

Leviticus 16:11-14

Aaron Eime, Christ Church Jerusalem, 2022

Moses had acted as priest for one week, demonstrating to Aaron and his sons how to serve appropriately in the presence of God (Leviticus 8-9). On the eighth day, Aaron had assumed his role as the High Priest and now receives instructions on how to enter the Holy of Holies to meet with the Lord. The Torah is unclear if Moses was also allowed into the Holy of Holies. He had been in the presence of the Lord on Sinai for 120 days, thus he was not a stranger to the Glory of God. Nor to the voice of God as Numbers 7vs8-9 describes how Moses would hear the voice of the Lord from the cloud above the Ark of the Covenant, without describing the location of Moses. Was he too before the Ark or outside the *Parochet*, the separation curtain? It is unclear, but regardless of the access Moses has, Aaron does not have the same access. Aaron may only proceed beyond the curtain one day a year and only in a certain fashion.

When Aaron enters the Tabernacle he is actually not truly alone; he brings with him the generational history of his own house, with all its blessings, victories and faults. The Lord declares in Exodus 34vs5-7 that the consequence of sin and its taint can be passed down to subsequent generations. Conversely, holiness and righteousness can also affect the future generations, as Paul reflects in Romans 11 that the Jewish people remain elect and loved for the merit of the patriarchs. This should add a weighty responsibility to our own personal devotion and obedience to the Lord. There is much to say about the theology of individualism. That is, we all have a personal relationship with the living God and each one of us is sealed with the Holy Spirit. However biblical theology is one of community. God calls and redeems to Himself a holy people, not a bunch of individuals. Jesus teaches us to pray for forgiveness in the plural, forgives us our sins and not only me. Paul admonishes us not to stop meeting together and the Didache encourages us to every day seek the company of the saints. Therefore with this context of community and family history, before proceeding inside the curtain, Aaron sacrifices a bull as a sin offering for himself and his household. This is first atonement on the Day of Atonements.

Exodus 30vs34 describes a special incense for God's personal use, concocted of 11 ingredients. Aaron brings this incense with him on this special day. The incense creates more than a pleasant aroma; it creates a cloud of smoke that obscures the ark. We can be near the presence of the Lord, but it is death to see Him with human eyes. As Jesus says in John 1vs18, no one has ever seen God. God meets Aaron from His own cloud between the cherubim on the Atonement Cover. The meeting of Man and God is a cooperative endeavour. God brings a cloud and Aaron brings a cloud. If you think about it this is an incredible act of love on the part of the Lord. Even as the *kaporet*, the atonement cover, is obscured by the cloud or clouds, Aaron sprinkles some blood of his personal bull on it before the Lord. God delights to have humans (His creation) participate in the redemptive activity of Heaven.

During our discussion, we asked the question: if Aaron is behind the curtain only one day a year, how then does the Holy of Holies get cleaned? What about the build-up of dust? Or the dried blood on the Ark? Also how was the Holy of Holies disassembled and transported and then rebuilt during the wandering in the wilderness? While these questions are interesting to ponder and discuss, the issue of text is how do you and in what manner do you come into the presence of God? Familiarity breeds contempt, as they say, and while God is indeed our friend, He is also a consuming fire. Just ask Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aaron.