

The Scapegoat

Easter, 2014

Leviticus 16

One of history's earliest recorded instances of biological warfare was in 1347. A Mongol army had besieged a city in what is now modern day Ukraine. They literally catapulted the bodies of bubonic plague victims over the walls of that town. While they didn't understand the nature of the disease, they knew it was contagious. The terrified inhabitants fled to Italy, carrying with them the deadly bacteria, along with the rats and fleas who spread them. Over the next three years the plague spread throughout Europe in the massive epidemic now known as the Black Death – if you can imagine – nearly one-half of Europe's population died.¹

Centuries ago, one epidemic created a poem – used most often by unaware children in playgrounds. It goes like this:

***Ring around the rosies,
A pocket full of posies;
A 'tishoo, A 'tishoo.
We all fall down.***

- *Ring around the rosies* was a reference to the circular rash on the skin which tragically announced the onset of the infectious disease.
- *A pocket full of posies* referenced the superstition that carrying flowers in your pockets or handbags would ward off the disease.
- *A 'tishoo, a 'tishoo* – simply mimicked the sound of sneezing by someone gripped with the plague;
- *We all fall down* was the lamenting surrender that we all end up dying.

There have been more plagues since then – epidemics without cures – many of them brought under control by the discovery of penicillin and antibiotics.

Still to this day, malaria, yellow fever and other infectious diseases continues to claim the lives of millions of people worldwide.

But there is one plague far more widespread and deadly than all the plagues of human history; it is, as

the Puritan writer Ralph Venning called it, “the plague of plagues”. It affects every single person who has ever lived – it is the plague of sin.ⁱⁱ

And there isn't anything you can do about it. The infection is within you and every day you give evidence of its symptoms.

No doctor, laboratory, scientist or biochemist will ever find a cure . . . a vaccination . . . a serum to solve the problem of sin.

And we are all infected.

I've watched the evangelistic approach of one man who took a camera, hit the street and asked people if they were sinful. Most people didn't own up to it. In fact, they said, with some measure of confidence, that God would consider them suitable for heaven.

He then asks them – “Have you ever told a lie?”
“Yea, of course.”

“When then, what does that make you? A liar.”

“Have you ever stolen anything from anyone – your parents, your friends, a store?”

“Yea.”

“Then, what does that make you? A thief.”

And you can see people not really liking where this is going.

He barrels on.

Have you ever had a lustful thought toward a woman or a man who wasn't your husband or wife?

“I suppose.”

Well, God considers that adultery in your heart – so what does that make you? An adulterer.

So, you think you're getting into heaven, but we've just confirmed the fact that you're a lying, stealing, adulterer.

Wait, but I've done a lot of good things in my life.

And he says, “Listen, if a man stands before a judge as a rapist, what does it matter if he says, “Listen, I've done a lot of good things in my life.” He's still guilty of rape and no just judge is going to look the other way.

So what are you going to do about your lying, stealing, blaspheming, adulterating sins?

That's a pretty good approach . . .

The truth is, ladies and gentlemen, there isn't any way to balance out the scale, because just one sin alone makes you a sinner. In fact, you committed that sin because you were a sinner to begin with.

And the Bible says, "The wages of sin is death." In other words, you've sinned and the penalty is death.

And we will all prove that we are sinners because we will all die . . . we will all fall down!

While there are a lot of good things you can do, the problem is, you've done a lot of bad things and God said in His word, He will not allow the guilty to go unpunished. (Exodus 34).

The former Mayor of New York missed the point of the gospel entirely in his bravado this past week when an interview quoted him as saying, "I am telling you if there is a God, when I get to heaven I'm not stopping to be interviewed. I am heading straight in. I have earned my place in heaven – it's not even close."

That's Adam bragging about his fig leaves.

What about the plague of sin? Who is going to die and pay the eternal penalty for your sin?

From Adam up to the final day of Atonement when Christ hung on the cross; God's plan of redemption had the blameless dying for the guilty.

In Genesis chapter 3 God delivers His punishment upon Adam and Eve, informing them that they will now be barred from the Garden – Paradise – which represented intimate worship and fellowship with God.

But just before He sends them out of the Garden, in **verse 21; The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.**

This is the first act of atonement – this is the first death of an innocent animal which effectively covered the guilt of sin. It was the first picture of the coming Redeemer who would become the final sacrifice for sin.

Adam and Eve had attempted to cover over their guilt with fig leaves. That's the first attempt at false religion. This was man-made effort to hide a guilty conscience. This is the first example of a man-made religion.

The problem is, God can see through fig leaves. He can see through tradition and ceremony and liturgy and look into your very heart.

What God did instead, was provide for Adam and Eve clothing from the bloodshed of innocent animals.

And this began the long history of atonement by means of animal sacrifice.

Why animals?

Well for starters, animals are sinless – they are innocent of transgression – they don't have a sin nature; although I do wonder about my dog at times.

But whatever an animal does, they are not evidencing a sin nature, but an animal nature – with all its instincts to survive.

Animals also are non-eternal creatures. Their death ends their existence – it will not lead to eternal suffering because they weren't redeemed.

Throughout scripture, God clearly gave the human race the animal kingdom to benefit mankind – whether plowing the field or serving as food or clothing.

Certain animals were also able then to serve as innocent substitutes in God's grand design of redemption

And the very first person to kill an animal was God.

The first person, so to speak, to skin an animal and make clothing out of it for human beings was God Himself.

And what God did was effectively teach Adam and Eve that through the death and bloodshed of an innocent animal, their sin would be covered temporarily while they waited for the coming One who would permanently atone for the guilt of their sin.

In other words, the blood of bulls and goats and sheep could never permanently atone for their sin (Hebrews 10:4) – but it was a statement of faith in the redemptive revelation of God as Adam and Eve looked forward by faith to the coming, suffering Redeemer whose heel would be bruised. They looked forward then to the cross-work of the Lamb of God on their behalf in faith – and we look backward in faith to the cross of Christ who died on our behalf.

So Adam and Eve responded by faith?

We know they did, among other clues, because in Genesis chapter 4 and verse 1 we read, **Now Adam had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have gotten a man child with the help of the Lord."**

In other words, instead of Eve rebelling in anger and rejecting the atoning plan of God, she maintains trust in God and here in the delivery room, she's praising God for the birth of Cain.

And more than that, she names her son, Cain – which means, "He's here." Many scholars believe she's actually referring to the earlier promise of a man-child coming to redeem them.ⁱⁱⁱ

She thinks, “He’s here . . . He’s it!” So she celebrates, “Praise God, I’ve delivered the promised redeemer.”

Unfortunately, Cain won’t be mankind’s Redeemer; he will become mankind’s first murderer, right?

Sometime later, after the birth of Cain, Eve bears their second son, Abel.

And both these boys grow up outside the Garden, fully aware of their parent’s history, fully aware of God’s system of sacrifice and atonement and fully aware of the promised Redeemer.

Another clue that Adam and Eve believed by faith in the atoning work of innocent animals and – in them – the coming redeemer who will finally pay the penalty for sin, because in verse 3 of Genesis 4, you discover Cain and Abel following in their parent’s footsteps in bringing sacrifices to God.

In fact, Cain will eventually refuse to do it God’s way and will substitute the work of his own hands instead.

But in verse 3 we’re told – ***So it came about in the course of time – literally, at the end of days – they brought to the Lord their offerings.*** This phrase, many Old Testament scholars believe, is the expression of an annual event – one that Cain and Abel had been involved with for several decades along with their parents. The ***end of days*** can be translated, “revolution of days” – or literally, at the end of the year.^{iv}

This was standard procedure. Cain and Abel didn’t come up with this annual idea on their own; it had been handed down to them.

Again, it wasn’t man’s idea to come up with an altar. The substitution of an innocent animal for the atoning of sin wasn’t man’s creation. Man came up with sewing fig leaves together – working with their hands to cover their sinful state rather than confess it.

And we’re told that when Adam and Eve were forced to leave their paradise – their beautiful garden, God assigned a pair of cherubim to guard the Garden and we’re told specifically in ***Genesis 3:24*** that they guarded the entrance to the Garden on the east side preventing mankind from re-entering.

Many believe that it would be at this place – right there in the presence of those cherubim and their flaming sword – it would be at that place where Adam and Eve – and later along with their two sons – come for this annual sacrifice.

They would come back to the place that marked their exile; the place where the curse was delivered

along with the promise of a Redeemer; that was the place they came to offer their God-prescribed atoning sacrifices.

By the way, we’re not told in the Bible how long these cherubim guarded the Garden of Eden. They may very well have stayed until the flood of Noah wiped mankind off the face of the earth in Genesis chapter 7, which totally reshaped the topography of earth in that catastrophic event which effectively then wiped the Garden away.

But every year Adam and Eve and their children came, prior to the establishment of the priesthood; they came to offer their sacrifices –

- and they were reminded of mankind’s rebellion against God;
- their exile from Paradise;
- their inability to atone for their sins apart from the blood of an innocent animal;
- and their lack of intimate worship with God – they were confronted

Centuries later as Israel departs from Egypt during the time of Moses, God gave directions for the establishment of the priesthood, the construction of a Tabernacle and the sacrificial system.

Adam and Eve are long gone. The Garden of Eden with the flaming cherubim guarding the entrance are gone.

But you discover that the sacrificial system is alive and well. In fact, God instructs Moses to build a moveable tabernacle where the center piece would be a holy of holies – the place where God’s glory and justice and mercy was represented.

In that Holy of Holies was a box – about 4 feet long and 3 feet wide and deep. And inside that golden box were the tablets of the law delivered to Moses.

But a heavy curtain separated the Holy of Holies from the outer Holy Place and the Courtyard.

And God prescribed in Exodus 26 that Israelite seamstresses were to embroider into the fabric of that curtain the figures of cherubim.

As if to remind them,

- mankind is still in exile;
- mankind is still barred intimate access to God;
- mankind is still unable to atone for their sins by their own works – their own hands –
- mankind must be substituted for and atoned for by the death and bloodshed of an innocent animal.

In fact, only one man could enter the Holy of Holies and that High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies in trembling fear – and when did he enter? At the end of days – once a year.

And he would come bearing the blood of innocent animals.

He would slip between the folds of that curtain embroidered with those warrior angels and once inside the Holy of Holies he would face the ark of the covenant in front of him.

And he would immediately be awe struck by the golden cherubim that had been crafted as if they were hovering above it – their wings crafted so that they reached forward and touched each other. (Exodus 25)

Again, they were still guarding the presence of God as it were and for the most part, mankind was still unable, apart from the shedding of blood, to receive the mercy and grace of a holy God.

But the priest would sprinkle the blood on the lid of that box – called the mercy seat and God would *temporarily* be satisfied with the covering of the sins of the nation.

Temporarily? Yes . . . because it was still pointing to that wooden altar upon which the Lamb of God would come to die and put an end to all sacrifices for all time.

And when Jesus Christ, hanging on that cross cried out, “It is finished.” That curtain in the Temple nearby was ripped from top to bottom – why? To say once and for all that the cherubim no longer bar the way to personal communion and personal confession and one-to-one fellowship between the worshipper and the Living God.

That through the once and for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ – by faith in His atoning blood – you can be forgiven – you can have communion with God – and one day you will regain a newly created Paradise – the New Testament calls it = Heaven.

Let’s travel back in time for a few moments, to that Old Testament Day of Atonement – the end of days – that once a year sacrifice – and glory in the atoning work of Jesus Christ, depicted and prophesied and pictured for us at that annual event which makes heaven a promised reality for those who believe in Christ.

He is illustrated in the Book of Leviticus; God delivers to Moses instructions on this annual sacrifice for the sins of the nation Israel.

These animal sacrifices that pictured the work of Christ in a very meaningful, moving way that are

most often ignored as we celebrate the passion of Christ.

The sin offering involved two goats – two unblemished goats – without any skin disease, which would represent corruption.

Both goats represented one sacrifice – an annual sacrifice offered on the Day of Atonement for the sins of the nation.

And each of the two goats, while they represented only one sacrifice, fulfilled two different doctrines of atonement.

Let’s start with the first one.

BRING IN FIRST GOAT

The Doctrine of Substitution

The first of the two goats represented and illustrated the doctrine of vicarious atonement – that is, the penalty of sin is paid for by an innocent party, and the guilty is released from their guilt.

We could call this the doctrine of substitution.

Now, according to *Leviticus chapter 16*, the High Priest would have cast lots over the two goats and one of them would be chosen for the LORD, *verse 8* informs us.

In other words, this goat will be sacrificed unto the Lord, on behalf of the people of Israel.

According to God’s instructions, *Leviticus chapter 16 and verse 15 reads. Then he (the High Priest) shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. 16. Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleanness of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. All the way down to verse 19, the High Priest is sprinkling blood in various places – eventually out to the altar where the people can watch him put the blood of that goat, making atonement . . . making that goat effectively pay the price for their sin.*

Remember, the High Priest is in the Holy of Holies – just beyond the veil embroidered with cherubim, now in front of the Ark of the Covenant which contains the law. And the priest will sprinkle some of the goat’s blood on top of this golden box. Why? Because the people of Israel have broken the law – the Ten Commandments – but God will now see their guilt through the blood of this blameless

animal – and their guilt for the past 12 months will be covered.

You can imagine the joy and relief and exuberance in the hearts of the nation to know that their sins of the previous 12 months have been covered.

All because of God's ransom payment for sin, covered by the blood of this blameless animal.

TAKE THE FIRST GOAT BACK

Dr. Harry Ironside, a beloved Bible teacher of a generation ago and a former pastor of Moody Church repeated an account from history that illustrates the payment of debt by another.

Many years ago, Czar Nicholas I of Russia had a good friend whose son was in the army. Out of kindness, the Czar had him assigned to a border fortress of the Russian army and appointed over the payroll for that entire army. The young man started well. But he began gambling and eventually gambled away not only his own paycheck, but money from government funds for the payroll of the garrison. At first, he'd taken only a few rubles at a time, but these had mounted up and eventually became an enormous debt.

One day he received notice that an official would be coming to do an audit of the books. The young man knew he was in serious trouble. The night before the official was to arrive he took out the records to find out how much money had been given to his payroll accounts. He totaled the amount. Then he went to the safe, took out the money and counted it carefully. The difference was large – too large to ever explain.

As he sat there looking at the final figures, this young officer picked up his pen and wrote in large letters into the ledger, "A great debt; who can ever pay?"

Then, because he did not see how he could face his father, the Czar, the terrible dishonor the next day held, he determined to take his life with his own revolver at the stroke of midnight. The night was warm and he was drowsy . . . as he waited for the midnight hour, in spite of himself the young man's head dropped lower and lower until he fell asleep – his head resting next to the ledger on one side – his pistol, still in his hand on the other side.

Nicholas was often in the habit of sometimes putting on the uniform of a common soldier and visiting the troops to see how they were getting on,

did so this night, coming around to the office where this young officer was sleeping.

There was the young officer, whom he recognized, asleep. He walked over to the desk and saw the books and the money stacked in rows on the desk. He read the totals and the whole thing became clear in a moment. His first thought was to awaken this young soldier and place him under arrest. But he just happened to notice the personal note written into the bottom of the bottom of the ledger, "A great debt, who can ever pay?"

In a sudden movement of mercy and grace, Czar Nicholas leaned over, picked up the pen that had fallen from the hand of the sleeping officer, wrote just one word, and tiptoed out.

For an hour or so the young man slept. Then he suddenly awoke and, seeing that it was long past midnight, reached for his revolver. As he did so his eye caught sight of his note, and someone else's writing underneath his. His note read, "A great debt, who can ever pay?" Underneath was one word – Nicholas.

Dropping his gun, he raced to the files where the signature of the Czar was available. They were from the same hand. He thought to himself, "The Czar has been here tonight and knows all my guilt; yet he has undertaken to pay my debt; I need not die."

He was not surprised early that morning a messenger came from the palace bearing precisely the amount of money needed to satisfy the debt.

That's the doctrine of substitution – someone assuming your penalty and paying the price themselves.

This is the illustration of the coming Redeemer who will, once and for all, Paul wrote to the Colossians, ***God . . . has forgiven all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.*** (let me read that again) ***God . . . has forgiven all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands*** (how?) ***This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. (Colossians 2:14)***

The doctrine is staggering.

On the cross, God the Father effectively treated Jesus as if He had lived our lives with all our sin, so that God would then treat us as if we lived Christ's life of pure holiness.^v

God imputed – deposited – to His account our sin and He imputed - deposited – to our account His righteousness. (Romans chapter 4)

That's the doctrine of vicarious atonement or propitiation . . . or more simply, the doctrine of substitution.

BRING IN THE SECOND GOAT

But there's another doctrine taking shape here – as precious in its illustration of Christ as the first.

And there's another goat to illustrate this second aspect of the sin offering.

The Doctrine of Expiation

The first goat represented substitution. This goat represents expiation.

That's a hard word to say – expiation. I had to go to seminary and pay 200 dollars an hour to learn how to say it – you can say it for free this morning – say it with me – expiation.

Now what it means is this – the sins of the nation are not only forgiven, they are taken away – they are removed.

It isn't just that God balances the books – He actually wipes your slate clean . . . and pure!

Back in *Leviticus, chapter 16*, Moses is informed that this second goat – *verse 10* – ***shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.***

There is some question as to who or what Azazel is. Origen was the first to claim it was a reference to Satan. In fact, some believe the goat was delivered to some demon named Azazel.

Evangelical Old Testament scholars simply understand this name is actually a combination of two Hebrew words – the word for goat and the word for banishment – or escape.^{vi}

You could literally translate it, “scapegoat”, which is shortened from escape goat.

Verse 10 could be translated better, that it might be the scapegoat, banished to the wilderness.

An expanded, yet literal translation might read, “the going-away-goat into the wilderness”.

Why is it going to be banished?

Notice verse 20. And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. 21. And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into

the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. (That would be you, Mike ☺).

Now notice *verse 22. The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.*

What a sweet picture of Christ's work on our behalf.

Since the New Testament focuses on the Lord as the final Passover Lamb; we tend to overlook the Old Testament picture of our Redeemer's work illustrated in these unblemished goats on the Day of Atonement.

And yet it's interesting that John the Baptizer introduced Jesus by combining the two – he said of Jesus, Behold the Lamb of God – who takes away the sin of the world.

That Greek verb – airw – can be translated to bear it away . . . literally, to carry off.^{vii}

Who bears it away . . . who carries off our sin!

Can you imagine the joy of the people as they saw the High Priest reach that final moment in this encounter . . . placing his hands on the head of this goat and saying, “I place now upon your head the transgressions of the people of God – all our iniquities – all our sins – now placed upon you . . . now . . . bear it away and carry it off . . . it will be your banishment . . . and our deliverance.”

MIKE: BEGIN LEADING THE GOAT AWAY

And then the people would watch as the goat was led away. A mixture of sadness, oh, but great joy.

They have a substitute who died for their sin; they have a substitute who was banished for their sin.

In fact, we're told in Jewish literature dating back to the time of Christ that there would be a series of people – at regular distances – waving bright cloths to signal all the way back to the city that the goat was now at this point . . . and then at that point . . . and then, finally, led into the wilderness.^{viii}

And when the signal came that it had arrived in the wilderness – the celebration back in Jerusalem would begin all over again.

Isaiah had this illustration in mind as he wrote of the coming suffering Redeemer in his 53rd chapter – ***Surely He (the coming Redeemer) has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows . . . and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:4-6)***

Not just the iniquity of the past year – but of our entire lives.

What a debt of sin I have . . . who can every pay it?

What a plague of sin I suffer . . . who will bring the cure?

The Apostle Peter combines both aspects of the goats on the Day of Atonement as he writes of Christ's suffering as our Redeemer . . . he writes,

“He Himself bore our sins (all of them – by the way – past, present and future) He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24)

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 4/20/2014 by Stephen Davey.

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i John MacArthur, 2 Corinthians (Moody Publishers, 2003), p. 209

ii Ibid, p. 210

iii John MacArthur, Hebrews (Moody, 1983), p. 296

iv Thomas Manton, By Faith: Sermons on Hebrews 11 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), p. 115

v MacArthur, p. 217

vi Warren W. Wiersbe, Leviticus: Be Holy (Victor Books, 1994), p. 73

vii Fritz Rienecker/Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 220

viii W. Volck, “Azazel,” in Schall-Herzog, Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, I, 183; cited in Bibliotheca Sacra, October, 1958, p. 324