

APPENDIX ELEVEN

The Gospels And The Day Of Atonement

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Even reading the passion narrative superficially suggests Jesus as the antitype of the Passover lamb. But there are less prominent motifs embedded in the same accounts. Consider the words of J.D.M. Derrett:

... they linked Jesus' sufferings with the usual dramatic preparation of the High Priest, on the Even of the Day of Atonement. The latter was taken to an **upper chamber**, where he communed with the 'elders of the Court'. He was **adjured**, and was kept awake all night. The tending of the Altar **fire**, which normally took place about **cock-crow**, was advanced, and before cock-crow the Altar was made ready for the High Priest's personal sacrifice. During the ceremonies the High Priest was robed and disrobed several times and his final vestments were glorious. The gospel texts have retained the coincidences, some of them trifling in themselves, because the role of the High Priest and the outlines of his ritual were perfectly well known, and because a succession of mere hints was enough to make the point that Jesus was the **real** High Priest and was just about to effect the **real** (and everlasting) Atonement. That he was interrogated by the High Priest and elders in the High Priest's dwelling (and we note in passing the gospel's stumbling over the place of the meeting and the exact identity of the chief interrogator) is a perfect piece of New Testament irony. And that the Day of Atonement and Passover have little in common seemed irrelevant, on the theory that Jesus' life summed up and gave meaning to all the *Torah*. (*Law in the New Testament* [London, 1970], 410-411)

When we add to this the little touch in John's resurrection account about the folded clothes left in the tomb and recall Lev. 16:23 the picture becomes clearer still. Even the evangelists concerned apparently with the history of the atonement are not negligent of its theological implications and the typical antecedents.

The Old Testament picture in Leviticus 16 brings to view one who after preliminary ritual was without sin. This one by his solitary labours reconciled the nation to God. He brought the blood of a spotless offering into the presence of God and the whole nation was accepted in his acceptance. Then he returned to the waiting penitents to bless them, and on every fiftieth year the Jubilee trumpets sounded on the Day of Atonement and the people rejoiced as never before in their whole lifetime. The New Testament assures us that the reality has come in Jesus our great High Priest who has made atonement for our transgressions. Therefore are we accepted in the beloved, and gladly rejoice in His imputed righteousness. That has been the good news ever since the resurrection morning in 31 AD. Reconciled by our Representative, in God's reckoning we too have entered within the veil and become seated in heavenly places at God's right hand. Eph. 2:6.

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