

1 - The preoccupation with being unclean Lev 11-15

The chapter 16 begins with a re-call of the seriousness of approaching God in any other way than He has specified. Then, chapters 11-15 detail a whole series of ways that uncleanness can settle on a people in regard to God Himself. So we are not surprised that the material of Leviticus 16 is going to deal with that issue, in regard to the very tabernacle of God set among an unclean people.

2 - The outline of the action of Lev 16

1-2 Introduction

The flashback to the reference about Aaron’s sons sets the context. Were they revealed to Moses as a specific way to prevent the death’s of any other priests in the dealing with their duties. Notice that they are revealed to Moses; which puts him in a position superior to the High Priest. He is the great mediator between God and man.

The most basic caution to Aaron was that he should not enter the Holy of Holies where the ark was kept “at any time.”. But there was the possibility of entering once a year with proper precautions. This was the day of Atonement. The reason for this caution was that the holy of holies houses the ark on which was the “mercy seat”. It is here that God comes to his people; in the heart of the tabernacle [Exodus 24.15ff]

3-5 Animals and priestly dress for the ceremonies.

The basic requirements for the ceremonies included: [a] a bull for the purification offering and [b] a ram for the burnt offering, and then [c] two goats and [d] another ram for the congregation.

The High Priest’s dress was very different in this day. He laid aside his normal, royal-like, beautiful garments [described in Exodus 28] and donned garments even plainer than the ordinary priests garb [described Exodus 39.27-29]. On this day he looked more like a slave dressed in a shirt, shorts, sash and turban made all of linen.

Among his fellow men he has a dignity as the great mediator between man and God and is dressed in a way that expresses the glory of his office. On this day he is entering into the other world of God’s presence, he becomes the servant of God and expresses this with a simplicity of dress. Ezekiel [9.2-3,11; 10.2,6-7] and Daniel [10.5; 12.6-7] describe angels dressed in linen, and Revelation 19.8 has the saints in heaven in similar clothes.

6-10 Outline of the ceremonies

[1] Aaron offers the bull as a purification offering for the priests and for himself [verse 6]

[2] He casts lots to decide which of the two goats will play which part; one will be sacrificed and the other [for Azazel] will be led into the wilderness.

[3] The goat for the purification offering is sacrificed [verse9]

[4] The other goat is brought before the Lord and then led off into the wilderness.

11-28 Detailed description of the ceremonies

[a] 11-19 the blood sprinkling rites.

[i] The purification offering on behalf of Aaron and the priests resembles the normal pattern for a purification offering [Lev. 4.3-12] with this difference; that in this case the blood is not sprinkled on the outside of the curtain leading to the holy of holies, it is taken into the holy of holies itself and is sprinkled on the mercy seat on the top of the ark.

The precautions for entry for the High Priest were to prepare a censer full of hot charcoal, putting in fine incense, and the purpose of this was that the incense cloud would cover the mercy seat. The screen created was either to hide the sinner from God, so averting wrath [Psalm 141.2; Num 17.11ff;] or to prevent the High Priest from gazing upon the Holy Presence.

[ii] the casting of lots for the goats is passed over here

[iii] sacrifice of the goat. The bull was offered on behalf of the priests, the goat on behalf of the people. Its blood was used in the same way as the bull’s; sprinkled 7 times on the mercy seat. [In this setting the “sanctuary” means the holy of holies; the “tent of meeting” means the outer part of the tent; and the “altar” refers to the altar of burnt offerings in the main courtyard.

By these atonement day rituals the impossible is made possible; they permit the holy God to dwell among an unholy people [16-17 and also Isaiah 6.3ff; Psalm 15; 24.3ff]. In both the Old and New covenants there is only one mediator between God and man [1 Tim 2.5].

The meaning of this is cleanse and sanctify the sanctuary and the altars from the uncleanness of the Israelites which pollutes the sanctuary. This is what makes the consistent coming of God to his people in the tabernacle as possible from His side. In this sense the work of the High Priest in the sanctuary is distinctly God oriented.

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[iv] The scapegoat despatched [20-22]– After being chosen by lot, the animal is brought before the High Priest and he lays his hands upon its head and confesses the nation’s sins. It is then led off into the wilderness by a man appointed for the task [Heb. “a man made ready”].

Taken by lot from between the two goats presented implies that the choice is God’s. It indicates that the two functions, here divided between two goats, are both chosen by God by the drawing of one lot between two.

The goat, as a bearer of sins, is sent to a land that is “cut off” [solitary land NASV], ie a place separated from the camp – so that there is no chance of the goat returning and bringing back the guilt of the sins upon the people. The sin is separated from Israel because it was born away.

[v] 23-28 cleansing of the participants. The washing of the inhabitants of the camp is simply that the camp be not re-polluted.

29-34 The duty of the people

What the nation had to do on the day of atonement was to afflict themselves and not do any work. The affliction of themselves was a demonstration of true penitence - to examine themselves and repent of their sins. The phrase “afflict yourselves” is rare [Lev. 23.27, 32; Numbers 29.7 of the day of atonement and also Isaiah 58.3,5; Psalm 35.13]. It included sackcloth, fasting, praying with bowed head, self examination and prayer.

3 - The reason for the action of Day of Atonement

1. In setting the context as the preparation for Aaron not to die in the prosecution of his duty the Day of Atonement teaches us that the no man, however holy, can approach the presence of God without appropriate atonement being made.
2. Israel’s sin and consequent uncleanness are conveyed to the building in which they worship. Unless they are cleansed, God will condemn his people to judgment. Purification of the Tabernacle from uncleanness is central to the dwelling of God being continued there.
3. The despatch of the scapegoat as sending away the sins of the people from among themselves shows us a picture of the nation’s cleansing as a whole people. What took place in the holy of holies was not seen by anyone except the High priest. But the scapegoat picture was seen by all and was a powerful visual aid that sin was real and it needed to be eliminated.
4. The total embargo on work and the affliction of their souls made the same point of the serious nature of sin clear.

4 - Sacrificed goat and scapegoat – Isaiah 53

52.13-14 Sees the parallel between “my servant” and you “my people”. Here is a representative and the servant will be lifted up and prosper, but will, like the people, be also a marred and seen to be broken in his form.

He will also sprinkle many nations; so there will be a cleansing for mankind here done by the servant of the Lord.

If we look carefully at the setting and the description of the work of the suffering servant we are led to conflate the work of the sacrificed goat and the work of the scapegoat as a sin bearer together in the one work of the Lord’s Servant.

The idea of the *sacrificed goat* will be to bear sins; so there is a matter which must be set right before God in a way that there is a direct mediation between God and man about that matter. This is what takes place within the holy place with one man as the mediator. What this goat speaks of is what is acceptable to God to work this reconciliation by the conditions and instructions that his word has stated, and the meticulous adherence to them in faith by the mediator. [See Isaiah 53.2a, 5-6,7, 9-10, 11a-c, 12a-c]

The *scapegoat* will be the idea of to bear sins away from the camp. In the latter the goat is dealing with the defiling result of sins as felt by a collected people of God. To lay hands upon the goat and confess their sins is the action of the High Priest which means that this goat is going to stand for all of them as it bears the sins away. To bear them away and not return with them must imply a necessary rejection by the people. Here is a cleansing by the removal of the defiling situation sins bring so as to stay among the people. The removal of the sins secures the removal of defilement. [See Isaiah 52.14, 53.2bc-3, 4,8, 11e, 12e]

5 – The New covenant is a new way with the living Christ

If Romans is concerned to tell us how the redemption, and the access to God has been possible then it is Hebrews which will tell us on the assumption of that redemption what that access means for us and how it may be applied and used constantly.

The Letter to the Hebrews is written about AD 60, probably before the onslaught of persecution of Nero in AD 64 and before the fall of the Temple in Jerusalem AD 70, to a group of Christians in danger of giving up their faith because of a nostalgia for the ancient practices and traditions of the Jews from which they came.

The writer's purpose is to show them that there is no going back to what looked like old certainties and a hard and fast legal system. They are to find their only certainty in the living Christ, and they must venture forward in that confidence alone. He maintains to turn back from this freedom to the superficially solid ground of the Old Testament legalism is to exchange the reality for the shadow.

He points to Christ as the only way for men and women to have a relationship with God that is right. The gulf is between humans burdened by guilt and a holy, just and righteous God. The Old Testament ceremonial law pointed a way, but it will take the perfect obedience on behalf of man, by a Mediator who unites in himself the divine and the human – only in this way can the bridgehead be established over such a gulf.

It would seem that the particular readers had attached a great importance to the loss of the good offices of the Jewish High Priest, who once a year carried through the ceremony of the Day of Atonement. They must have felt that here was a down to earth, hard and fast assurance of forgiveness; a cover-plan which Christianity did not offer. Our author's task is to show that nothing has been lost in dispensing with this side of OT Law; and that Christianity provides an infinitely better and effective means of forgiveness. Not only so, that if the Jewish provisions had been striving to restore broken relationship with God then it had failed and that the Christ in the fullest sense had effected all that the Temple, the priesthood and the ritual had been striving in vain to accomplish.

6 - The special nature of Christ's priesthood

In the letter to the Hebrews Christ's priesthood is associated with that of Aaron and also that of Melchizedek. This Melchizedek is mentioned in the Bible three times. Each time the reference adds something to our understanding of this man.

- a. In Genesis 14 he is linked with Abraham. He is called the "Priest of the most High".
- b. Psalm 110, a Messianic Psalm which our Lord applied to Himself Matthew 22.44; Mark 12.36; Luke 20.42 conveys the implication of a priesthood which is superior to the Aaronic priesthood. The very idea that there may even be a priesthood other than that of Aaron's is, of itself, very striking.
- c. Melchizedek appears in Hebrews as a type of Christ (5.5-10). The implications for Christ's priesthood, learnt from this typology with Melchizedek are:
 - i. it is a royal priesthood. Christ is a king as well as a priest.
 - ii. Melchizedek's name is used to suggest the idea of righteousness.
 - iii. Melchizedek's title "king of Salem" suggests the idea of peace.
 - iv. The absence in the Genesis 14 record of any ancestral connections for Melchizedek is used to imply the perpetual nature of Christ's priesthood.

One very important thing about the use of Melchizedek as a priest is that it is his person and the order of his priesthood which is used in the typology of the priestly work of Christ. It is not his functions - for, in the Genesis 14 narrative, he doesn't exercise any of the priestly functions. He is just simply called "priest of the God Most High". It is with respect to his *person* and the *order* of his priesthood that the writer to the Hebrews uses him.

In this way, a number of matters concerning the functions of the Aaronic priesthood will be made clear based upon a connection with Aaron's functions: whilst certain other matters, as to the nature of the Person of Christ will be noted, and these will be in contrast to the person of Aaron. In respect to the parallels between Melchizedek and Christ, we can see that Christ, like Melchizedek was:

- i. a royal person, whereas Aaron was not.
- ii. an abiding person, whereas Aaron was not.
- iii. a unique person, whereas Aaron was not.

In this way Christ's priesthood is older, wider and more lasting than Aaron's.

7 - The function of Christ's priesthood

When we come to think of the work of the priesthood of Christ, then it is the functions of the Aaronic priesthood that are central to the writer. The key word he uses is "better". In this way he states the similarity of the work of Christ as Priest with Aaron, and then, at the same time, indicates how much superior it is, in all respects as to its functions. Whilst our Lord was not of the priestly line of Aaron Hebrews 7.13-14; 8.4, it is necessary to use the Aaronic priesthood's functions to show what Christ has done. This is done, using the continual series of contrasts between Aaron and Christ.

a. In Hebrews 2.17-18; 3.1 and 4.14-16 The humanity of Jesus is asserted as a basis for His being a priest. He is a brother man, and those He represents, he is able to understand. This is so because He understands temptation and the ones whom he aids are those who are subject to temptation. That is, he understands how they got into the mess. Although he has felt the temptation to the limit, yet He is without sin.

b. In Hebrews 5.1-10 we have a clear comparison made. The requirements of the Aaronic priesthood are stated (5.1-5):

- i.office (5.1);
- ii.character (5.2-3);
- iii.appointment by God (5.4-5).

In verses 6-10 we have the fulfilment of those requirements by Jesus, only they are stated in the reverse order:

- i.divine appointment (5.5-6);
- ii.character (5.7-8);
- iii.office (5.9-10).

c. In Hebrews 7, we have stated the comparison between Melchizedek and Aaron on three areas:

- i.Aaron was not royal;
- ii.Aaron died, so he didn't abide;
- iii.Aaron had many successors.

The implication of the argument is that the superiority of the person carries over to a superiority of functions.

d.In Hebrews chapters 7 & 8 the superiority of the work of Christ is compared with that of Aaron's:

- i.a better covenant (chapter 8) because it is spiritual, not temporal.
- ii.a better sanctuary because it is heavenly and not earthly.
- iii.a better sacrifice (chapter 10) because it is real, not symbolical.

Following chapter 10, the comparisons are not continued, however in chapter 13, there are three functions, connected with the priesthood which are stated:

- i.access to God for man (13.12);
- ii.offering to God from man (13.15);
- iii.intercession for man to God (13.18).

8 - The superiority of Christ's priesthood

Throughout the whole of this discussion, the main points of superiority of Christ's priesthood are:

- a.It is royal in its character.
- b.It is heavenly in its sphere of operation.
- c.It is spiritual in its nature.
- d.It is continuous in its efficacy.
- e.It is perpetual as to its duration.
- f.It is universal in its scope.
- g.It is effectual in its results.

9 - The "once for all" nature of his offering

The two main actions of the High Priest stressed in Hebrews deal with the two main actions of the High Priest on the day of Atonement Leviticus 16. They were the disposal of the animal outside the camp Hebrews 13.11-12 and the entering into the Holy Place with the blood of the animal sacrificed. Consistent with this theme, the two main emphases which are struck in the life of Jesus are His death and the ascension. This latter sees Him enter into heaven on our behalf Hebrews

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9.12,24. It is this understanding that helps us make sense of the difficult verses Hebrews 8.3-4. (Which has sometimes been used to suggest that Christ is continually offering Himself in heaven.)

The following matters are very important in this regard:

- a. The letter stresses the uniqueness and the completeness of the offering (7.27; 9.12,28)
- b. The sitting down at God's right hand is the attitude of a victor (whose work is finished) not of an offerer.
- c. The essential nature of the new Covenant is the remission of sins (8.8; 10.11-12), and this is only possible if the offering is completed (4.16; 9.14-22). The use of the aorist tense (Greek) in 8.3 seems decisive in establishing that the "offering" is the "death".

10 - The personal qualifications of Christ as priest

Just as it is necessary to hold in constant tension simultaneously the ideas of Jesus being fully God and fully man whenever we consider Him as prophet, priest or king. So here, in considering the High-priesthood of Jesus we are involved in His Manhood and also His Deity.

- a. On the human side: (this material really is stated up until 5.9)
 - i. His manhood, makes Him one with us for sympathy and help (chapter 2).
 - ii. His perfect sympathy (4.14-16).
 - iii. His perfect training by obedience through suffering (5.2-20) (Notice that where it says that he learned obedience, it means he experienced what it costs in practice, to obey.)
- b. On the divine side:
 - i. His divine appointment (5.10).
 - ii. His indissoluble life (7.16) which establishes a permanent tenure of office.
 - iii. His inviolable and intransmissible priesthood (7.24), which implies the inability of delegation to someone else.
 - iv. His perpetual life of intercession (7.25).
 - v. His fitness through His character (7.26).
 - vi. The divine oath, which is the divine guarantee, of His appointment (7.28).
 - vii. His position on the throne (8.1).
 - viii. His perfect offering (9.12,24; 10.12).

As Chapter 1 describes Him, His priesthood is based upon His divine Sonship. It is the uniqueness as Son that gives Christ the qualifications for priesthood.

11 - The Day of Atonement in the NT

Many of the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement are called to mind in the Letter to the Hebrews, especially chapter 9.

The day of Atonement is a type of, or pre-figures, the crucifixion of Christ. On the cross Christ accomplished what the High Priest was attempting in the day of Atonement.

[1] Entry into the presence of God.

The effectiveness of his atonement was stated in the Gospels by the veil of the Temple being torn in two [Matt 27.51; Mark 15.38 and Luke 23.45]. In Hebrews the tearing of the veil corresponds to the incarnate Christ's flesh and the result is that all believers are in a place where they can enter into the presence of God. It has to do with the fact that He is the God man who has died. Hebrews 10.19ff].

[2] Entry to God at all times.

The day Christ died was the definitive day of atonement, once for all.

[3] In a better place of approach than Aaron.

[a] Aaron as a sinner needs to offer sacrifices for himself; Christ as a sinless One does not [Hebrews 7.26ff]

[b] Aaron had to repeat the sacrifices annually, Christ secured an eternal redemption by his own death [Heb 9.6-14,25ff].

[c] Aaron's rituals took him into the earthly sanctuary; Christ's took Him into the heavenly [9.24]

[d] The repetition of Aaron's sacrifices was a constant reminder of the persistence of sin and its need for the basis of forgiveness was also needing to be procured again and again. Christ's once-for-all sacrifice secured a permanent forgiveness of sins. [Heb 10.1-18].

[4] A greater confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus [10.19] and to draw near [Heb 10.22-25].