GOOD NEWS ANCIENT AND MODERN

Course 3, *The People of Destiny*, Lesson 7

The Problem: The good news of forgiveness and salvation became a reality when Christ bore the punishment for our sins. On the Cross, "*He bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness*" 1 Peter 2:24. This is the greatest news of all! Despite our sinfulness, we are not irrevocably lost—salvation is mercifully offered to all who believe.

As those living on this side of the Cross, we rejoice in the accomplished work of Christ. We look back with gratitude, knowing that forgiveness and redemption are assured for those who accept Him. But what about the people who lived before Christ's time on Earth? How could they grasp the concepts of forgiveness and salvation in a way that inspired confidence in God and a longing for deliverance from sin?

Understanding that God loves all people equally and has provided everyone—regardless of their place in history—with the same opportunity to be saved by grace fills us with awe. This truth strengthens our faith in the holy intentions of our heavenly Father. But it raises important questions: How could salvation through Christ be available to those who lived before His earthly ministry? How could Old Testament believers know about the Messiah's sacrificial death and its significance?

As we seek answers to these questions, we discover how the messages, experiences, and services given to God's people before Christ illuminate the good news revealed in the New Testament. The Old Testament types and symbols enrich our understanding of salvation and Christ's redemptive work. In turn, the New Testament sheds light on the Old Testament, clarifying its deeper meanings and prophetic significance.

Let us first turn to the Old Testament to uncover how the gospel was unmistakably taught, and then explore how the New Testament interprets and fulfills that ancient message.

Objectives:

I. We begin by taking a brief overview of the sanctuary that the Lord instructed the ancient Israelites to build.
II. We consider the sacrifice and ministry of Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament symbolism.
III. We study the sin-offerings that were brought to the sanctuary and the procedure that was followed, making forgiveness available.
IV. We study how the New Testament interprets the Old Testament symbolism of the sin-offerings.

I. THE ANCIENT ISRAELITE SANCTUARY

During their journey from Egypt to the promised land, the Lord instructed Moses to construct a sanctuary where He would dwell among His people and where they could worship Him (Exodus 25:8). This sanctuary differed significantly from modern-day churches. It was composed of an outer courtyard, which housed a tent-like structure known as the tabernacle. The tabernacle itself contained two distinct rooms—the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place—with the Holy Place being twice the size of the Most Holy Place. This design was rich with symbolic meaning and played a central role in Israel's worship and relationship with God.

The Word:

1. Briefly describe the dimensions of the court and the "hangings" or curtains of linen that surrounded it. Exodus 27:9-19

2. What two items of furniture did the court contain? Exodus 27:1-8; 30:17-21

3. Briefly describe the two rooms of the tabernacle; called the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. Exodus 26:31-35

4. What three items of furniture were in the Holy Place? Exodus 25:23-32; 30:1, 8

5. What item of furniture was in the Most Holy Place? Exodus 25:10, 16-20

Explanation: The court surrounding the tabernacle measured 100 cubits in length and 50 cubits in width, equivalent to 172 feet by 86 feet. Its walls or fencing stood at a height of 5 cubits, or 8 feet 7 inches. These walls were half the height of the tabernacle itself, ensuring that the structure was visible from outside the court. The tabernacle's upright frames were 10 cubits high (Exodus 26:15-16). The entrance to the court, located on the eastern side, was adorned with curtains crafted from costly materials, showcasing beautiful workmanship.

The tabernacle within the court measured 30 cubits in length, 10 cubits in width, and 10 cubits in height—roughly 51 feet 7 inches long, 17 feet 2.3 inches wide, and equally tall. This sacred structure was divided into two rooms: the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, each with its own distinct purpose and significance.

In the court, two key items of furniture were present:
- The altar of burnt offering, an outdoor structure used for burning animals offered as sacrifices.
- The laver, a large washbasin where the priests cleansed their hands and feet before entering the Holy Place, symbolizing purification.

The Holy Place contained three significant furnishings:
- The candlestick (menorah) with seven branches, representing the light of God's presence.
- The table of showbread**, holding 12 loaves of bread replaced every Sabbath, symbolizing God's continual provision.
- The altar of incense, where incense was burned every morning and evening as a symbol of prayers rising to God.

The Most Holy Place housed the ark of the covenant—a sacred box containing the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. Its lid, the **mercy seat**, was a slab of gold with two cherubim (angelic figures) on either end. The mercy seat represented God's throne, and His divine presence was manifested there above it (Numbers 7:89; 1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Kings 19:15; Ezekiel 8:3).

The court was the site of animal sacrifices, symbolizing atonement for sin. The Holy Place represented priestly intercession on behalf of the people, while the Most Holy Place was God's dwelling place where the yearly Day of Atonement (on the 10th day of the 7th month) signified judgment. These three ministries—**sacrifice, mediation, and judgment**—were central to God's plan for the salvation of the faithful.

Relevance: For the ancient Israelite, there was no question of God's love for His people. The Lord dwelt among them in the tabernacle, a constant reminder of His desire for relationship and reconciliation. Every service conducted by the priests pointed to God's work for the forgiveness and salvation of His people, revealing His grace and mercy in a tangible way.

II. THE SACRIFICE AND MINISTRY OF CHRIST AS THE FULFILLMENT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT SYMBOLISM

The three divine ministries provided in the Court, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place represented the three aspects of the ministry of Jesus Christ to save the world from sin.

The Word:

6. How does the New Testament connect the earthly tabernacle or sanctuary with the heavenly sanctuary? Hebrews 8:1-5

7. Whose sacrifice was represented by every animal sacrifice offered in the court of the earthly sanctuary? Hebrews 10:1-12; John 1:29

8. Whose mediation or intercession for us was symbolized by the daily ministry of the priests in the holy place? Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:23-26; 9:11-12

9. What end-time judgment was represented by the work of the earthly High Priest in the most holy place on the Day of Atonement? Acts 17:31; Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

Explanation: Every animal sacrifice offered in the court of the ancient Israelite tabernacle pointed forward to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross. The court symbolized this earth, where our Lord offered Himself to atone for humanity's sin. In the earthly service, the priests officiated daily in the court, and every morning and evening they offered incense in the holy place. This incense symbolized Christ, our High Priest, presenting the merits of His sacrifice to the Father on our behalf after His ascension to heaven (Revelation 8:3-4).

Once a year, on the 10th day of the 7th month—known as the Day of Atonement—the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place alone. In God's presence, he sprinkled the blood of a sacrificial animal on the mercy seat. This sacred ritual symbolized the final Day of Atonement judgment, prophesied by Daniel and Revelation, which takes place in heaven just before the second coming of Christ (Daniel 8:14; Revelation 14:6-7).

The earthly tabernacle services provide a rich framework for understanding Christ's heavenly ministry. In the next lessons, we will explore the Holy and Most Holy Place ministries in detail. For now, we will focus on the sacrifices for sin conducted in the court and their profound significance in pointing to Jesus' redemptive work.

Relevance: The news that Christ, our Savior, is living and ministering for us in the heavenly sanctuary is truly remarkable. As Scripture assures us, "*He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them*" Hebrews 7:25. This means that Jesus is always available to you and me, providing salvation, encouragement, and victory over sin—even in our darkest moments. Through Him, we find hope, strength, and the assurance of eternal life.

III. HOW FORGIVENESS WAS PROVIDED

Our focus will begin with the sin offerings designated for the average individual in the camp of Israel. The type of offering presented varied based on the person's material resources, reflecting God's compassion and fairness. Special provisions were made to ensure that even the poorest could participate in this sacred act of atonement, emphasizing that forgiveness and reconciliation were accessible to all, regardless of their social or economic status.

The Word:

10. From what two kinds of animal could the common man choose his sin-offering? Leviticus 4:28, 32

11. What two acts were performed by the confessing sinner? Leviticus 4:29

12. What three acts were then performed by the priest? Leviticus 4:30-31

13. What did these three priestly acts provide for the sinner? Leviticus 4:31 (last part)

14. What alternative sin-offerings could be brought by the poor? Leviticus 5:7, 11

Explanation: In the ancient Israelite system, the type of animal used for a sin offering depended on the sinner's position and material resources. An average person could bring less expensive and more readily available animals compared to a ruler or priest. The sin of a priest carried greater weight because his influential office made his actions highly consequential. As a result, he was required to bring a young bull—a costly sacrifice (Leviticus 4:3). In contrast, a ruler brought a male goat for his offering (Leviticus 4:22-23). God's judgment of sin accounts not only for the act itself but also for the privileges, responsibilities, and level of understanding of the person committing it.

The process of offering a sin sacrifice was rich in symbolism. The sinner placed their hand on the head of the animal, signifying a transfer of guilt and recognizing the animal as their substitute. By confessing their sin, they acknowledged the need for a substitute to die in their place.

Next, the penitent sinner was required to take the life of the animal. While priests later assumed this role in Israel's history, the original instruction was for the guilty person to carry out this act, underscoring the personal responsibility for sin.

Afterward, the priest sprinkled the animal's blood in specific parts of the sanctuary. For the average person and the ruler, the blood was applied to the horns of the altar of burnt offering in the court. For a priest's sin offering, the blood was sprinkled seven times before the veil in the Holy Place and applied to the horns of the altar of incense (Leviticus 4:6-7). In the sin offering for an average person, some of the animal's flesh was cooked and eaten by the priests (Leviticus 6:26, 29-30). This act, along with the sprinkling of blood, symbolized the recording of the sinner's pardon in the sanctuary.

The burning of the animal's fat on the altar symbolized offering the best to God. The Israelites were forbidden from eating fat (Leviticus 3:17; 7:23-24), and its burning was described as "*a sweet savor unto the Lord*" Leviticus 17:6; 3:5. Fat represented God's blessings, including material abundance (Genesis 45:18; 1 Chronicles 4:40; Psalm 92:14; Proverbs 11:25; Isaiah 30:23).

Only after these priestly acts was atonement considered complete, and the sinner forgiven (Leviticus 4:20, 26, 31, 35). Atonement represented cleansing, achieved through the sacrifice and priestly mediation.

For the poor, provisions allowed sin offerings of two turtledoves, two pigeons, or a "*tenth of an ephah of fine flour*" (Leviticus 5:11). An ephah was about 22 liters or 2.5 pecks in U.S. dry measure. Even in cases of flour offerings, the symbolism of sacrifice remained, as flour was produced through the crushing of grain, which "gave its life" to nourish others.

Sin offerings primarily addressed sins committed unwittingly or inadvertently (Leviticus 4:2, 13-14, 22-23, 27-28) and were brought when the individual became aware of their sin. For more serious, deliberate sins, a guilt or trespass offering was required. This involved the sacrifice of a ram, following similar procedures to the sin offering. Guilt offerings atoned for serious sins committed both inadvertently and deliberately (Leviticus 6:1-7; 19:20-22; Ezra 10:19).

Relevance: The sacrificial system reminded sinners that forgiveness could only be granted through suffering and death. Even in cases of flour offerings, this principle was symbolically preserved, as the grain was crushed to provide nourishment. These rituals pointed forward to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who gave His life to save humanity.

The message is clear: sin is costly, and redemption requires sacrifice. Yet through Christ's perfect offering, we have the assurance of forgiveness and the promise of reconciliation with God.

IV. HOW THE NEW TESTAMENT INTERPRETS THE SYMBOLISM OF THE SIN-OFFERINGS

The entire service of offering animal sacrifices for sins symbolized the sacrifice and heavenly mediation of Jesus Christ.

The Word:

15. When was Christ our sin-offering? Hebrews 7:27; 10:11-12; 1 John 3:5

16. What general principle is stated by the writer of Hebrews concerning the means by which forgiveness for sin is possible? Hebrews 9:22

17. What is our part as we seek forgiveness? 1 John 1:9

18. What is symbolized by the priestly sprinkling of blood after the sacrifice had been made? Hebrews 9:11-14, 243 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 John 2:1

Explanation: Christ's one sacrifice on the Cross fulfilled and replaced all the animal sacrifices of the ancient sanctuary. When Jesus died, the Lord dramatized the end of the earthly sanctuary services—or ceremonial law—by tearing the veil in the temple in Jerusalem (Matthew 27:50-51). This moment marked the transition from symbol to reality, from type to antitype, and from the earthly ministry described in the Old Testament to the heavenly ministry of Christ, our High Priest, in the sanctuary above.

This is truly good news for both Old Testament and New Testament believers. Those who passed away before the Cross, believing in the coming Messiah, will be resurrected at the end of time because of Jesus' sacrificial death. If Christ had not died and risen again, there would be no hope for the faithful dead to rise (1 Corinthians 15:17-23). Animal sacrifices could not save anyone (Hebrews 10:1). Only the death of Jesus could provide forgiveness and redemption (Hebrews 9:15).

Yet, even the infinite suffering of Jesus, central as it was to the plan of salvation, did not fulfill all the divine requirements for forgiveness. Just as ancient sinners confessed their guilt by placing their hand on the head of the sacrifice, we must confess our sins by virtue of Jesus' sacrifice. Additionally, priestly ministry must take place in heaven.

In the earthly sanctuary, the priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice in specific parts of the tabernacle. Similarly, in the heavenly sanctuary, Jesus applies the merits of His shed blood on our behalf when we confess our sins. His intercession in heaven provides atonement—the cleansing of sin that His sacrifice and our confession make possible. Forgiveness, therefore, is the result of three interwoven elements: Christ's death, our confession, and His ongoing heavenly ministry.

Relevance: Praise be to the Lord! Through Christ's sacrifice and ministry, you and I can live entirely free from guilt. Scripture assures us that our consciences can be purified "*from dead works to serve the living God*" Hebrews 9:14. We can stand in the presence of God as though we have never sinned, fully restored and empowered by the Holy Spirit to live according to His will (Romans 8:9-17).

For the Old Testament believer, the symbolic sanctuary services pointed forward to Jesus' death and ministry, which ultimately provided satisfaction for the guilt of sin. For us today, the good news is that Jesus' one infinite sacrifice is the perfect substitute for every sinner. As we confess our sins and claim His sacrifice as our own, He, as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, applies the merits of His sacrifice to us and grants us forgiveness.

Through Christ, guilt is cast into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19) and placed "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12). We are freed to experience peace, joy, and assurance, living confidently in the knowledge that Jesus has forgiven us.

Will you accept His gift of grace and allow Him to transform your life?

Do you rejoice in the good news of His sacrifice and heavenly intercession?

Have you invited Him into your heart to be your source of love, power, and purpose?

Review Questions

1. True or False

a. The ancient Israelite tabernacle or temple illustrated the three aspects of the ministry of Jesus Christ.
b. The altar of burnt offering was the place for the offering of human sacrifice.
c. “Atonement” included priestly ministry as well as sacrifice of an animal. (See #3 below)
d. All our sins were forgiven when Jesus Christ died on the Cross.

2. Reflect on how God differentiates the seriousness of sins and assigns corresponding degrees of punishment, as seen in Luke 12:47-48. How does this principle challenge our understanding of justice and accountability in light of His divine character? Explain how Luke 12:47-48 demonstrates God's perfect justice and accountability.

    a. The passage in Luke 12:47-48 highlights that God treats some sins as more serious than others and assigns punishment in proportion to the sinner's knowledge and responsibility. Jesus says that a servant who knows their master's will and fails to act accordingly will receive a more severe punishment, while a servant who sins in ignorance will receive a lighter one. This principle reveals that God's judgment is not arbitrary but deeply fair, taking into account the level of understanding and opportunity each person has been given.

    b. This principle challenges us to reflect on the responsibilities we bear when we have access to truth and understanding. With greater light comes greater accountability. It also underscores God's mercy toward those who sin out of ignorance, showing that His justice is balanced with compassion.

    c. What stands out to you in this passage about God's character or the way He judges sin?

3. Further reflection: In the Old Testament sanctuary system, atonement encompassed both the sacrifice of an animal and the subsequent priestly ministry. The animal's death symbolized the transfer of sin and provided the blood needed for cleansing, while the priestly ministry involved rituals such as sprinkling the blood in specific areas of the sanctuary. This dual process was essential for completing the atonement, which symbolized both forgiveness and reconciliation with God (e.g., Leviticus 4:20, 26, 31, 35).