice, according to the counsels of the grace of God, is, I presume to say it, precious and important as it is for us, the inferior part of that work, if anything whatever may be called inferior where everything is perfect; its object at least - we sinners - is inferior, if the work is equally perfect in every point of view. Having considered a little the grand principles, we may now examine the particular circumstances.

It will have been observed that there were two sacrifices: one for Aaron and his family, the other for the people. Aaron and his sons always represent the church - not in the sense of one body, but as a company of priests. Thus we have even in the day of atonement, the distinction between those who form the church, and the earthly people who form the camp of God on the earth. Believers have their place outside the camp, where their Head has suffered as a sacrifice for sin; but, in consequence, they have their place in the presence of God in the heavens, where their Head has entered. Outside the camp,\* here below, answers to a heavenly portion above; they are the two positions of the ever-blessed Christ. If the professing church takes the position of the camp here below, the place of the believer is always outside. It is, indeed, what she has done - she boasts of it; but it is Jewish. Israel must indeed recognize themselves outside at last, in order to be saved and to be brought in again through grace, because the Saviour, whom they despised in a day of blindness, has in grace borne all their sins. We anticipate that position whilst Christ is in heaven. The heart of the remnant of Israel will indeed be brought back, in its desires, to the Lord before that time. They will only enter into the power of the sacrifice when they shall look upon Him whom they pierced, and mourn for Him. Therefore was it prescribed that it should be a day to afflict their souls, and that they should be cut off if they did not.

{\*The camp is an earthly religious relationship with God outside the sanctuary, and established on earth with priests between us and God. This the Jews were; they cast Christ out of it, and it is now utterly rejected.}

252 The day of atonement supposes, moreover, according to the state of things found in the wilderness, that the people were in a state of incapacity for the enjoyment of the relations with God fully manifested. God had redeemed them - had spoken to them; but the heart of Israel, of man however favoured, was incapable of it in its natural state. Israel had made the golden calf, and Moses put a veil over his face. Nadab and Abihu had offered strange fire upon the altar of God, - fire which had not been taken from the altar of burnt offering. The way into the holiest is closed; Aaron is forbidden to enter there at all times. When he went in, it was not for communion, but for the cleansing of the defilements of a people among whom God dwelt; and the day of atonement is only introduced with a prohibition of entering at all times into the holy place, and is conspicuous as taking place after the death of the sons of Aaron. He does it with a cloud of incense, lest he die. It was truly a gracious provision in order that the people should not perish on account of their defilements; but the Holy Ghost was signifying that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest.

In what, then, is our position changed under Christianity? The veil is rent, and we enter, as priests, with boldness into the holiest, by a new and living way through the veil - that is to say, the flesh of Christ. We enter it without conscience of sin, because the blow which rent the veil, to shew all the glory and majesty of the throne, and the holiness of Him who sits thereon, has taken away the sins which would have incapacitated us from entering in, or from looking within. We are even stated there in Christ our Head - the

Head of His body the church. In the meantime, Israel is outside: the church is seen in the person of Christ, the high priest, and the whole of this dispensation is the day of atonement, during which Israel's high priest is hid within the veil. The veil which hid the import of all these figures is, indeed, done away in Christ, so that we have full liberty by the Spirit, but it is upon their hearts. He maintains there within, it is true, their cause through the blood which He presents; but the testimony of it is not yet presented to them outside, nor their consciences freed by the knowledge that their sins are lost for ever in a land not inhabited, where they will never be found again. Now our position is, properly speaking, inside, in the person of Aaron, the blood being on the mercy-seat. We are not only justified by the scapegoat, as being without - that is done, it is clear, and once for all (for the veil is only on the heart of Israel; it is no longer between us and God); but we have gone in with the high priest, as united to Him. We are not waiting for reconciliation till He comes out. Israel, though the forgiveness be the same, will receive these things when the true Aaron comes out of the tabernacle. This is why that which characterized the sacrifice of Aaron and his sons was the blood put inside on the mercy-seat, and the going in of Aaron in person. But the church is composed of persons who are here below, who have committed sins. Thus seen in the world, they enter, as to their conscience, into the rank of the outside people, as well as Aaron himself, seen not as a typical individual; and the conscience is purified by the certainty that Christ has borne all our sins in His body on the tree. Our position is within, according to the value of the blood of Christ, and the perfect acceptance of His person.

253 It is the same with regard to the expectation of Christ: if I consider myself as a man responsible upon earth, I expect Him for the deliverance of all things, and to put an end to all suffering, and to all the power of evil; and so individually myself, as a servant, I look to receive at His appearing here the testimony of His approval, as a Master, before the whole world. But if I think of my privileges, as a member of His body, I think of my union with Him above, and that I shall come back with Him when He shall come and appear in His glory. It is well we should know how to make this distinction; without this, there will be confusion in our thoughts, and in our use of many passages. The same thing is true in the personal religion of every day. I can consider myself as united to Christ, and seated in Him in heavenly places enjoying all the privileges which He enjoys, as Head of the body, before God His Father. I may also look upon myself as a poor weak being, walking individually upon the earth, having wants, faults, and temptations to overcome; and I see Christ above, whilst I am here below - Christ appearing alone for me before the throne - for me, happy in having, in the presence of God, him who is perfect, but who has gone through the experience of my sorrows, who is no longer in the circumstances in which I find myself, but with the Father for me who am in them. This is the doctrine of the Epistle to the Hebrews, whilst the union of the church with Christ is more particularly taught in that to the Ephesians.

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