

The Day of Atonement

Moses then gave the law of animal sacrifices to cleanse a whole community from sin. Many different animals were required, depending on the purpose of the sacrifice, but so often it had to be two he-goats and a lamb without blemish, or they would not be acceptable as a sacrifice by God. (Leviticus chapter 16 v 10 Exodus 12 v 5 and Numbers chapter 12 v 46 refer to these).

There were many times of festivities and feasts that required sacrifices, we shall turn our attention to two main times of sacrifice, the first is the feast of the Passover, when the Angel of God killed all the first-born sons and animals of the Egyptians, but because of their obedience to His instructions, none of the Hebrew people was harmed. At this time they were told to sacrifice a lamb without blemish, roast it and put some of its blood which had to be drained out before cooking, on the door posts and the lintel.

When the Angel of Death visited that place, everyone in the houses which had the blood of the lamb on the door posts would be completely unharmed. Death however would come to all the people who did not have this sign on the entrance to their homes. Those who did were instructed to eat the lamb in a hurry, and to leave nothing until the following day. This indicated that the work of the Messiah at the end of His life would be accomplished quickly (Exodus chapter 12 v 21 - 46).

Before the festival and the atonement sacrifices could begin, it had to be established what the priest and high priest would wear and do. One of the things that had to be worn was a long white garment, symbolising purity, tied at the waist with a long girdle. At the bottom of this garment, all around the hem were bells. If the sacrifice offered by the priest or high priest was in any way blemished, that priest or high priest would be struck dead.

The people outside would know that something had been wrong, when they could no longer hear the bells jingling as the priest moved around in the tent of meeting, they would then grab hold of the girdle which was long enough to reach outside the tent of meeting and pull the priest out dead. If the priest or high priest came out of the tent alive and well, they would immediately know that the sacrifice had been accepted by God and their sin atoned for.

The Day of Atonement - which was to cleanse the whole community, purify them and make them right in the sight of God, required the sacrifice of two goats. One to be sacrificed in the first section of the tent of meeting, the other to be sent out into the wilderness after the appointed High Priest had laid his hands on its head and confessed the sins of the whole community over it, symbolically transferring their sin to the goat which would then be sent out into the wilderness, thus taking away sin from the camp (Leviticus chapter 16 v 1 - 10).

The sacrifice of a bull, ram or lamb - for the sins of the community would be offered inside the tent of meeting, and its blood sprinkled on the sides of the altar and on the mercy seat. God promised that if this were done correctly, when He looked down on the community He would see the blood of the unblemished sacrifice on the mercy seat and this would atone for the sins of the community. This however, had to be repeated

once every year as the people continued to sin. It was commanded that these sacrifices had to be offered "between the two evenings".

According to the division of the Jewish day, which began at 6 am between the two evenings means approximately the ninth hour (Exodus chapter 12) not 9 am or nine pm but at the ninth hour, which would be 3 pm by our measure of daytime. All these things were effective in the short term, but were signs of things to come that would be effective forever.

Now its time to look at how many of these requirements Jesus met in order to redeem us. Firstly, it is clearly stated that the child born of Mary was conceived by The Holy Spirit, God Himself. It was the seed of Eve (the woman) who nurtured and gave birth to Him. Matthew chapter 1 v 16 gives the ancestry of Jesus through Joseph, the man chosen to be like a father to Jesus on earth, and Luke chapter 3 v 13 - 28 gives the ancestry of Jesus on Mary's side.

Both agree that the ancestry of Jesus goes back to the tribe of Judah. Having said all this, we must go forward now to see how Jesus acted as our High Priest, sacrificial lamb and scapegoat so that we could escape the wrath of God. Before ministering as High Priest of the whole community, the High Priest was instructed to bathe and put on linen clothing. Through reading what Jesus did with His disciples on the night of His last supper with them, we can clearly see that Jesus did bathe and put on linen clothing (John chapter 15 v 1 - 15).

Later Jesus was brought before Pilate on false charges, and led out of the city to be crucified. Like the scapegoat He had to be led outside the camp, and Jesus was taken outside the city wall (John chapter 19 v 17). Then He had rammed on His head a crown of thorns and would have without doubt been confessing the sin of Israel and the sin of the whole community and indeed the whole world (Matthew chapter 27 v 27 and John chapter 19 verses 22 - 24).