

## **Sin: Forgiven and Forgotten** **Leviticus 16**

Leviticus tells us that God is holy, and the holy and the unholy cannot mix. To keep the people's access to God open the Lord provided them with sacrifices. But those sacrifices would have been costly, and sin would build up as people neglected to make the right sacrifices. So one day a year the Lord provided the Day of Atonement.

### **Sins Forgiven**

Only the High Priest could enter God's presence – in the Most Holy Place – and only once a year. Before he could atone for the people's sins, he had to atone for his own. Then he sacrificed a goat for the people and sprinkled its blood in the Most Holy Place, in the tent of meeting, and on the altar outside to atone for their sin. Atonement flowed from God's presence out to the people.

Blood sacrifice was necessary because the blood represents the animal's life, and the consequence of sin is death. So the goat becomes the substitute for the people: it dies so they don't have to. This is substitutionary atonement. By the end of this Day, all their sin had been paid for, and it was all God's doing.

### **Sins Forgotten**

The second goat was the scapegoat. All the people's sins were confessed and transferred onto the head of the goat. But instead of killing the goat, it was sent into the wilderness. The result of sin is not just death, it is also banishment from God's presence. The scapegoat was banished instead of them. But he also carried their sins away: it is a picture of how God remembers our sins no more.

And yet animal sacrifices cannot really be true substitutes for thousands of people. Instead they were pointing to something greater.

### **Christ the Real Substitute**

At the cross Jesus became our atoning sacrifice. We can be forgiven because he died as our substitute. But he was also our scapegoat: all our sin was laid on him and at the cross he was banished from God's presence, so that we might be welcomed back in: our sins forgiven and forgotten.

Hebrews 10 tells us there are three ways we should respond to what Jesus has done for us:

- In humility and repentance, but with confidence, we should draw near to God.
  
- We should speak the truth of what Jesus has done for us to our hearts, so when we are tempted to doubt we can know courage and boldness instead.
  
- We should not stop meeting together, but encourage one another. We have been called to be a member of his people, and we should encourage one another to live worthy of that calling.