Title: Christological implications of Leviticus 16:11-28: a study from an Indonesian perspective

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Abstract:

In the modern church, the Book of Leviticus is often neglected, due perhaps to the incomprehensible content of the book to contemporary man. However ignored, Leviticus is still an important source for knowledge of God’s way of dealing with sin and uncleanness. This study attempted to find out how those who lived in Old Testament times, especially those who underwent the Exodus experience, could have understood the salvific acts of God. Of special interest was the question of whether or not they could have known through the rites of the Day of Atonement what Christ would do for them.

This study, then, examined closely the Day of Atonement services, as recorded in Leviticus 16. It looked specifically for an Old Testament understanding of Christ’s sacrificial and mediatorial ministry.

An overview of the contextual setting of Leviticus in the Pentateuch shows it to be the core of the five books of Moses. Leviticus deals with cleanness and holiness, as God wants demonstrated in his law-keeping people of Israel. Further, Leviticus 16 can be shown to be the heart of Leviticus, the core of the holiness message. The structure of the chapter, its relationship to the sanctuary service, its relation to the Exodus experience, and its relation to the law of God—all indicate this.
An analysis of Leviticus 16 demonstrates that the Day of Atonement was a very special day for Israel, with many special and unique religious features. This day was the climax of the religious year, when the sins and uncleanness of the people were cleansed, atoned for by the blood of Yahweh’s goat and sent away by the Azazel goat to the desert. The repeated use of the words kipper and taher in the chapter suggest cleansing and purification as the most important functions of the day. The mediatorial ministry of the high priest, the sacrifice offered for the sins of the people, and the Azazel ceremony—with its portrayal of the forgiveness of sin and eradication of evil—were symbols of judgment and salvation. Salvation was for the ones who obeyed, fasted, and accepted God’s plan; judgment—“cutting off” from the people—was for those who did not make right their hearts on that day.

The ceremonies of that special day clearly pointed to the activity of Yahweh in favor of Israel. He was seen as the one who made possible their salvation, delivered them from death and judgment, and set them right with himself and the community. There is no mention of Christ, but the functions of Yahweh, cleansing and saving from judgment, clearly portrayed the work that the Messiah would perform for Israel. It can only be conjectured that to some degree the Israelites comprehended this.

A brief study of the main features of the Day of Atonement in the New Testament confirms that the New Testament authors saw Jesus as performing the functions of Yahweh, so clearly shown in the Day of Atonement. Jesus Christ, as the promised Messiah, fulfilled what God intended to foreshadow in the Day of Atonement services.

A comparison of Leviticus 16 in Hebrew and the Indonesian versions of the Old Testament suggest that the concepts are clearly translated and can be readily understood within an Indonesian context. Four words are taken almost directly, through the Arabic, from the
Hebrew. There are: Azazel, tahir (clean), kudus (holy), and korban (sacrifice). These words are used by Indonesians in referring to the sacrifices and rituals that are commonly practices. Thus, the important concepts of the Day of Atonement can easily be conveyed within the Indonesian context.