

LESSON 6: THE DAILY SACRIFICE

Review:

Lessons One, Two, & Three - The purpose of the sanctuary is to remove the barriers of sin and guilt that keep us from face-to-face communion with God. The courtyard illustrates the means of forgiveness the Lord offers those willing to trust Him.

Lessons Four & Five - The holy place, the first apartment of the tabernacle, illustrates God's provision of the Holy Spirit, the scriptures, and the privilege of prayer. Through the daily services of the sanctuary the guilt of sin was placed first upon the sacrificial victim, and then lodged in the sanctuary itself. This atoned for the sinner, but defiled the sanctuary.

THE daily services we looked at in our last lesson were the foundation of all that was done in the sanctuary. Without these rites, sinners would have been left hopelessly conscious-smitten before the Lord. But God was "reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19) and He sought to inspire faith in human hearts that He still loved them and would accept their love in return. The iniquities and guilt which had separated them could be removed through faith, and at-one-ment would be restored.

Just as that work formed the greatest portion of the sanctuary's operation, so the message of forgiveness through Christ is the central concept of God's message to the world. This must never be displaced. But, still—there is more.

1. What was the most holy place like?

A lot like the holy place, in terms of its construction, since the same curtains and wall panels were used in both. It was, however, smaller—only half as long as the holy place—and in the form of a cube, ten cubits long, wide, and high. None but the high priest were ever permitted to enter its premises, and that only briefly on a single day of the year.

2. What was in it?

***Exodus 25:10–22** - And they shall make an ark of acacia wood; two and a half cubits shall be its length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height. And you shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it.... And you shall put into the ark the Testimony which I will give you. You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold; two and a half cubits shall be its length and a cubit and a half its width. And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat.... And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat. You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the Testimony that I will give you. And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony.*

The ark was essentially a wooden box, covered with gold, with a solid gold lid. Rising from this were two cherubim, hammered out of the single lump. It was a beautiful piece of workmanship, but its value and importance were not so much its construction as its contents and its use. Under the mercy seat, were the two tablets of God's holy law, and between the cherubim was the Shekinah glory, the visible presence of God.

3. If the daily services in the courtyard and holy place provided forgiveness, what was the point of the most holy place?

***Exodus 25:8–10, 22** - And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it. And they shall make an ark of acacia wood.... And there I will meet with you.*

Of all the various parts and pieces of the sanctuary, the first one God gave plans for was the ark of the covenant. The ark is the dwelling place of the Shekinah, the throne of God. The most holy place was “most holy” because of the ark.

4. So God lived in the most holy place, but all the services went on elsewhere?

Leviticus 16:2–3 - The LORD said to Moses: “Tell Aaron your brother not to come at just any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat. Thus Aaron shall come into the Holy Place....”

Almost all the services went on in the courtyard and the holy place. But there was one day a year when the focus shifted to the most holy place. This is what the Jews called Yom Kippur, or “The Day of Atonement.” Actually, because of its supreme importance, over time it came to be known as simply “The Day.”

Leviticus 16:29–34 - This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month... [the priest] shall make atonement for the Holy Sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tabernacle of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. This shall be an everlasting statute for you, to make atonement for the children of Israel, for all their sins, once a year.

5. Didn't the daily sacrifices make atonement? Why have a whole extra occasion for something that's already been done?

A very good question, but one to just keep in mind for right now, because we're not ready to answer it yet.

6. What actually happened on Yom Kippur?

The Biblical description of the ceremony is found in Leviticus 16. Remember that with only a single exception near the end of the day, all the rites were carried out by the high priest. For the sake of space, the following list does not include the five times the high priest bathed and put on clean clothes, nor the ten times he washed his hands and feet.

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest:

- A. Performed all the regular morning rituals of the continual burnt offering, the trimming of the wicks on the lampstand, and the offering of incense in the holy place.
- B. Changed clothes, taking off his special garments, and putting on a pure white set of clothes much like those worn by regular priests, but made of more costly material.
- C. Confessed his own sins and those of his household on the head of a bull which was to be sacrificed.
- D. Accepted from the people two white goats, as perfect and nearly identical as possible. Lots were cast to decide which of the goats would become the “Lord's goat,” and which would be the scapegoat.
- E. Sacrificed the bull and caught its blood in a bowl.
- F. Entered the most holy place with two handfuls of incense and a censer filled with coals from the altar of burnt offering. The smoke from the incense provided a fragrant cloud which would partially shield him from the radiance of the Shekinah. The censer was left on the ground in front of the ark.
- G. Retrieved the bull's blood from the courtyard and returned to the most holy place. This blood was sprinkled once on the mercy seat and seven times before the ark.
- H. Returned to the courtyard and sacrificed the “Lord's goat,” catching its blood in a bowl. He then went the third time into the most holy place, and sprinkled the blood of the goat as he had that of the bull.
- I. Passed through the holy place, making atonement for the golden altar of incense and the separating veil with the blood of the bull and the goat, now mixed together in a single bowl.
- J. Left the tabernacle and went to the altar of burnt offering where he applied the blood of the sacrifices to the horns of the altar and sprinkled blood on the altar itself.

K. Confessed the guilt of all the sins of the people—just now removed from the sanctuary—over the head of the scapegoat, and turned the goat over to a “ready” man who was to take it away into the wilderness.

L. Completed the services of the day by offering the normal evening burnt offerings and seeing to the proper disposal of the various animals which had been earlier sacrificed.

7. That’s all very interesting... but is it important?

Are the day and ceremony important in a literal sense? No, for two reasons: First, because the ceremonial system ended at the death of Christ in A.D. 31, and second, because the ceremony hasn’t even been performed since Rome destroyed the temple in A.D. 70.

But those two points don’t affect the larger message that the ceremony symbolized. Notice this verse:

Leviticus 16:33 - *[The high priest] shall make atonement for the Holy Sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tabernacle of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly.*

Notice this point: the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement were directed first towards making atonement for the sanctuary. But not just the sanctuary in general, but only those parts which had played a role in the earlier process of atoning for the sins of the people—the priesthood, the ark of the covenant, the veil, the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering.

And yet, at the end of the day, God’s list of the “atoned-for” includes all of the above, plus “all the people of the assembly.”

Somehow, the atonement for the sanctuary also affected the people, even though they had already been atoned for through the daily offerings. And this result was important enough that God required the people to take a keen interest in the proceedings:

Leviticus 23:27–28 - *Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement.*

God took this very seriously. Anyone who didn’t “afflict his soul” was to be “cut off from his people,” and anyone who worked was to be “destroy[ed] from among his people.”

8. OK, it seems important to God, but I don’t understand how it’s important to me...

Let’s put another piece of the puzzle on the table where we can see it.

Leviticus 14:53 - *Then he shall... make atonement for the house, and it shall be clean.*

Leviticus 16:30 - *The priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the LORD.*

Numbers 8:21 - *Aaron made atonement for them to cleanse them.*

Ezekiel 43:20 - *You shall cleanse it and make atonement for it.*

Notice how cleansing is equated with atonement. If a house is atoned for, it is clean. If the people are atoned for, they are clean. In Numbers, it was the Levites; in Ezekiel, it was the altar. Atonement equals cleansing. Now read from the book of Daniel:

Daniel 8:14–17 - *And he said to me, “For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.” Then it happened, when I, Daniel, had seen the vision and was seeking the meaning, that suddenly there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. And I heard a man’s voice between the banks of the Ulai, who called, and said, “Gabriel, make this man understand the vision.” So he came near where I stood, and when he came I was afraid and fell on my face; but he said to me, “Understand, son of man, that the vision refers to the time of the end.”*

The book of Daniel, along with the related material from the book of Revelation, is some of the most fascinating the Bible has to offer.

While we can't look at all the details right now, two things are obvious: the sanctuary is going to be cleansed, and it's going to happen in the time of the end.

From what we just learned about atonement and cleansing, we could just as easily say the sanctuary will be "atoned for" in the time of the end. But the only way the sanctuary was ever "atoned for" was through the ceremony of the Day of Atonement. So that means there will be a Day of Atonement in the time of the end.

But the sanctuary was destroyed in A.D. 70, so how can that be? Is the Jerusalem temple going to be rebuilt, as some people expect? Will there then be a ceremony with bulls, lambs, and sheep?

But wait! Jesus disowned the temple before He died. He said, "Your house is left unto you desolate." (Matthew 23:38) And the meaning of the sacrifices ended with the death of Christ. How can there be a Day of Atonement ceremony with animal sacrifices? Wouldn't that be denying the that Jesus was the "Lamb of God"?

9. So... is there going to be a sanctuary to be cleansed at the end time or not?

Do you remember Lesson Two, where we followed the sanctuary down through history? Where did we end up? With the sanctuary in heaven!

***Hebrews 8:1-2** - Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.*

***Hebrews 9:24** - For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.*

Let's look at this a bit more closely. If there is a sanctuary in heaven that is to be cleansed in a last-days Day of Atonement, we should be able to find the things involved in that cleansing—the priesthood, the ark of the covenant, the veil, the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering. Let's see what we can find.

High Priest:

***Hebrews 8:1** - Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.*

Regular Priests:

***Revelation 20:6** - Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection.... They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.*

The Ark:

***Revelation 11:19** - Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple.*

The Veil:

***Hebrews 6:19** - This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever.*

The Altar of Incense:

***Revelation 8:3** - Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.*

The Altar of Burnt Offering:

Revelation 14:18 - And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire.

10. But all these things are in heaven. Does anything in heaven need to be atoned for? Does anything in heaven need to be cleansed?

Hebrews 9:23 - Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these ["the blood of calves and goats"], but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

11. We're not talking about anything physical, like mud or dust. What makes these things "dirty"?

Let's go back to a thought we covered in Lesson Three. We were talking about the white curtain around the courtyard, and how it represents Jesus' plan for His people to be a "glorious church."

Ephesians 5:27 - That He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

This isn't just because Christ thinks it would be a nice thing. This is important! He needs His church to serve as "Exhibit A" to the rest of the universe:

Ephesians 3:10 - Now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,

This is a special need that can only be filled by the church. He needs His church to show the rest of His creation—the principalities and powers in the heavenly places—His wisdom in the plan of salvation. And the biggest question mark in that regard is the question of bringing sinners to heaven and making them immortal.

1 John 1:9 - Down through the centuries Jesus has forgiven innumerable sinners, but He has also been making some pretty incredible promises.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Ezekiel 37:23 - They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will... cleanse them. Then they shall be My people, and I will be their God.

The problem, as you might have guessed, is that God's promises haven't all been, shall we say, "verified" just yet. How many people do you know who have been cleansed "from all unrighteousness"? For that matter, how many people can God point to, and say "They shall not defile themselves anymore... with any of their transgressions"?

Can you see why the sanctuary, God's system of forgiveness, is contaminated by the confessed and forgiven sins of His people, and why it needs to be "cleansed"? Can you see why the "principalities and powers in the heavenly places" need to see the "manifold wisdom of God"? Can you see why it needs to be "made known by the church"?

12. Is all this really possible? After all, we're only human.

Hebrews 6:1 - Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.

This verse acknowledges the "foundation" of Christianity, "repentance from dead works and... faith toward God," but then says, "Now let's put up the building!"

Now, look where the passage takes us in order to build on the foundation-

Hebrews 6:19-20 - This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever.

This is most holy place language, through and through. Where Jesus, our "forerunner" has gone, He invites us to follow. As Gabriel told Daniel, the vision of the cleansing of the sanctuary is for the time of the end. But that is like the old saying, that you always find things the last place you look for them. That makes sense, because it's really foolish to keep looking after you've found what you're looking for.

The time of the end is like that. The reason the “cleansing of the sanctuary” is at the time of the end is just that God can’t end the plan of salvation until the sanctuary is cleansed.

Hebrews 9:11–14 - *But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*

God needs this demonstration of a cleansed sanctuary and a cleansed people to “make manifest” His wisdom to the universe. Only then can He move forward with His plans for the rest of eternity. If that thought doesn’t make the sanctuary important to God’s people, nothing will.

Lesson Summary:

- At the center of the most holy place, indeed the entire sanctuary, was the Law of God.
- God's presence was manifested in the most holy place.
- Even though the people had been atoned for through the daily sacrifice, the Day of Atonement, also provided atonement for the sanctuary and the people.
- The Day of Atonement points to a time in which the record of sin will be cleansed from the heavenly sanctuary. At the same time people on earth will likewise be cleansed from their sins.

My Response:

It is my desire to be a part of that cleansed people whose lives will give glory to God.

Next Lesson: The Big Picture