

This chapter describes how the Day of Atonement was to be conducted. The high priest had to make an offering for his own sin before he could make atonement for the people. The priest also had to take two goats for the people which together foreshadowed what Christ would later do on the cross when He gave Himself as our sin offering and permanently took our sins away.

2 And the LORD said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy *place* within the vail before the mercy seat, which *is* upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat.

Verse 1 tells us that this instruction of the LORD for Moses to speak to Aaron came after the death of Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu. The account of their death was back in Lev. 10:1-3 where they offered "strange fire" before the LORD. They had apparently not taken fire from the altar of burnt offerings as they should have done and instead used common fire (perhaps from their own dwellings) to burn incense before the LORD. This seems to be the context in which the LORD commands Moses to inform Aaron that he cannot enter the holy place where the ark resides any time he desires. Aaron's sons died because they failed to regard the things of God as holy and it appears that the LORD wants to warn Aaron to not make the same mistake. Aaron, as the high priest, was only authorized to enter the holy place once a year on the Day of Atonement. To enter the holy place was to enter the presence of God for He said that He would appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat that was on top of the ark.

Verses 3-4: Aaron is to prepare himself for his duties on the Day of Atonement by bathing and then putting on special linen garments for this ceremony. Then he must bring with him two offerings designated for himself: a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

5 And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.

In addition to his own bull and ram, the high priest must take two goat kids and a ram that have been provided by the children of Israel for their sin and burnt offerings. The Hebrew word for "kids" is masculine and refers to a hairy male goat. These two goats had to be without blemish because they were to point to Christ as the perfect, holy One Who would atone for and take away our sins.

6 And Aaron shall offer his bullock of the sin offering, which *is* for himself, and make an atonement for himself, and for his house.

The high priest stood in the place of Christ, our Great High Priest (Heb. 4:14), who would offer His own blood as an atonement for our sin and so the earthly high priest had to begin by dealing with his own sin through the offering of the bull that he brought for his own sin offering. This offering made an atonement his sins and those of his family. Someone whose sin was not covered could not minister before the LORD nor could he suitably represent the role that Christ would fulfill as our Great High Priest.

7 And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the LORD *at* the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. 8 And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat.

The two goats that were to provide atonement for the people were brought before the LORD so that He could choose (through the casting of lots) the roles for each goat. One would be slain as the sin offering and the other would become the scapegoat, taking the sins of the people away. According to Jewish tradition, the priest would stand before the door of the tabernacle between the goats, with one under his left hand and the other under his right. He would then place two gold coins in an urn. The coins were identical except for the inscription: "For the LORD" on one and "Azazel" (Hebrew for "scapegoat") on the other. After shaking the coins inside the urn, he would put both hands inside and take a coin in each hand. The goat under the hand containing "For the LORD" became the sin offering and the other became the scapegoat. Thus the roles of the goats were chosen by the LORD and not man.

9 And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the LORD's lot fell, and offer him *for* a sin offering.

The goat that the LORD chose to be the sin offering through the casting of the lot was now offered for the sin of the people. This offering foreshadowed the day when Christ would offer Himself as a sin offering for us. This blood of this goat was shed just as Christ would shed His blood for us. **Heb. 9:11-12** "*But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.*"

10 But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make an atonement with him, *and* to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness.

A single goat was insufficient to represent the redemption that Christ would accomplish for us, and so the second goat was necessary. This goat (the scapegoat) would symbolically carry away the sins of the people.

Verses 11-20: The high priest is then to offer the bull that he had brought for a sin offering for himself and his household. After taking fire from that offering in his censer, he took the censer, incense, and blood from the bull and entered the holiest place where the ark sat. He then burned incense in the censer, covering the mercy seat with a cloud of smoke while he sprinkled the bull's blood on the mercy seat with his finger seven times to make atonement for himself and his household. He would then bring the goat's blood that had been offered as a sin offering for the people and do the same as he did with the bull's blood. Finally, the high priest exits the tabernacle and makes an atonement for the altar by sprinkling the blood from both the bull and the goat on the horns of the altar seven times.

21 And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send *him* away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness:

“And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat” – This ceremony is the only one that required the use of both hands, implying the seriousness of this step. Perhaps it was because the high priest would be transferring to the goat not only the sins of the people but of himself also.

“and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat” – The confession of the sins of the people (including the high priest himself) symbolically transferred the guilt of those sins from the people to the goat. This act is also symbolic of the fact that our guilt was transferred from us to Jesus Christ, the One Who took our sins away.

“and shall send *him* away by the hand of a fit [timely; ready] man into the wilderness” – The goat is not sent away at a later time, but immediately. A man is standing by ready to immediately perform the task of leading the goat into the wilderness where it will not find its way back among the people. The scapegoat being taken away with all of the people’s sins is symbolic of how that Christ has taken away all of our sins to where they will never be held against us ever again.

22 And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.

The goat carrying the sins of the people was to be released in “a land not inhabited.” This phrase indicates that the goat was to be left in an area where the children of Israel would never see it again, nor was it likely to find its way back into the camp of the people. Doing this pointed forward to the day when Christ would bear our sins, taking them away so that we would never see them again.

Verses 23-34: After sending the scapegoat away, the high priest would enter the tabernacle, bathe and then put the linen garments back on. He would then offer the rams that had been brought as burnt offerings for himself and the people. When the man who led the scapegoat away returns, he has to bathe and wash his clothes before he is allowed to reenter the camp. The remnants of the two sin offerings (the bull for the high priest and the goat for the people) were to be taken outside the camp and burned. The writer of Hebrews points out that this practice also pointed to Christ in **Hebrews 13:11-12**: *“For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.”*

While the sacrifices under the Mosaic Law (including the Day of Atonement) served their purpose at the time, they could never permanently solve the problem of sin. The sacrifice atoned for the sins they had already committed, but next year there would be more sins needing atonement. The writer of Hebrews said:

Heb. 10:1-4 *“For 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. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.”*

However, the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made was sufficient to permanently take away our sin. The writer of Hebrews continues:

Heb. 10:10-12 *“By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;”*

The writer of Hebrews continues by showing us that this permanent solution to our sin is what God had promised in the OT as he quotes from Jer. 31:33-34.

Heb. 10:14-17 *“For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”*

Thank God for a permanent salvation through the blood of Christ!