

Set Free  
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Leviticus 16

Opening: Most people agree they are imperfect, but many struggle with the idea that they are (by nature) sinful and in need of a Savior. **Why is that? Why do people struggle with the biblical balance between the justice of God and the love of God? What is “atonement?” Why was atonement necessary?**

A great summation from our Explore the Bible lesson:

*“God requires atonement because He is holy, but He provides atonement because He is love.”<sup>i</sup>*

Big Idea: God promised a way for His people to be free from the guilt of sin (atonement.) Jesus fulfilled that promise by being our substitute on the cross. The Old Testament “Day of Atonement” was a “preview” of Jesus’ substitutionary atonement for all mankind.

Let’s do some quick review from last week:

- What was God’s calling for Moses’ brother Aaron and all his descendants?
- What was the role of a priest in that day? How did Jesus change that?
- What happened to Aaron’s two eldest sons? Why did it happen?

After what happened to Aaron’s sons we can imagine that the priests were afraid to come near the tabernacle. God gave instructions regarding the proper way to atone for the sins of the people. In chapters 11-15 of Leviticus God instructed the priests how to discern between what was clean and unclean. Then in chapter 16 God instituted the “Day of Atonement” or in Hebrew, Yom Kippur. Yom means “day” and Kippur means “atonement” or “covering.”<sup>ii</sup>

Leviticus 16:3–6 (NLT)

<sup>3</sup>“When Aaron enters the sanctuary area, he must follow these instructions fully. He must bring a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. <sup>4</sup> He must put on his linen tunic and the linen undergarments worn next to his body. He must tie the linen sash around his waist and put the linen turban on his head. These are sacred garments, so he must bathe himself in water before he puts them on. <sup>5</sup> Aaron must take from the community of Israel two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

<sup>6</sup>“Aaron will present his own bull as a sin offering to purify himself and his family, making them right with the Lord.

- Aaron is allowed to go behind the large curtain and into the “holy of holies” where the presence of God was. **Why Aaron? How often was this allowed?** (Exodus 30:10) <sup>iii</sup>

- Notice how many steps of preparation Aaron had to take before entering into God's presence. **Why was he careful to follow instructions?**
- I see two lessons when I read this:
  - I'm grateful that because of Jesus I can enter God's presence any time and anywhere without any ritual being necessary.
  - While that is good news, this text also makes me consider whether we are guilty of showing up to worship God without doing enough to prepare our hearts and minds.
- The more we prepare for worship, the more we will receive in worship!
- **How should we prepare ourselves for worship** (either corporate or private)? **What is the FIRST thing we should do? What else?**
  1. We need to remember \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ our \_\_\_\_\_ before coming into His presence! (James 4:8-10)
  2. We need to come \_\_\_\_\_ (and \_\_\_\_\_) Him to \_\_\_\_\_. (Jer. 33:3)
  3. We need to get OUT of "\_\_\_\_\_ mode." We are the \_\_\_\_\_ and HE is the \_\_\_\_\_. We're not here to be \_\_\_\_\_ or to do a "\_\_\_\_\_ " of how the service "\_\_\_\_\_."
  4. We need to worship \_\_\_\_\_, not just \_\_\_\_\_. (Heb. 13:15)
  5. We need to have the \_\_\_\_\_ on our minds daily. (Romans 12:2 and Isaiah 45:22)

Thomas Edison was asked how he came up with the idea for the light bulb. Edison replied, "By thinking about it all the time."<sup>iv</sup>

- How often do we frantically rush into corporate worship with our mind on ten different things other than God's presence? How often is our personal, private worship of God just "checking a box?"

- Praying these verses is a great way to slow down for worship:

*Psalm 139:23–24 (NLT)*

<sup>23</sup> *Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.*

<sup>24</sup> *Point out anything in me that offends you,  
and lead me along the path of everlasting life.*

- Next we see a picture of how Jesus meets ALL our needs for atonement.

Leviticus 16:7–10 (NLT)

<sup>7</sup> Then he must take the two male goats and present them to the Lord at the entrance of the Tabernacle. <sup>8</sup> He is to cast sacred lots to determine which goat will be reserved as an offering to the Lord and which will carry the sins of the people to the wilderness of Azazel. <sup>9</sup> Aaron will then present as a sin offering the goat chosen by lot for the Lord. <sup>10</sup> The other goat, the scapegoat chosen by lot to

be sent away, will be kept alive, standing before the Lord. When it is sent away to Azazel in the wilderness, the people will be purified and made right with the Lord.

- The high priest took two male goats. One of them had to die because as Hebrews 9:22 says, “...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”<sup>v</sup>
- The second goat was to be released into the wilderness to symbolize carrying away the sins of the people.
- Scholars debate the name “Azazel (even the pronunciation!)”
- **Azazel** (ah-zay'zel), a demonic figure to whom the sin-laden scapegoat was sent on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:8, 10, 26). The Hebrew word has been traditionally understood as a phrase meaning ‘the goat that escapes,’ giving us the word ‘scapegoat.’<sup>vi</sup> Some Jewish interpreters regard it as the name of a place some 12 miles east of Jerusalem, in the wilderness. Others take it to be the name of an evil spirit, or even of Satan.<sup>vii</sup>
- The two goats together are a picture of the sufficiency of Christ in providing for our atonement: 1) Christ died for our sins as the perfect, sinless sacrifice. 2) Christ also removed our sin and guilt.
- This is the very essence of the gospel message. You and I can be free from our sin and guilt because (as these verses tell us) ---

Psalm 103:12 (NLT) says,

<sup>12</sup> He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.

That’s why in John 1:29 (NLT) John the Baptist,

<sup>29</sup> ...saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

1 John 2:2 (NLT)

<sup>2</sup> He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.

1 John 4:10 (NLT)

<sup>10</sup> This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

- Jesus’ death on the cross not only allows us to enjoy Heaven and avoid Hell, it allows us to be released from the guilt of our sin.
- That’s the real lesson in this text. The Day of Atonement was a preview of the FINAL work of atonement Jesus would accomplish on the cross.
- We should praise Him daily when we think of that!
- But, it’s not “automatic” or “earned” atonement. We can only claim it if we accept Christ as Savior and Lord. We must confess our sin to Jesus our great High Priest and trust Him to cover that sin.

- Finally, we see that God instructed the Hebrew people to make this Day of Atonement an annual observance.

Leviticus 16:29–30 (NLT)

<sup>29</sup> “On the tenth day of the appointed month in early autumn, you must deny yourselves. Neither native-born Israelites nor foreigners living among you may do any kind of work. This is a permanent law for you. <sup>30</sup> On that day offerings of purification will be made for you, and you will be purified in the Lord’s presence from all your sins.

- Our Jewish friends still observe this day each year in the fall.
- *“After the temple was destroyed in ad 70, Jewish people could no longer offer the prescribed sacrifices for atonement of sins. They have substituted prayer, good works, and charitable donations hoping to take away the penalty for their sins.”*
- *“Yom Kippur is a day of fasting. No work is done on this day, including at home. Many Jewish people spend the day at synagogue, praying for forgiveness of their sins. Immediately after the evening service, they have a “break fast” meal.”<sup>viii</sup>*
- **Why do Christians NOT observe the Day of Atonement as an annual event on our calendar? What day DO we observe that is similar?**
- In a sense we should celebrate it every day!

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- The Day of Atonement in Leviticus was a preview of the complete and perfect atonement that Christ would bring through His death on the cross.
- The elaborate preparations by Aaron remind us we can be thankful that because Jesus is our great High Priest, we can come “boldly” yet reverently into God’s presence any time, day or night.
- We’re also reminded that we should not approach God casually. Instead we should daily prepare our hearts and minds for worship by spending time in prayer and His word. Our corporate worship here in church shouldn’t be a “spectator sport” but a time when we see God as our “audience of One.” Worship is a time to ask Him to search our hearts, reveal what we need to confess, and speak to us what we need to hear.
- In the ritual of the two goats we see that Jesus was not only our substitute as the sacrifice, but He also takes away our sin and guilt.
- That reality should cause us to want to have a deeper and richer relationship with Him every day.

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<sup>i</sup> Explore the Bible Teacher’s Guide – Lifeway 2017

<sup>ii</sup> Hunt, Josh. Question Based Bible Study Guide -- Exodus Leviticus: Good Questions Have Groups Talking (p. 198). Good Question Publishing. Kindle Edition.

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<sup>iii</sup> Exodus 30:10 (NLT) <sup>10</sup> “Once a year Aaron must purify the altar by smearing its horns with blood from the offering made to purify the people from their sin. This will be a regular, annual event from generation to generation, for this is the LORD’s most holy altar.”

<sup>iv</sup> Anders, M. and Anders, M. (1998). *30 days to understanding the Christian life in 15 minutes a day*. Nashville: T. Nelson.

<sup>v</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Heb 9:22). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>vi</sup> Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In *Harper’s Bible dictionary* (1st ed., pp. 81–82). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

<sup>vii</sup> Easton, M. G. (1893). In *Easton’s Bible dictionary*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

<sup>viii</sup> Rose Publishing, *Feasts & Holidays of Bible* (Torrance, CA: Rose Publishing, 2011).