

Day of Atonement

Lev 16:11-19
SS Lesson for 02/21/2016

Devotional Scripture: Heb 2:9-17

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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson examines how and why atonement was made in the ritual of the **Day of Atonement**. The **study's aim** is to understand that atonement will help us understand the personality and thoughts of God. The **study's application** is to live daily with the understanding that our sins have been atoned for and are no longer held against the ones who trust in Jesus Christ.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Lev 16:16

So he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins; and so he shall do for the tabernacle of meeting which remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness.

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

a. The sin offering of the high priest (16:11-14)

This paragraph explains the steps in the blood-sprinkling ritual of the bull slaughtered by the high priest “for his own sin offering” (v. 11). This ceremony resembles the ritual given in 4:3-12 for the ordinary sin offering of the high priest, the difference being in the *place* where the blood was sprinkled. Rather than in front of the curtain and on the incense altar (as in 4:6-7), the blood here was taken into the most holy place and sprinkled on “the front of” and “before the atonement cover” (16:14).

16:11. The purpose of the high priest’s **sin offering** was **to make atonement for himself and his household**. The high priest himself had to be cleansed from the pollution of **sin** before he could function as a mediator to offer “the sin offering for the people” (v. 15).

16:12-13. The high priest was to enter the most holy place three times, the first time with **a censer full of burning coals from the altar** of burnt offering on which coals he was to burn **incense** prepared especially for use in the tabernacle (cf. Ex. 30:34-36). This apparently created a **smoke** screen to prevent his gazing at the Shekinah glory of God’s presence over **the atonement cover**, thus averting divine wrath on himself.

16:14. Aaron was to enter a second time behind the curtain with **some of the bull’s blood** which he was to **sprinkle... on the front of the atonement cover**, and then **seven times before the atonement cover** (either on the front of the ark or on the ground). The use of the rest of the bull’s blood is indicated in verses 18-19.

b. The sin offering of the people (16:15-17)

16:15. The sin offering of the people consisted of “two male goats” (v. 5), one of which was selected by lot to be the Lord’s goat and one to be “the scapegoat” (v. 8). This selection procedure is passed over here since the summary explanation (vv. 7-8) was adequate. The scapegoat is again the subject of verses 20-22, but first the high priest was instructed to **slaughter the Lord’s goat for the sin offering for the people** and to manipulate the blood within the most holy place (his third entrance therein) **as he did with the bull’s blood** (cf. v. 14).

16:16-17. The same ritual was to be enacted in **the Tent of Meeting**, perhaps through the sprinkling of blood seven times before the altar of incense, and then by smearing blood on the horns of this altar (as indicated in Ex. 30:10). The combined blood-sprinkling ritual (in the most holy place and in the Tent of Meeting) is said not only to make **atonement for the high priest, his household, and the whole community of Israel** (Lev. 16:17) but also to make “atonement for the most holy place, the Tent of Meeting, and the altar” (v. 20; cf. v. 16). Thus the purpose of the sin offering was to provide an atonement for Israel by cleansing the place of God’s dwelling from the pollution of the people’s sins. Alternately, it may be that the animal was slaughtered to make atonement for them and the blood was sprinkled to purify

the sanctuary. God's dwelling place needed to be cleansed **because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been** (v. 16).

c. The cleansing of the altar (16:18-19)

16:18-19. Not only was the most holy place and the rest of the Tent of Meeting to be symbolically cleansed from the pollution of Israel's sins, but also **the altar that was before the LORD** was to be cleansed. Though some scholars have identified this as the altar of incense (e.g., Harrison, *Leviticus*, p. 173), it more probably refers to the altar of burnt offering which is elsewhere described as "before the LORD" (cf. 1:3, 5, etc.; cf. Wenham, *Leviticus*, p. 401). This cleansing was accomplished by putting a mixture of **some of the bull's blood and some of the goat's blood... on all the horns of the altar**, and sprinkling **blood on it** (either on the top or on the sides) **seven times** (16:19). The purpose of this action was **to consecrate it from the uncleanness of the Israelites**.

Commentary from The Bible Expositor and Illuminator

The Day of Atonement is one of the most important days in the Jewish calendar year. It comes ten days after Rosh Hashanah and a few days before the Feast of Booths. This places it in the month of Tishri, in late September or early October. This holy day is the most solemn day of the liturgical year. In Bible times, every male was required to make the annual pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem for this day. It is the culmination of the holiest week of the year. This was the day when all Israel accounted for the sins of the past year. During this day, everyone but the very young and the sick was required to observe certain commandments. Even if they were not at the temple, the people underwent a complete fast and other acts of self-denial. This day was the end of a period of penitence for the people. At the temple, elaborate ceremonies took place. During this time, numerous sacrifices were made, including a calf for an offering. The main ceremony, however, involved the sacrificial goats. The high priest performed this ritual to purge both the people and temple of the year's sins. In this ritual, the high priest selected two suitable goats. One goat he sacrificed as a sin offering for the people and then entered the Holy of Holies to sprinkle its blood on the mercy seat. This goat was the one designated by God for the atonement of sin. Only the Levites among the people could enter the temple. The high priest alone was permitted to enter the most holy place, and only on this day of the year. The high priest then laid his hand on the second goat. He confessed the sins of himself and all the people, transferring these to the goat. After this, the goat was released into the wilderness. This represented Israel's sins being cast into a distant place, away from the people. Christians do not need to partake in this ritual. Because of Christ's work, we are freed from this yearly ritual. Instead, Christ became our sacrifice. Paul wrote, "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us" (Heb. 9:12). In a sense, Christ's role is threefold. Having shed His blood, He became the acceptable offering for our sins. Our sins were transferred onto Him, casting them into a distant place away from us. And because He endured His suffering, died, and rose from death, He became our High Priest (Heb. 5:5-10). Through Him, we have been covered by an eternal offering for sin (Heb. 7:24-27). He is always making intercession for us. Because of Him, God no longer considers our sins (Ps. 103:12). We have been brought close to Him through our Saviour (Eph. 2:13-16). When was the last time you thought of Christ as your scapegoat? What about your atonement offering? We often call Him our High Priest, but it goes deeper. It is only through Him that we are made clean. He did not simply provide the required sacrifice for us. He became that offering so that we would never be trapped by sin again.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Forgiveness became national news (again) in late 2006 when five Amish schoolgirls were murdered in their one-room schoolhouse in Pennsylvania. A distraught gunman left suicide notes for his family and then went to the school where he shot hostages and then killed himself. The Amish leaders did not respond with anger, but with forgiveness. To forgive means to give up resentment for an offense committed; to forgive involves cessation of anger toward another. Atonement, however, is more than forgiveness. Atonement includes

reparation for the wrong committed. Forgiveness between people is possible without atonement; forgiveness by God requires atonement. Atonement is often defined as “at-one-ment” with God. That’s clever but superficial because it describes the result of atonement but not the basis for it. That basis is the payment of sin’s penalty by Jesus on the cross. This is often referred to as the substitutionary atonement because God substitutes the payment paid by his Son so that we do not have to pay the price ourselves—the price of eternity in Hell. Blood atonement is a key concept in both the books of Leviticus and Hebrews. Without the shedding of blood as atonement, there is no forgiveness by God (Hebrews 9:22).

The Lord prescribed three annual festivals that the people of Israel were to observe at the central sanctuary (Exodus 23:14-17). The first two festivals were subjects of study in the two previous lessons; the third will be considered in the lesson following this one. Just before the third festival was the Day of Atonement, arguably the most important religious event on the Hebrew calendar. This took place on the tenth day of the seventh month (Leviticus 16:29; 23:27), that month being late September and early October. The tenth day was five days before the Festival of Tabernacles. By the time of the New Testament era, the sacred nature of the high priest’s duties compelled him to rehearse what he had to do on the Day of Atonement to avoid mistakes. So seven days ahead of time, he moved into one of the chamber rooms that were on three sides of the temple. There he could ensure that he remained ceremonially clean (by avoiding contact with a dead body, etc.). Just in case, another priest was designated to serve if the high priest became defiled in any way. During the seven days, the high priest rehearsed his duties of lighting the lamps in the temple, carrying the incense and live coals with a censer, sprinkling and applying blood, and accomplishing the essential features surrounding the burnt offering sacrifices. Others were with him to make certain that he knew each part of the day’s events and how they were to be performed. The high priest ate a light meal on the evening before the Day of Atonement. He had Scripture explained during the night, and he was kept awake in order to avoid any defilement that might occur during sleep (Deuteronomy 23:10). He wore ordinary clothing as the day began, then bathed and changed into his colorful high-priestly garments to perform the burnt offering that was done each morning (Exodus 29:38-42). As he went through the day, he bathed and changed clothing five times. His hands and feet were washed twice that much. The high priest did something else unusual on this special day: he actually pronounced the sacred name of God, often seen as Yahweh. Devout Jews of the time did not pronounce it for fear of profaning it, so the word Lord was the substitute word when Scripture was read.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Atonement for the High Priest (Lev 16:11-14)

11 "And Aaron shall bring the bull of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his house, and shall kill the bull as the sin offering which is for himself.

12 Then he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, with his hands full of sweet incense beaten fine, and bring it inside the veil.

13 And he shall put the incense on the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the Testimony, lest he die.

14 He shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; and before the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.

Sin offering for the priest (11)

Sin offering because of bringing guilt on the people (Lev 4:3)

3 "If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, he must bring to the Lord a young bull without defect as a sin offering for the sin he has committed.

Sin offering because of sins committed in ignorance (Heb 9:7)

7 But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.

Sin offering day after day for his own sins (Heb 7:27)

27 Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

Sin offering to make atonement for sins of himself and his household (Lev 16:6)

6 "Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household.

Incense offering (12-13)

Incense offering as a memorial (Lev 24:7)

7 Along each row put some pure incense as a memorial portion to represent the bread and to be an offering made to the Lord by fire.

Incense offering as part of prayers (Ps 141:2)

2 May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.

Incense offering that has been vowed (Jer 44:25)

25 This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: You and your wives have shown by your actions what you promised when you said, 'We will certainly carry out the vows we made to burn incense and pour out drink offerings to the Queen of Heaven.' "Go ahead then, do what you promised! Keep your vows!

Incense offering that represent the prayers of the saints (Rev 5:8)

8 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

Blood sprinkled on mercy seat (14)

Blood sprinkled to sanctify (Heb 9:13)

13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.

Blood sprinkled to cover sins (Heb 10:4)

4 because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Blood sprinkled to anoint for consecration (Lev 8:11)

11 He sprinkled some of the oil on the altar seven times, anointing the altar and all its utensils and the basin with its stand, to consecrate them.

Blood sprinkled as representation of the covenant (Heb 9:20)

20 He said, "This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep."

Atonement for the People (Lev 16:15-17)

15 "Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which is for the people, bring its blood inside the veil, do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat.

16 So he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins; and so he shall do for the tabernacle of meeting which remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness.

17 There shall be no man in the tabernacle of meeting when he goes in to make atonement in the Holy Place, until he comes out, that he may make atonement for himself, for his household, and for all the assembly of Israel.

Sin offering for the people (15)

Sin offering for the community (Lev 4:21)

21 Then he shall take the bull outside the camp and burn it as he burned the first bull. This is the sin offering for the community.

Sin offering of a scapegoat (Lev 4:24)

24 He is to lay his hand on the goat's head and slaughter it at the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered before the Lord. It is a sin offering.

Sin offering of self-denial (Lev 23:27)

27 "The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present an offering made to the Lord by fire.

Sin offering and sacrifice through faith in Jesus (Rom 3:25)

25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—

Atonement for uncleanness (16)

Uncleanliness that is cleansed on the outside by the ceremonial blood (Heb 9:13)

13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.

Uncleanliness that is cleansed by hearts being sprinkled through faith (Heb 10:22)

22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Uncleanliness that is cleansed by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:11)

11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Uncleanliness that is cleansed by a willingness to trust God (Matt 8:2-3)

2 A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." 3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy.

Uncleanliness that is not just on the outside, but on the inside (Matt 23:25-26)

25 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26 Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

Atonement for all (17)

Atonement for all temporarily by use of a scapegoat (Lev 16:10)

10 But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the Lord to be used for making atonement by sending it into the desert as a scapegoat.

Atonement for all only through Jesus (Rom 3:25-26)

25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— 26 he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Atonement for all through blood (Lev 17:11)

11 For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.

Atonement for the Altar (Lev 16:18-19)

18 And he shall go out to the altar that is before the Lord, and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and some of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar all around.

19 Then he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, cleanse it, and consecrate it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.

Blood for the altar (18)

Blood for the altar to consecrate it (Exod 29:36)

36 Sacrifice a bull each day as a sin offering to make atonement. Purify the altar by making atonement for it, and anoint it to consecrate it.

Blood for the altar to make it holy (Exod 30:28-29)

28 the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the basin with its stand. 29 You shall consecrate them so they will be most holy, and whatever touches them will be holy.

Blood for the altar to make atonement for it (Lev 8:15)

15 Moses slaughtered the bull and took some of the blood, and with his finger he put it on all the horns of the altar to purify the altar. He poured out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. So he consecrated it to make atonement for it.

Consecrate altar for the uncleanness (19)

Consecrate altar by sprinkling blood on all sides (Lev 1:5)

5 He is to slaughter the young bull before the Lord, and then Aaron's sons the priests shall bring the blood and sprinkle it against the altar on all sides at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.

Consecrate altar by draining the blood out of the base (Lev 5:9)

9 and is to sprinkle some of the blood of the sin offering against the side of the altar; the rest of the blood must be drained out at the base of the altar. It is a sin offering.

Consecrate altar by sprinkling blood seven times (Lev 8:11)

11 He sprinkled some of the oil on the altar seven times, anointing the altar and all its utensils and the basin with its stand, to consecrate them.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

The first reference to the Day of Atonement comes in the Book of Exodus, chapter 30. The first nine verses detail the plans for the Altar of Incense. There is then a special word of warning, followed by a brief reference to the Day of Atonement: “You shall not offer any strange incense on this altar, or burnt offering or meal offering; and you shall not pour out a libation on it. And Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year; he shall make atonement on it with the blood of the sin offering of atonement once a year throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD” (Exod. 30:9-10).

It is noteworthy that in this passage, the warning about offering “strange incense” immediately precedes reference to the Day of Atonement, just as Leviticus 16 introduces the instructions concerning the offerings by referring to the death of Nadab and Abihu, who were smitten of God for offering “strange fire” (cf. Lev. 10:1).

An Overview of the Day of Atonement

Before we discuss the significance of some of the events of the Day of Atonement, let us pause to “walk through” the entire ceremony which is outlined in Leviticus chapter 16. This will enable us to get a feel for the ceremony as a whole, before we move to an examination of its parts.

From all appearances, the rituals outlined in our text do not begin the day’s activities for Aaron, but come after the exercise of some of his regular duties. The day would seem to begin as usual with the offering of the morning sacrifice, the burnt offering of a one year old lamb (cf. Exod. 29:38-42; Num. 28:3-6). After these duties were performed, the High Priest would commence the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement, as prescribed in our text:

(1) Aaron was to take off his normal priestly garments, wash, and then put on the special garments which were prescribed for the sacrifices which took him into the holy of holies (v. 4; cf. Exod. 28; 39).

(2) Aaron secured the necessary sacrificial animals: a bull for his own sin offering and two male goats for the people’s sin offering; two rams, one for Aaron’s and the other for the people’s burnt offering (vv. 3, 5).

(3) Aaron slaughtered the bull for his own sin offering (vv. 6, 11).

(4) Before entering into the Holy of Holies with the blood of the bull, Aaron had to create a “cloud” of incense in the Holy of Holies, covering the mercy seat, to “veil” the glory of God so that he could enter in (vv. 12-13). The best approximation to this in my experience is what a bee-keeper does, smoking the hive of the bees, before he begins to remove the honey. In the case of Aaron, he was to offer only the prescribed incense so as to create an obscuring veil of smoke, thus dimming the glory of God’s presence and sparing his life.

(5) Aaron then took some of the blood of the bull and sprinkled it on the mercy seat seven times (v. 14).

(6) Lots were then cast for the two goats, to determine which would be slaughtered and which would be driven away (vv. 7-8).

(7) The goat for slaughter, the goat of the people's sin offering, was sacrificed, and its blood was taken into the Holy of Holies and applied to the mercy seat, as the bull's blood had been (v. 15).

(8) Cleansing was then made for the holy place (v. 16), seemingly by the sprinkling of the blood of both the bull and the goat. The atonement of the holy place is done alone, without anyone present to help, or to watch (v. 17).

(9) Next, outside the tent, Aaron was to make atonement for the altar of burnt offering, using, it would seem, the blood of both the bull and the goat (vv. 18-19).

(10) Now the second goat, the one which was kept alive, had the sins of the nation symbolically laid on its head, and was driven from the camp to a desolate place, from which it must never return (vv. 20-22).

(11) Aaron then entered the tent of meeting, removed his linen garments, washed, and put on his normal priestly garments

(12) The burnt offerings of rams, one for Aaron and his family and the other for the people, was now offered (v. 24)

(13) The earlier sacrifices of the bull and the goat were completed. The fat of the sin offering was burned on the altar (v. 25), and the remains of the bull and the goat were taken outside the camp, where they were burned (v. 27).

(14) Those who had been rendered unclean by handling the animals on which the sins of Aaron or the people were laid were to wash themselves and then return to camp (vv. 26, 28).

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/10-day-atonement-leviticus-16>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The basic thrust of the Day of Atonement concerns the nature of sin, which required that innocent animals give their lives so that human sins could be forgiven. God planned for this to be a temporary arrangement. Eventually, there was to come a perfect sacrifice that need never be repeated. The writer of the book of Hebrews uses imagery from the Day of Atonement, especially in chapter 9, to make comparisons with the salvation that Christ has accomplished. Hebrews 10:4 declares that "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." Hebrews 7:27 affirms that Jesus did not need "to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself." "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22). Christ had to die in order for our sins to be forgiven! The new covenant in his blood is available to all who respond to the great invitation: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. Sinners are responsible for seeking God for forgiveness of their sins (Lev. 16:11-12)
2. Sin always leads to death; atonement for it must be made (Lev. 16:13; Rom. 6:23)
3. Sin is so serious that it required the shedding of blood for its remission (Lev. 16:14-15; Heb. 9:22)
4. Sin taints everything it touches (Lev. 16:16)
5. Only the one designated by God could enter into His presence to make intercession (vs. 17)
6. An imperfect system required continual observance; a better way has been made (Lev. 16:18-19; Heb. 10:1,11-12)