

A Better “Day of Atonement”

“On the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement, . . . to make an atonement for you before the LORD your God.”
—Leviticus 23:27,28

ON OCTOBER 3-4, 2014, from sundown to sundown, Jews throughout the world will celebrate Yom Kippur, or Day of Atonement, their holiest day of the year. The central themes of Yom Kippur are atonement and repentance. This holy day is traditionally observed by Jewish people with fasting and intense prayer, often spending most of the day in synagogue services. As noted in our opening text, Israel’s Day of Atonement—Yom Kippur—is celebrated each year on the tenth day of the seventh month, called Tishrei. Although Tishrei is the seventh month of the Jews’ religious calendar, it is considered the first month of their civil year, and Rosh Hashanah—the first day of Tishrei—is the Jewish New Year. Yom Kippur completes the annual ten-day period known in Judaism as the “High Holy Days” that commence with Rosh Hashanah.

Israel's Day of Atonement was established by God as part of the Law given to them through his servant Moses at Mount Sinai. On this day, certain offerings and sacrifices were to be made which, if done according to God's instructions, he counted as providing atonement for their sins. By so doing, God reckoned Israel acceptable before him, and he could continue to deal with them as a chosen, covenant people, for the ensuing year.

In reality, the benefits of this special day to Israel were limited. It had to be repeated every year because the nation continued to sin and fall short of keeping its covenant. It failed to provide life to the people because, despite their most valiant efforts, each individual still sinned; and the Scriptures tell us that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." (Ezek. 18:4) Israel's Day of Atonement, however, was used by God to illustrate and point forward to a "better" arrangement, one by which not only Jews, but also all mankind, would receive atonement for sin which would be eternally efficacious. It is this better "Atonement" which is the subject of the following pages.

BLOOD AND ATONEMENT

Blood is used in the Bible as a symbol of life, particularly life poured out as an atonement for sin. The Scriptures say, "The life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul."—Lev. 17:11

God's arrangement with typical Israel, through the priesthood and Tabernacle services, called for

much shedding of blood. While a degree of blessing accrued to the Israelites from these sacrifices, their main purpose was to point forward to Jesus' sacrifice. He shed his blood—poured out his human life—to make an atonement for all mankind. By so doing, he “reconciled all things unto himself, . . . whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven”—that is, for mankind as well as for those who are partakers of the “heavenly calling.”—Col. 1:20; Heb. 3:1

A similar thought to atonement is expressed by the word “propitiation,” both meaning to expiate, or make satisfaction. Paul, speaking of Jesus, says, “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.” (Rom. 3:25) In I John 2:2, we read, “He [Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”

God's great love made provision for atonement through the blood of Christ. The need for this arose when Adam transgressed the divine law and brought the penalty of death upon himself and his progeny. Not until satisfaction, or propitiation, had been made for his sin could he, or any of his condemned race, be released from the penalty of death. Atonement for sin provided through the blood of Christ, therefore, leads to life for those who accept this gift of God's grace.

TYPICAL ATONEMENT

In the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, where the typical work of sacrifice is described, the word atonement appears seventy-three times. In the

sixteenth chapter of Leviticus, the yearly Atonement Day and its sacrifices are recounted. The nation of Israel received a measure of blessing from these annual services, but they did not provide satisfaction for the sin and its penalty, death, which they inherited from father Adam, so they remained under Adamic condemnation and continued to die.

Paul explains this matter, “The law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.” (Heb. 10:1) Only by being made perfect, free from Adamic condemnation, can one escape the penalty of death. The yearly Atonement Day sacrifices offered by Israel’s typical priesthood did not result in perfection to those who sought benefit from them.

“The law made nothing perfect,” Paul writes, “but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.” (chap. 7:19) This “better hope” is based upon the atoning value of the blood of Christ. His blood is efficacious to assure perfection, and therefore life. This is because his life, which he poured out, and as symbolized by his shed blood, was an exact equivalent of the perfect life of Adam—the life that he forfeited when he sinned against his Creator. Paul emphasizes this basic aspect of the atoning work of Christ by the use of the word “ransom,” saying that the man Christ Jesus gave himself “a ransom for all.”—I Tim. 2:3-6

RECEIVED BY FAITH

God’s love provided atonement for sin through Christ, which in turn, opens the way to life. However,

the mere fact that Jesus died as the Redeemer and Savior of the world does not in itself give life to Adam and his race, for whom the sacrifice was made. Each one of the condemned race who receives life through this provision must believe therein, and individually accept the gift. John 3:16 makes this clear, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Jesus again said, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation [Greek: judgment]; but is passed from death unto life." (chap. 5:24) This is a most comprehensive statement, and can be properly understood only in the light of Jesus' further explanation. In verse 25, he reminds us of the hope of the resurrection, saying, "The hour is coming . . . when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live."

After explaining that he had been given authority to execute judgment, and that it had been given him to have life in himself (vss. 26,27), Jesus again speaks of the resurrection. He states that those who have "done good"—those faithful to God in all ages—shall come forth unto "the resurrection of life." Those who have "done evil"—all others, still more or less entangled in sin—shall come forth unto a resurrection of judgment. (vss. 28,29, *Revised Standard Version*) As explained in verse 24, the faithful believers do not enter into this judgment.

When Jesus said, "He that heareth my word, . . . hath everlasting life," it is clear he meant that they have it upon the basis of faith. This means that God no longer looks upon them as sinners under

condemnation to death, but as perfect in the righteousness of Christ, and having a right to live. However, from the human standpoint, these seem to die like everyone else or, as the thought is expressed in Psalm 82:7, they “die like men.” Actually, as is further explained in this prophecy of the church’s part in the plan of God, they “fall [in death] like one of the princes.”

The Hebrew word here translated “princes” literally means head, and is used in the Old Testament to describe captains and generals in armies, or chief persons in any association. Its literal meaning lends itself to the fact that, in this particular text, the princes referred to are the heads of the human race—Adam, who fell, and Jesus, who will be the head of the regenerated race.

The first prince died as a condemned sinner. The second prince died sacrificially on behalf of the first and his race. He died to provide a way for mankind to come out from under the penalty for sin, which was death. The prophecy states that the “children of the most High” (vs. 6), to whom these words are addressed, seem from the human standpoint to “die like men,” yet actually they “fall like one of the princes.”

They do not fall like prince Adam, because he was under the sentence of death. Through their faith acceptance of the atoning merit of Christ’s blood, these “children” have passed from death unto life, and are no longer under condemnation. They die, therefore, as prince Jesus died—that is, sacrificially. Their life is not taken away from them because of sin. Rather, they lay it down by denying themselves, taking up their cross, and following

Jesus into death. They “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth” and thereby are led into death, even as he was “brought as a lamb to the slaughter.”—Rev. 14:4; Isa. 53:7

A LIVING SACRIFICE

There is much said in the New Testament to indicate that the footstep followers of Jesus are co-sacrificers with him. Paul wrote, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” (Rom. 12:1) It is a “holy” sacrifice, and therefore “acceptable” to God. It is holy because faith in the atoning blood of Christ results in perfection—not actual, but reckoned.

In Romans 6:3-11, Paul reasons the matter out for us in detail, and shows why we are given the privilege of laying down our lives in acceptable sacrifice to God. First, he speaks of it as a baptism, or burial, into Christ’s death—a sacrificial death. He says we are “buried with him by baptism into death.” Paul also states that we have been “planted together in the likeness of his death”—that is, dying like one of the princes.

Paul further explains in verses 6 and 7 that our “old man is crucified with him [Christ], that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin.” The *Marginal Translation* more correctly says, “justified from sin.” These bodies that are “justified from sin” are not, therefore, the “body of sin” that is destroyed, but our own justified bodies that are willingly presented to God as a “living sacrifice.”

What then, is the “body of sin” that is destroyed? *Strong’s Bible Concordance* defines the Greek word translated body as follows: “the body (as a sound whole), used in a very wide application, literally or figuratively.” The body of sin mentioned by Paul is a figurative body—those sinful aspects of character which have been blighting humanity ever since Eden. The atoning work of Jesus opens the way for the destruction of this symbolic body of sin. The death of our justified bodies as a “living sacrifice” is a further aspect of the divine arrangement whereby the evil reign of sin will be overthrown and destroyed.

Paul substantiates this in verse 10. Speaking of the death of Jesus, he says, “He died unto sin once.” In verse 11, he continues, “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin.” There are two key words in this statement—“likewise” and “reckon.” We are planted together in the likeness of Jesus’ death, Paul said earlier, and he now tells us that Jesus’ death was “unto sin.” Jesus was not himself a sinner, and did not die unto sin in his own body. He died unto sin as a “sin offering.”

Likewise, or in the likeness of his death, we die unto sin. With our imperfect bodies we could offer nothing to God in the way of an acceptable sacrifice. In order to be partners with Jesus in the divine plan of reconciling the world to God, we are authorized to reckon, or deem, ourselves to be so doing. We can do this because God reckons us as having passed from death unto life. If we be dead with Christ, our bodies, Paul says, are freed, or justified, from sin’s condemnation. Thus, on the authority of God’s Word, we are privileged to reckon ourselves

as participating in the “better sacrifices” of this age, and in the great sin-offering work.—Heb. 9:23

RANSOM AND SIN OFFERING

When considering God’s plan for man’s atonement, there is a distinct difference of meaning between the words ransom and sin offering. The word ransom as used in the Bible means a “corresponding price.” Thus Paul explains that the “man Christ Jesus . . . gave himself a ransom for all.” (I Tim. 2:5,6) None but a perfect man could do this, for it was the perfect man Adam who sinned and brought death condemnation upon himself and his offspring. Since the undefiled Jesus gave himself a ransom, nothing needs to be, nor can be, added thereto.

A sin offering is simply an offering, or sacrifice, for sin. A sin offering can be anything which God indicates his willingness to accept, and for any purpose which he may design. In connection with the typical Tabernacle services, bullocks and goats were offered for sins, and the Lord accepted them. By God’s design certain blessings accrued to Israel from these offerings. They did not make the offerer perfect, nor give him life. Only the perfect sin offering, combined with a corresponding price, as given by the man Christ Jesus, could do this.

The ransom, a corresponding price, was provided by Jesus, and was the first step taken to give life to Adam and his race. The world must be given a knowledge of this provision, and have an opportunity to accept it. Even after they accept it, however, they will need sympathetic help and understanding in order to bring their lives into harmony with the

righteous principles required of all those who will have the privilege of attaining everlasting life. This second step describes the work and purpose of the sin offering.

It is specifically in this connection that Jesus' footstep followers are invited to share in the work of reconciling the world to God—of bringing mankind into at-one-ment with the Creator that they might live. Paul writes, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." Prior to this statement, he said, "God, who hath reconciled us [Christ's followers] to himself by Jesus Christ," has given unto us the "ministry of reconciliation." Thus we represent Christ as his ambassadors, to give to the world the "word of reconciliation."—II Cor. 5:18-21

This cooperative plan in which the word of reconciliation is entrusted to the footstep followers of Jesus begins during the Gospel Age, while we are still in the flesh. The condition is that we must share the death baptism of Jesus. We must be planted together in the likeness of his death, and suffer with him. This suffering and sacrifice must be on behalf of Christ's body members now, but also for the benefit of the world of mankind during the next age.

Paul wrote, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church." (Col. 1:24) This is a very practical matter. All those who eventually become members in the body of Christ were at one time in the world. The Truth which enlightens and draws them to the Lord is not flashed across the sky, but

ministered to them by those previously enlightened. Because darkness hateth the light, this ministry of the Gospel—the ministry of reconciliation—results in suffering.

Bitter, death-dealing persecution does not always result from bearing witness to the Truth, though it often did in the beginning of the age. Now the hatred of the light is more refined, often taking the form of ostracism and cold indifference. However, faithfulness in the ministry of the Truth will lead to weariness of the flesh. These responsibilities, if faithfully discharged, will mean a measure of mental concern for the interests of the Lord's cause. No true saint of God can ever be content to take life easy when there are brethren to be served, or when the Gospel can be proclaimed to reach those whom the Lord may be calling to become his brethren.

We have a wonderful example of this in the ministry of Paul. What a great deal of suffering was involved in his faithful ministry—stripes, imprisonments, stonings, perils in the sea and in the city, and even perils among false brethren. (II Cor. 11:23-28) All of this, he said, was for Christ's "body's sake, which is the church."

Paul's suffering was not just for the church. In his masterful argument on the necessity of the resurrection, he again speaks of his suffering, and the suffering of all the body members. Why, he asks, are we thus "baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all?" (I Cor. 15:29) Here again Paul is referring to our death baptism, and he says that it is on behalf of the dead—that is, for the eventual benefit of the dead world of mankind.

A SYMPATHETIC PRIESTHOOD

Jesus is the great antitypical high priest, and his footstep followers are clearly shown in the New Testament to be associated with him in the priesthood. (Heb. 3:1; I Pet. 2:5,9) One of the principal functions of Israel's priesthood was the offering of sacrifices. So the priesthood of this age, beginning with Jesus the head, and continuing with his faithful body members, also offer sacrifices—not animal sacrifices, but themselves. Jesus set the example of faithful sacrifice, even unto death, and we are baptized into death with him.

Based upon the sacrifices offered, the priests of Israel extended blessings to the people. For example, at the close of the typical sacrificial service outlined in Leviticus, chapter 9, "Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people, and blessed them." (vs. 22) The antitypical priesthood, composed of Jesus and his church, will, in Messiah's kingdom, be the channel of blessing to all mankind. The blessing they will offer the people will be the opportunity to gain everlasting life made available through the ransoming blood of the Redeemer.

What wisdom and love are revealed in this arrangement! The antitypical priesthood members are the Gospel Age sons of God, and we read that "it became him, for whom are all things, . . . in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." (Heb. 2:10) Jesus had never been imperfect. The thought of the text is that through suffering he was trained or perfected as the "captain" of our salvation.

This training through suffering made Jesus a sympathetic High Priest. Paul wrote, "In that he

himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.” “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”—Heb. 2:18; 4:15,16

These references describe Jesus’ relationship as High Priest to his consecrated followers. The same principle will hold true in the next age in the relationship of the world of mankind to the divine priesthood, made up of Jesus and his glorified church. The entire priesthood is perfected for that high office through suffering, so that when the due time comes, the world will be dealt with sympathetically and understandingly.

ONLY JESUS’ BLOOD

It is Jesus’ blood alone, representing his life poured out, that constitutes the ransom, the corresponding price. However, as we have seen, those who suffer and die with him during the present age are reckoned as having a share in the great sin offering work based upon the ransom. The sacrifice and suffering of Christ’s followers contribute to the future blessing of the world. Because this sacrifice is a part of God’s arrangement for destroying the body of sin and releasing sin-cursed humanity from death, it is properly styled a sin offering. As Paul explains, we, like Jesus, are dying “unto [or, for] sin.”—Rom. 6:10,11

All the sin canceling merit is in the ransom. The church’s share in the sin offering lies in the sacrificial

work of this age which, as we have seen, is designed to prepare us to be the kind of priesthood that will offer the life provided by the ransom under the most favorable circumstances. Thus every painful circumstance we faithfully endure will result beneficially to the world when the life-giving blessings of the ransom are offered to them.

The entire Gospel Age is being utilized in training an understanding, sympathetic, and merciful priesthood, which will carry the healing powers of the ransom to the world. These offer themselves to die with Jesus, that they might share in ridding the world of sin and its blighting effects upon humanity. Their sacrifices and sufferings add nothing to the ransom. They are simply God's way of making the value of the ransom an eternal benefit to the dying race.

God could have perhaps miraculously revealed the truth of the ransom to all mankind, and said, "Accept this provision, or else continue to die." In his great love, however, he has provided this better way. It is a way in which members of the fallen race, touched with the feeling of the world's infirmities and needs, may sympathetically bring the provisions of the ransom to the attention of mankind, and lovingly instruct the people in the ways of life.

Truly we can say with Paul, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!—Rom. 11:33 ■