This evening we're turning to Leviticus 16 - a study on the Day of Atonement ... we want to see Jesus as our Saviour and Scapegoat. What are we to make of it? More often than not, it's known as Yom Kippur (Ki-poor). This is the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar - one of two high holy days, the other is the one we looked at last evening, Rosh Hashanah, the Feast of Trumpets.

When referring to the Day of Atonement, the rabbis, more often than not, used one simple word, 'yoma' ... meaning 'The Day.' This day is so different to every other day - this day, more than any other, is on a different level. It shows how holy God is and how sinful man is!

It's a day when fasting is a must, a day when no work is done, a day when no burden is carried. The people are to 'deny themselves' ... a day of affliction for their souls (16:29-31).

Jewish people will flock to the synagogue - 5 special services are held. The book of Jonah is read during the afternoon service ... a reminder of God's forgiveness and mercy when people repent of their sin. On Yom Kippur, God calls his people to get serious about sin!

It is observed for 1 day – in our calendar, it usually falls somewhere in late September/early October – this year it's on Wednesday 19th ... for a Jewish person it occurs in the month of Tishri, on Day 10. The PP slide will give you some idea of where and when it fits in. Yom Kippur actually brings to an end the Ten Days of Awe - they began on the Jewish new year, Rosh Hashanah, ten days of repentance and reflection when Jewish people have been focused on sorting out their lives, dealing with all kinds of issues, and getting on top of their interpersonal relationships.

You can read all about it at your leisure in Leviticus 23:26-32 and in detail in Leviticus 16. Later on, in our study, we'll see the link with the New Testament book of Hebrews. I've even put the Hebrew word up there for you!

What is the real purpose of Yom Kippur? It's when the high priest went beyond the veil into the holy of holies to atone for the sins of the people. For him, it was a day of lonely service - we know that from 16:17. He was there all alone, a solitary figure! A reminder of another man - the Lord Jesus - who trod the winepress alone; the one who, on that centre cross, was forsaken, abandoned, by God, and rejected by men.

It was a case of one man, on his own, doing what he had to do, on one day only. It was a divine appointment. The people did nothing, the priest did it all. A token of our experience in grace ... we know from Titus 3:5, it is 'not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.' You can read about it in chapter 16 verses 1-2 and further down in verses 29-30. We read: 'On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves and not do any work ... because on this day atonement will be made for you to cleanse you. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins.'

It's important for us to see the significance of the seventh month - on Day One the trumpet was blown for Rosh Hashanah - the new civil year ... this time it is the year 5779. Day Ten was Yom Kippur ... then on Day Fifteen came
Sukkot which lasted for a week. Seven days of joy and celebration and thanksgiving. The blowing of trumpets signalled a new year, but only the shedding of blood could give the people a new beginning. A fresh start. That's what it means to be forgiven, to be ‘at one’ with God. So we read these precious words in Hebrews 9:22, ‘without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.’

Back then, the high priest had to do this year after year. His work was never finished. That's where Jesus made a difference for he did what no one else could do. We read in Hebrews 9:26 these thrilling words: 'But now, once for all time, Jesus has appeared at the end of the age to remove sin by his own death as a sacrifice' ... and in verse 28 ... 'so also Christ died once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people.' See that ... the death of Jesus on Calvary's cross has fulfilled the Day of Atonement.

The word translated 'atonement' is the Hebrew word 'kaphar' - it speaks of a covering. It was used, for example, of the tar that fully covered Noah's ark! It also refers to the mercy seat in the holy of holies - it was the lid on the ark of the covenant.

The question is, How did the high priest do it, how did he go about it? What routine did he follow? You can read all about it in verses 3-28 ... this was God's idea, the people had sinned and they needed cleansing, there was no other way!

The high priest ensured that the proper sacrifices were available ... there was a bull and a ram for himself and his family, and two goats and a ram for the people. They had to be in tiptop condition, no flaws ... God was looking for them to be just right. The bull and goat were sin offerings, the ram was a burnt offering (16:3).

He then did all that God required him to do for himself and his family (verses 3-5). For us, we want to see what happens next ... this is what he did on behalf of the people of Israel. The two goats were taken, lots were cast, one of them was killed, the other goat was looked after by a priest - it had a special role to play later on.

It's interesting to see what the high priest wore at this point in time ... he has taken off his garments of 'glory and beauty' and is only dressed in his white linen broidered coat. The multicoloured ephod with the breastplate of twelve precious stones, the robe of blue with the golden bells and pomegranates attached to the hem are set aside ... a powerful reminder of the Lord setting aside his glory when he went all the way to Calvary for us. The white coat speaks of his humanity and his humility. We find that alluded to in Philippians 2 where we read, 'He humbled himself …'

One of the goats was killed and offered as a sin offering on the brazen altar. The blood of that goat would be taken by the high priest beyond the veil into the most holy place ... he would sprinkle it on the mercy seat and seven times before the mercy seat ... he was simply doing what God asked him to do. And he was in there on his own, no one else was with him. When he'd finished, he came back out to the courtyard where he repeated the process on the brazen altar ... then he went to the other goat that was alive, and we read in verse 21: '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 - and put them on the goat’s head. He shall send the
goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task.'

Then we read in 16:22 the rationale behind it: 'The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert.' Ain't that amazing - that goat was the scapegoat! It's in the wilderness where it would never be seen again. We read: 'As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.'

Can you see the picture clearly? Can you see the link between this event and the death of the Lord Jesus? This was a type, a shadow of things to come. That's where Jesus is both our Saviour and our Scapegoat.

The first goat reminds us of the doctrine of substitution - someone else dying for me! It died in my place, it's blood covered my sin for another year ... twelve months later, it would all be done again. That's why there was no chair in the tabernacle or temple for the work of the high priest was never complete. Aaron never sat down ... the Lord Jesus did! He sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

The second goat reminds us of the doctrine of expiation - the sins of the people were not only forgiven, they were taken away, they were removed. God not only balances the books, he wipes the slate clean! Remember, John the Baptist in John 1:29 said: 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.'

I love the way the writer speaks of it in Hebrews, we read in 9:12-14 these words: 'Christ entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption ... How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!'

It reminds me of an old hymn: Not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain, could give the guilty conscience peace or wash away the stain. But Christ the heavenly Lamb takes all our sins away, a sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they!

There's a future aspect to this ... a prophetic slant. Yom Kippur is a day for Israel to be restored to God as a nation, it's a day when they trust in their Messiah. You find echoes of this event at the end of Zechariah 12 and in the first bit of chapter 13.

Here is a day when Jewish people will see and recognise their Messiah ... the day when he returns in power and glory and touches down on the Mount of Olives ... when they will be full of remorse for the way they treated him at his first coming ... a day of national repentance ... a day when individuals mourn and cry unto God. This anticipates a day when Israel will be saved, all because a 'fountain is opened for sin and for uncleanness.'

Let me tease it out for you ... we read in Zechariah 13:9: "This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'"

I think this is nothing short of sensational ... this verse is one of the key verses in all of the Old Testament - it's a verse of amazing contrasts: it speaks of tribulation and triumph, of profound sorrow and ecstatic hope - it hits a high note when the chilled relationship
between God and his people is now restored and renewed. That's why grace is so amazing! It seems to me that this verse propels us into the future - it’s a reference to the time of Jacob's trouble, as Jeremiah labelled it; it slots into the time frame of Daniel's seventieth week - read all about it at the end of Daniel 9. This is all scheduled to happen during the period of Great Tribulation here on earth - so many dear people will perish, a significant number will be purged - here we are reminded of a remnant that will remain.

These days are scarily frightening - it's worth noting, the church will not be here, she is with the Lord for the trumpet will have sounded - we call that event the rapture of the church (Paul writes of it in 1 Thessalonians 4).

As soon as the church is up and away, and the Antichrist is revealed, it's a case of all hell let loose in the world, those will be days when hordes of demons will rape the earth, days when Satan is on the run - you can read all about in the centre section of the book of Revelation.

Many of the OT prophets spoke of it - men like Joel and Amos ... days of inky black darkness and abject gloom, it is hailed as the "terrible day of the Lord."

The fact is, that's when God is working behind the scenes - the old truth that weeping will endure for a night but joy comes in the morning is so appropriate at this point in her history. That's the message of Zechariah 12 ... when Jesus returns to the earth the hearts of Jewish people will be opened as they see him (12:10). It begins with a move of the Holy Spirit in conviction and it ends with them calling on the name of the Lord - once their eyes are opened and they recognise him as the One whom they pierced, they will mourn as one mourns when losing an only son - such grief, such deep sorrow, such an awareness of sin - it's nationwide repentance, yet there's something individual about it for each person mourns alone. He deals with us one-to-one!

Thank God, in that day, we read in 13:1, that "a fountain is opened for sin and uncleanness." I love that for it shows the power of the blood of Jesus to cleanse all sinners, no matter who they are or where they're from! The hymn tells us, "There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins ..." This is it! Jesus saves! Sure, he does. That's the day when Paul's prayer for the salvation of Jewish people in Romans 10:1 will be answered ... we read that "all Israel shall be saved" (Romans 11:26). God's delays are not his denials.

To me, that's the icing on the cake - they will turn to him and say with love and affection, "the Lord is our God" ... he will look at them and say with a smile on his face, "and you are my people." Yes, that's what reconciliation is all about!

Yom Kippur is a day, therefore, for each of us to be mindful of our sin ... a day for you and I to be so very thankful that Jesus is our Saviour and our Scapegoat. Back then, under the old economy, sin was covered; today, because of Calvary, it is removed for ever, it's blotted out! That's why we love to sing: "Christ has for sin atonement made, what a wonderful Saviour!"