

The Day of Atonement and YOUR Future

Most people have not heard of the Day of Atonement. Many who have don't understand it properly. Yet this Day reveals a wonderfully positive truth.

By George M. Kackos

Scene one: A young woman walks through a semitropical garden filled with beautiful trees loaded with luscious fruit. Everything looks so good — so right.

But is it?

Suddenly she is confronted by a talking serpent who asks about God's commands. Subtly, the serpent reasons with her until she decides to eat the fruit forbidden her by her Creator. Her husband then follows her example of disobedience.

From that time forward, mankind continues to be subject to Satan's influence. Consequently, all humans sin and fall short of God's glory.

Scene two: A young man, once strong and virile, is nailed to a stake. Blood oozes from deep, gaping lacerations in His body, wounds inflicted by a savage beating. Tormentors surround Him, arrogantly jeering, "He can save others, but not Himself!"

But the man's mind is not on revenge; it is on the ultimate purpose of His suffering, which is to provide the sacrifice necessary for mankind's salvation.

Finally, after many hours of suffering, death comes suddenly. Three days later He is resurrected. He rejoins His Father, where He serves as High Priest and soon-coming King for all humanity.

Scene three: The earth has been devastated. Plant and aquatic life are almost nonexistent. The human population has been reduced to a small fraction of its former size by the terrifying events of the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord.

Everywhere there is destruction, but there is also hope. Jesus Christ has intervened in world affairs. One obstacle remains — the presence of Satan the devil, mankind's enemy for 6,000 years.

To eliminate this threat to global peace, an angel is sent to bind Satan. Satan is taken to a place of restraint where he is prohibited from influencing mankind for a thousand years.

Is there a relationship between these scenes? The answer is yes. There is a profound relationship that can be understood by studying the meaning of one of God's annual festivals — the Day of Atonement.

This Day is commanded

Most professing Christians don't even know that this Festival of God exists. Many who have heard of it think that it is no longer to be kept. But what does God say?

"And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: '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, to make atonement for you before the Lord your God. . . . You shall do no manner of work; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings' " (Lev. 23:26-28, 31).

This year the Day of Atonement falls on September 17.

Some will reason that this command ceased to be in force after Christ's crucifixion. Such reasoning is false! Jesus Christ did not come to nail God's annual Holy Days to the cross (Matt. 5:17-18).

The fact is that God's festivals have only begun to be fulfilled. These days picture aspects of God's plan of salvation (Col. 2:16-17), and must be observed by true Christians.

For more information on God's true Holy Days and what each one pictures, write for our free booklet *Pagan Holidays — or God's Holy Days — Which?*

But what about the ritualistic laws that the Old Testament commanded with festival observance? Are they to be kept, or have they been fulfilled?

The purpose of the physical rituals God gave to ancient Israel was to remind the people of the need for the payment of their sins. The various sacrifices pointed ahead to the sacrifice of One who would come later in history as Savior of all mankind.

So the ritualistic laws were ful-

filled by the events leading to and including Christ's own sacrificial death. Therefore they need not be kept today, nor can they be, as there is no Aaronic priesthood to perform these physical duties (Heb. 9:8-10, 10:1-4, 9-12).

The ritualistic laws are no longer performed, but their various aspects still have symbolic meaning. For each festival, we seek to understand all the festival's meanings, as revealed in the Bible, as they relate to salvation.

The Tabernacle and the priesthood

Before we proceed with a study of these rituals and symbols, it is necessary for us to understand some things about the Tabernacle and the priesthood.

After making the covenant agreement with Israel, God told the nation to build a Tabernacle, which is a physical type of God's habitation in heaven (Ex. 25-27, 30, Heb. 9:23-24). The Tabernacle consisted of an enclosed courtyard, containing an altar for animal sacrifices and a tent.

The tent was divided into two sections by a veil. The section behind the veil was called the "Most Holy" place or "Holiest of All." The other section was the "holy place" (Ex. 26:33, Heb. 9:3). The most holy place represented God's throne. Located here was the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the Ten Commandments and other items (Deut. 10:2, 31:26, Ex. 16:33-34, Num. 17:1-10). The lid of the Ark was called the mercy seat; this was where God manifested Himself (Ex. 25:22).

The job of high priest was given to Aaron; his sons served as priests. As time passed, other of his descendants held these positions. As priests, they performed various animal sacrifices and ceremonies on behalf of Israel.

Rituals for Aaron

On the Day of Atonement, special animal sacrifices and ceremonies were conducted. These are explained in Leviticus 16.

This was the only day when Aaron was allowed to enter the

most holy place. Before doing this, he had to bathe and dress himself in his priestly garments (Lev. 16:4). Then he had to offer on the altar a bullock as a sin offering for himself.

Once this was completed, he took a censer, a vessel that held burning coals, from the altar and entered the most holy place. He then took incense, an aromatic compound, and placed it on the burning coals. Next he sprinkled blood from the bullock on the mercy seat, which represented God's throne (verses 11-14).

Why did Aaron do these things? What did they picture? Aaron had to first make atonement for himself as a sinning human before God. The word *atonement* means "to make at one with."

Washing himself pictured having his conscience changed to accept God's standard of righteousness (Heb. 10:22). His linen coat symbolized living a righteous life (Rev. 19:8). The incense pictured prayers ascending to God (Ps. 141:2, Rev. 5:8). The blood represented the way sins are forgiven (Heb. 9:13-14, Rom. 3:25).

Aaron, the high priest, was a type of Jesus Christ, who is now our High Priest (Heb. 3:1). By living a sinless life, Jesus qualified to offer Himself as a sin sacrifice for all humanity through His crucifixion.

After Jesus' death, the veil in the Temple (the Temple had replaced the Tabernacle) was torn in two from top to bottom (Matt. 27:50-51). The torn veil represented the fact that we are now allowed direct contact with God the Father through prayer (Heb. 10:19-22, John 16:23).

This contact is something that those living before Christ's resurrection did not have; their access was limited to the Word of God, the God of the Old Testament who became Jesus Christ.

The two goats

Now that Aaron had completed sacrifices for himself, what happened next?

"The two goats he must place

in front of the Eternal at the entrance to the Trysting tent [Tabernacle]; Aaron shall cast lots over the goats, one lot for the Eternal and the other for Azazel the demon; the goat that falls by lot to the Eternal shall be brought forward and offered as a sin-offering, but the goat that falls by lot to Azazel shall be set free in presence of the Eternal, that Aaron may perform expiatory rites over it and send it away for Azazel into the desert" (Lev. 16:7-10, Moffatt).

Whom did this slain goat, whose blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat and the altar for the sins of the people (Lev. 16:15-19), represent? The answer is Christ, who was slain and whose blood was shed for the forgiveness of our sins (Heb. 9:12, 22-26).

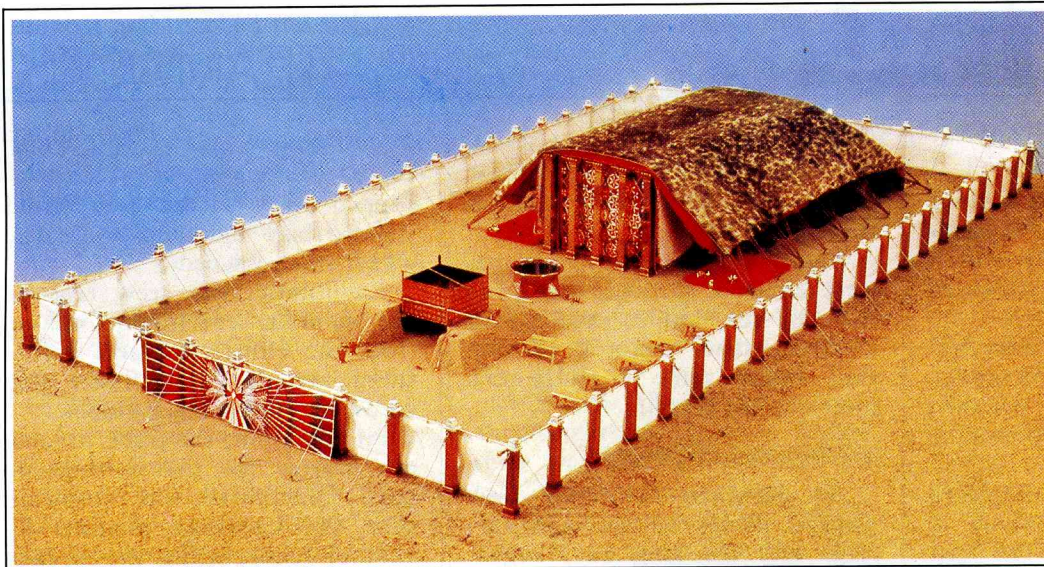
But Christ's death has not completed the job of making atonement for the sins of humanity. Why? Because Satan, the god of this world, has blinded the minds of most people. Consequently, mankind rejects the true Gospel, which includes accepting the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and living a righteous life (II Cor. 4:3-4, Rev. 12:9).

So how will the job of atonement be completed? How will mankind be made at one with God?

The answer is revealed through the symbolism of the live goat — the *azazel*, in Hebrew.

Says *The Comprehensive Commentary*: "[According to] the oldest opinions of the Hebrews and Christians . . . Azazel is the name of the Devil . . . the word signified the goat which went away." The *azazel* was the goat that was sent into the wilderness.

This *azazel* is sometimes referred to as the "escape goat" or "scapegoat." But these terms make the meaning unclear. *Scapegoat* has come to mean "one who bears blame or guilt for others." This is not the case with Satan. He is guilty of influencing mankind into disobeying God (Eph. 2:2). And he will be punished for it — Satan will bear his



Artist's rendering (left) shows the Tabernacle in the form of a model. The Tabernacle was a physical type of God's habitation in heaven. Below, a diagram of the layout of the Tabernacle.

Model from The Tabernacle of God in the Wilderness of Sinai by Paul F. Kiene. © 1976 Verlag Hermann Schulte Wetzlar. © 1977 Zondervan Corp. Used by permission. Diagram by Gary Klar.

own guilt! He will not be allowed to escape.

Satan to be bound

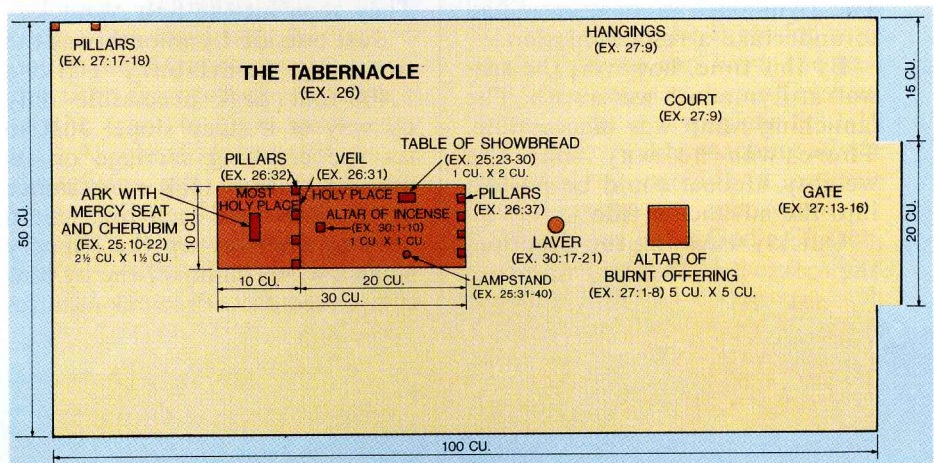
The live goat was brought before Aaron, who, as we have seen, is a type of Jesus Christ, our High Priest. Aaron laid hands on this goat, confessing upon it the people's sins. Then it was led by another individual into the wilderness where it was released (Lev. 16:20-22).

How is this symbolism going to be fulfilled? Jesus is coming to this earth again, this time to rule. He will order Satan bound and taken to a place of restraint for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1-3).

The world will then become free of Satan's influence and responsive to God's way of life; men's sins will be laid to Satan's charge. The change will be remarkable. Humanity as a whole will accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and live according to God's law (Isa. 11:9). Finally, there will be universal peace, joy and happiness (Jer. 31:12-14).

What about fasting?

In addition to the symbolism of the sacrifices, there is another aspect of this Festival that we must consider. Notice Leviticus 16:29: "This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether a native of your own



country or a stranger who sojourns among you."

What does it mean "afflict your soul"? The word *afflict* (Hebrew *anah*) is translated "humble" in Psalm 35:13, where David said, "I humbled myself with fasting." So afflicting oneself means to fast.

Biblical examples show that fasting means to go without food and water (Deut. 9:9, 18, Esther 4:16, Acts 9:8-9). This is the only day when we are commanded to fast. It is so important that in the New Testament we see this Festival referred to as "the Fast" (Acts 27:9).

The purpose of fasting is to humble ourselves, to see our insignificance and realize our need for and utter dependence on God (Jas. 4:9-10). God does not hold us guiltless for the sins that Satan influences us to commit. We bear a responsibility for

yielding to Satan's temptations.

God wants you to examine yourself so you will recognize your shortcomings and overcome them. These are the conditions of a proper fast that will cause God to intervene on your behalf. (For more information on fasting, write for our free reprint article "But by Prayer and Fasting.")

Keep this Festival

The Day of Atonement, then, is a solemn, serious occasion, and yet, because of what it pictures, this Festival is a tremendously positive and encouraging day.

Besides revealing vital understanding about God's plan of salvation, the Day of Atonement can bring you much closer to God, if you obey God's command to observe this day.

Don't deny yourself this relationship with God. Decide now to keep the Day of Atonement! □