The Scapegoat

Scripture Reading — Leviticus 16:20-22

He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins. . . . — Leviticus 16:21

Here in Leviticus, in a lengthy passage about slaughtering animals to atone for people’s sins, we find more imagery that points to Jesus.

One such image is the scapegoat. The word scapegoat is still used in the English language today, meaning “someone who bears the blame for others.” Usually, though, when people today are looking for a scapegoat, they want to avoid admitting wrong.

The scapegoat image in Leviticus didn’t work that way. The people were called to repent and acknowledge their guilt as the priest laid his hands on the goat’s head and confessed over it all of the people’s sins. This was not some magical mumbo-jumbo. God, in his grace, was accepting a substitute for the people, taking away their sin, sending it out into the wilderness for destruction, and counting them righteous.

This is a picture that points to the Savior, Jesus, who came to take on himself the curse for all human sin. He became the scapegoat for us all. As the apostle Paul put it later, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Prayer

Lord God, thank you for the death of Christ on the cross. Through him, our scapegoat, we are cleansed of our sins, and we have peace with you. Our hearts overflow with gratitude for all you have done for us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Devotion topics: Christianity, Sin, Discipleship, Grace, Confession, Repentance, The Cross

Written by George Young — https://today.reframemedia.com/authors/george-young

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