**The Day of Atonement**

If you have not taken a leisurely walk along Colleton Ave. in downtown Aiken, I highly recommend it. There are numerous grand old homes that have been restored to their former glory and The Willcox Inn located at the western terminus of Colleton is a local treasure. Many of these old buildings are clad with wood siding which requires regular applications of paint. Some owners compromise with vinyl siding to avoid the ongoing maintenance. Some who choose to keep the wood just paint over the peeling layers or worse, paint over rotten wood. While these houses look fine from the street, a closer inspection reveals a rough, uneven texture which is the telltale sign of multiple coats of paint built up over the years. The only way to avoid that is to completely scrape off the old paint and get down to the bare wood before repainting, a laborious task that few are willing to undertake. In our study of Leviticus chapter 16, we see Aaron entering the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement (celebrated as Yom Kippur in the fall 6 months after Passover) to sprinkle the blood of sacrificed animals on the mercy seat. This was done annually and was the only time the high priest was allowed to go inside the Most Holy Place.

The chapter begins with God giving Moses instructions that he was to pass on to Aaron regarding the Day of Atonement. Aaron would cleanse himself then put on his tunic, sash and turban but not his other priestly garments. He would take a bull for a sin offering, 2 rams for burnt offerings along with 2 goats to the tabernacle. The bull would be sacrificed as a sin offering for Aaron and his family. The goats were to be brought to the entrance of the tabernacle and lots cast to determine which goat would the sacrificed. The blood of the sacrificed bull and goat were sprinkled on the atonement cover (mercy seat, KJV). Aaron had to offer incense smoke to cover the atonement cover since that was God’s seat and His Glory needed to be block from sight. The smoke would also serve to block sinful man from God’s sight (see Isa. 44:22). After coming out of the Most Holy Place, Aaron would cleanse the altar with some of the blood of the animals.

Next Aaron would lay his hands on the second goat and confess all the sins of the people, thereby transferring their sins to the goat. The goat was then taken away from tabernacle and released in the desert. Aaron would take off his garments and leave them in the Most Holy Place, cleanse himself then put on his regular priestly garments and sacrifice the 2 rams as burnt offerings. The man who took the goat into the desert also had to cleanse himself before returning to the camp.

Aaron is symbolic of Jesus who is our high priest. Charles Spurgeon noted that Aaron entered the Most Holy Place in humble clothes just as Jesus was dressed in a simple robe (though purple) before he was crucified. Matthew Henry observed just as Aaron entered alone, none of Jesus’ disciples died with him.

The goat sacrificed as a sin offering is a picture of Jesus. Of the 2 goats presented at the tabernacle, one was slain and the other set free. It was left to chance which goat was selected for death and which one would live unlike Jesus who willingly became the sacrifice. Many have compared the 2 goats to Jesus and Barabbas as one was crucified and the other set free. Note that the goat that was set free first had all the sins of Israel placed on its head before being released in the desert. David Guzik wrote that the release of the goat was a matter of concern for the Israelites. Since the purpose of releasing the goat was to take their sin far away, what if the goat returned to the camp? As time went on, they apparently solved this problem by casting the goat off a cliff eliminating the possibility it would return. As Bob Deffinbaugh wrote, even if the goat did not return, the best they could hope for was the impurity of sin would be put off for a year while Christ’s death put away sin altogether. Like the goat that disappeared into the wilderness, so have our sins been blotted out. “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” (Psalm 103:12, see also Isa. 38:17 and 43:25).

The blood of the sacrifices was symbolic of the blood of Jesus. Just as the blood purified the atonement cover and tabernacle, we are purified by the blood of Jesus. Just as we are covered by the blood, the priest covered over the sins of the people with the blood from the animals, however it had to be done annually unlike Jesus who died once. We in turn are to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). Preparing for this requires getting down to the bare wood *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.”* (Psalm 51:17).