

Study 35: Leviticus, Part 8 Leviticus 23 Day of Atonement; Tabernacles; Jubilee

Last week, we looked at the feast of Trumpets (the Day of Judgment). We will now examine:

The Day of Atonement 26 The Lord said to Moses, 27 “The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves [i.e., fast], and present a food offering to the Lord. 28 Do not do any work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the Lord your God. 32 From the evening of the ninth day of the month until the following evening you are to observe your sabbath.”

You will remember that two goats were used in the Day of Atonement ceremony. They were placed beside each other in front of the High Priest, and lots were used to determine the fate of each goat. According to the Babylonian Talmud,¹ the lots were stones, the one for the Lord being white, while the one for Azazel was black. The High Priest would put his hands into the container that held the lots and take one in each hand. (Of course, he did this without looking). If the white one (i.e. the one “for the Lord”) came up in his *right* hand, it was considered an auspicious sign. This lot determined the goat that was to be sacrificed as a sin offering. The other lot signified which goat would carry the sins of the people away into the wilderness (called, in some translations, the “scapegoat”). In order to insure that the goats didn’t get mixed up, the one selected “for Azazel” (the “scapegoat”), the custom arose of tying a crimson strip made of wool to one of its horns [cp. Jesus clad in a scarlet robe]. A portion of this strip was then taken and attached to the door of the temple. It often happened that after the sacrifices were completed and the goat had been taken to the wilderness, the piece attached to the door of temple would turn from crimson to white, recalling **Isa 1:18**: “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”

The Talmud refers to supernatural signs that began **40 years** (one generation) before the destruction of the temple: “During the last forty years before the destruction of the Temple the lot [‘For the Lord’] did not come up in the right hand; nor did the crimson-coloured [strip] become white; nor did the westernmost light shine; and the doors of the [temple] would open by themselves....” (Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 39b).² The westernmost light refers to one of the lamps of the menorah (the one closest to the Holy of Holies), which was a kind of “eternal flame,” and was used to light the other lamps when evening came.³ The temple doors opening by themselves is also attested to by Josephus,⁴ and was interpreted by the Rabbis as a sign that the temple was going to be destroyed.

The goat “for Azazel” was led out the Eastern Gate, traveling from the west to the east (the land of being lost and forgotten). **Ps 103:12** says, “as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” We should be glad God didn’t say “north” and “south,” because eventually one becomes the other. Whereas if you’re traveling east, it never becomes west, and vice-versa. This goat was supposed to be let go, but in later times, the one leading it out into the wilderness was

¹ The Talmud contains the Mishnah and the Gemara. The Mishnah (also called the “Oral Torah”) contained what the New Testament calls the “traditions of the elders” (Matt 15:2), and contained the teachings of the Pharisees that developed during the second temple period (536 BC – AD 70). This was the “fence” the Pharisees attempted to erect around the Torah to prevent even coming close to violating its commandments. The Gemara is the commentary on the Mishnah. There are two Talmuds: the Jerusalem (or Palestinian), and the Babylonian (the larger of the two, was begun during the Babylonian captivity). The Jerusalem Talmud predates the Babylonian by about 200 years.

² The Jerusalem (or Palestinian) Talmud concurs: “Forty years before the destruction of the Temple, the western light went out, the crimson thread remained crimson, and the lot for the Lord always came up in the left hand. They would close the gates of the Temple by night and get up in the morning and find them wide open” (Jacob Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel, Volume 14: Yoma*, p.176).

³ According to the ‘Ask a Rabbi’ page of the Jewish Answers website: “The westernmost of the lights in the menorah burned perpetually (Talmud Shabbat 22b). (The menorah stood against the south wall of the tabernacle, so the westernmost light was the one on the right end.) The Talmud says that the westernmost light burned perpetually to demonstrate that the Divine Presence dwelt in the Tabernacle. Aaron relit all the lights in the menorah every evening, but the westernmost light was the only one that was still burning when he refilled it with oil and trimmed its wick. The oil that Aaron put in the menorah was only enough to burn all night; the fact that the westernmost light lasted until the next night was miraculous.” See: <http://www.jewishanswers.org/ask-the-rabbi-714/the-eternal-light/?p=714>.

⁴ “At the same festival [Passover]...the Eastern gate of the inner [court of the] Temple, which was of brass, and vastly heavy, and had been with difficulty shut by twenty men, and rested upon a basis armed with iron, and had bolts fastened very deep into the firm floor, which was there made of one entire stone, was seen to be opened of its own accord about the sixth hour of the night. Now those that kept watch in the temple came hereupon running to the captain of the temple, and told him of it; who then came up thither, and not without great difficulty was able to shut the gate again. This also appeared to the vulgar to be a very happy prodigy, as if God did thereby open them the gate of happiness. But the men of learning understood it, that the security of their holy house was dissolved of its own accord, and that the gate was opened for the advantage of their enemies. So these publicly declared that the signal foreshowed the desolation that was coming upon them.” (*The Wars of the Jews* 6.5.3).

required to kill it by pushing it off a cliff (a perversion of the Scriptures, and typical of the “traditions of men” which Jesus so roundly condemned).

In **Lev 16:17**, it says: “No one is to be in the tent of meeting from the time [the high priest] goes in to make atonement in the Most Holy Place **until he comes out, having made atonement for himself, his household and the whole community of Israel.**”

Until the High Priest returned from the Holy of Holies, atonement was incomplete. This is why the entire congregation waited in silence for him to return. In **Rev 8:1**, it says, “When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.” It is after this that the judgment of the “prostitute” (KJV: “harlot”) begins. A careful study of the word “prostitute” in Scripture will reveal that this term (when not speaking of a *literal* prostitute) refers to **Israel’s** unfaithfulness to the Lord, usually its practice of idolatry. God’s New Covenant people (Israel) were waiting for their High Priest, Jesus, to return from the true Holy of Holies (in heaven), and announce their completed atonement. Not merely “atonement,” though, which is only a “covering over,” but total and complete *salvation*. Hebrews, chapter 9 speaks of the Day of Atonement work of Christ, and the presentation of His own blood in the heavenly Holy of Holies. **Heb 9:28** says, “Christ was sacrificed once to **take away** the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but **to bring salvation** to those who are waiting for him.” So, here’s a question to consider: If Christ has not yet returned, do “those who are waiting for him” have salvation yet? Note that “atonement” is simply a *covering* of sin, not an elimination of it. It’s like using a credit card. It covers the debt, but that debt still has to be *paid* for at some time in the future.

Deut 18:15 says, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me [Moses] from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.” So, we can look at Moses and see Jesus. Remember when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai bringing the tables of the Law with him? What did he see going on in the camp? Idolatry. After cleansing the camp, Moses interceded for the people for 40 days. Then God called him back up the mountain where he remained another 40 days. When he returned (with his face shining like the sun), it was the 10th of Tishri, the Day of Atonement, and he brought a *new* copy of the covenant, and announced that God has forgiven them.

In like manner, when Jesus condescended to come to Earth, He found that Israel had made the Law into an idol. After He was resurrected, He stayed around another 40 days, then ascended to heaven. He promised to return within that generation (40 years, e.g. Matt 24:34, etc.), to bring judgment upon physical Israel for their violation of the covenant, to bring that covenant to an end, and to announce that God had forgiven His people (covenantal/spiritual Israel). Once He had returned, they could then celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. It should be noted here that the Year of Jubilee (Lev 25) was also proclaimed on the Day of Atonement. This is when all land returned to its rightful owner. Adam had lost the Earth to Satan, and now, at the return of Christ, it reverted to its rightful Owner.

Feast of Tabernacles (Booths/Ingathering) 33 The Lord said to Moses, 34 “Say to the Israelites: ‘On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the Lord’s Festival of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days. 35 The first day is a sacred assembly; do no regular work. 36 For seven days present food offerings to the Lord, and **on the eighth day** hold a sacred assembly and present a food offering to the Lord. It is the closing special assembly; do no regular work. [...] 39 “So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the Lord for seven days; the first day is a day of sabbath rest, and the eighth day also is a day of sabbath rest. 40 On the first day you are to take branches from luxuriant trees—from palms, willows and other leafy trees—and **rejoice** before the Lord your God for seven days. 41 Celebrate this as a festival to the Lord for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come; celebrate it in the seventh month. 42 Live in temporary shelters for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in such shelters 43 so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in temporary shelters when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.”

It is my opinion (note that this is only my *opinion*) that the first day of this feast is when Jesus was born. I cannot prove it from Scripture, which is why this is only my opinion. However, I think it would certainly have been an *appropriate* time for Jesus to have been brought into this world. John 1:14 says, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” The Greek word used for “made his dwelling” means “pitched a tent,” or “put up a tabernacle.” The 8th day of this feast would have coincided with Jesus’ circumcision.

The Feast of Tabernacles signaled the *end* of the harvest season, so it was also known as the Feast of **Ingathering**. Whereas in the Feast of Firstfruits, the message was one of new beginnings, the Feast of Tabernacles represents a “time of the end,” what the King James Version unfortunately translates as “the end of the world.” It is more accurately translated as “the end of the **age**” (see, e.g.: **Matt 13:39**, the parable of the wheat and tares: “. . . . The **harvest** is the **end of the age**, and the harvesters are angels”). This “end time” would bring great joy to God’s people, but for those that were His enemies, suffering and death.

Many things are associated with the harvest, or “the end of the age,” in Scripture. There was to be a judgment, a resurrection of the dead (what theologians call the “general resurrection,” i.e. the resurrection of the saints), and, perhaps most important of all, the full manifestation of the New Covenant (which, at that time, they had only “by faith”). **Rev 14:14-20** speaks of this harvest:

Rev 14: 14 I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man [Dan 7:13] with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. 15 Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, “Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth [*land*] is ripe.” 16 So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth [*land*], and the earth [*land*] was harvested.

17 Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. 18 Still another angel, who had charge of the **fire**, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, “Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth’s [*land’s*] vine, because its grapes are ripe.” 19 The angel swung his sickle on the earth [*land*], gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God’s wrath. 20 They were trampled in the winepress outside **the city**, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses’ bridles⁵ for a distance of **1,600 stadia**.⁶

After rejoicing in the final harvest, there was to be a day of rest, a sabbath – the 8th day. Hebrews 4 spoke of this:

1 Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. 2 For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did [speaking of those who experienced the Exodus]; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed [or: *because those who heard did not combine it with faith*].

8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. 9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. 11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

Joshua, not Moses, brought the people into the Promised Land. After they had crossed over the Jordan River, the Lord said, “Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you” (Josh 5:9). Notice that it was not until the people had *entered* the Promised Land that their “reproach” (sin) was “rolled away” (cleansed).

This is a picture of life in the New Covenant. We have ceased from our works (regulations, ordinances, sacrifices), because Jesus has fulfilled it all! There are some who make the very grave error of assuming that parts of the Old Covenant have yet to be fulfilled. If that were true, we would still be held accountable for that covenant, for as Jesus said:

“For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until **everything is accomplished [fulfilled]**.” (Matt 5:18).

Around the 10th century AD, the Jews created a celebration they called “Simchat Torah,” or “Rejoicing with the Torah,” and was scheduled to take place the day after the Feast of Tabernacles. It celebrated the completion of the yearly cycle of Torah readings, and the beginning of the new cycle. Although this is a later tradition, and not found in Scripture, I thought it was interesting that at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles, there was a time of rejoicing with the Word of God, whom we know as Jesus (John 1:1)!

Lev 23 37 (“These are the Lord’s appointed festivals, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies for bringing food offerings to the Lord—the burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings required for each day. 38 These offerings are in addition to those for the Lord’s Sabbaths and in addition to your gifts and whatever you have vowed and all the freewill offerings you give to the Lord). [...] 44 So Moses announced to the Israelites the appointed festivals of the Lord.

⁵ To take this language literally is to mistake its meaning, and to ignore the way language was commonly used in describing significant events. The Jewish commentary, Midrash Rabbah [Lamentations](#), referring to Hadrian’s attack on the city of Bethar, near Jerusalem, says that the Romans “slew the inhabitants until the horses waded in blood up to the nostrils, and the blood rolled along stones...and flowed into the sea” (which was over 37 miles away). Note that this was describing a *past* event.

⁶ The Jews spoke of the land of Israel as being a square, 1600 stadia (about 180 miles) long and wide (see *Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible*, comment on [Rev 14:20](#)).

Note: We must be careful not to apply our Greek-style thinking to the ancient Middle Eastern-type of language. For example, what do we think of when we read the promise to Abraham of seed as numerous as the “stars of heaven,” and “the sand of the sea”? Yet, look at what Moses said to the people just before they crossed over into the Promised Land:

Deut 1:10 The Lord your God has increased your numbers so that **today you are as numerous as the stars in the sky.**

Deut 10:22 Your ancestors who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and **now** the Lord your God has made you **as numerous as the stars in the sky.**

Homework: Article: *An Air of Expectancy* – phone number attached for those who have questions.