

Leviticus Bible Study #18

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Leviticus 16:1-34

1 The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died, **2** and the LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat. **3** But in this way Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with a bull from the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. **4** He shall put on the holy linen coat and shall have the linen undergarment on his body, and he shall tie the linen sash around his waist, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water and then put them on. **5** And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.

6 “Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. **7** Then he shall take the two goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting. **8** And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel. **9** And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and use it as a sin offering, **10** but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.

11 “Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. He shall kill the bull as a sin offering for himself. **12** And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil **13** and put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die. **14** And he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat on the east side, and in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.

15 “Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. **16** Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses. **17** No one may be in the tent of meeting from the time he enters to make atonement in the Holy Place until he comes out and has made atonement for himself and for his house and for all the assembly of Israel. **18** Then 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** And he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it and consecrate it from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel.

20 “And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. **21** And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. **22** The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.

23 “Then Aaron shall come into the tent of meeting and shall take off the linen garments that he put on when he went into the Holy Place and shall leave them there. **24** And he shall bathe his body in water in

a holy place and put on his garments and come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people and make atonement for himself and for the people. **25** And the fat of the sin offering he shall burn on the altar. **26** And he who lets the goat go to Azazel shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp. **27** And the bull for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy Place, shall be carried outside the camp. Their skin and their flesh and their dung shall be burned up with fire. **28** And he who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp.

29 “And it shall be a statute to you forever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you. **30** For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins. **31** It is a Sabbath of solemn rest to you, and you shall afflict yourselves; it is a statute forever. **32** And the priest who is anointed and consecrated as priest in his father's place shall make atonement, wearing the holy linen garments. **33** He shall make atonement for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. **34** And this shall be a statute forever for you, that atonement may be made for the people of Israel once in the year because of all their sins.” And Aaron did as the LORD commanded Moses.

Introduction

The author of Hebrews states plainly that “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”¹ Yet here, as we read through the laws concerning the Day of Atonement, we find that the text affirms forgiveness given to the people for all of their sins (both intentional and unintentional) as they observe the holy day. In fact, as the last verse relates, there is atonement *made* for their sins then. How then did the children of Israel receive forgiveness if it was not by the blood of the sacrifices?

In a word, blood is just blood and death is just death. There is no natural nor spiritual quality to the life of an animal which would remove guilt from a human being. Blood is not *inherently* a form of currency which pays for something like gold or silver. Rather, as Hebrews says,² it is the way in which the sacrifices point to the ultimate sacrifice on Calvary which counts for something before God. The regulations presented in this chapter of Leviticus are in full agreement. The ancient Israelites, with different levels of awareness, were to make their sacrifices with an abiding trust that God would forgive them. This forgiveness was granted on account of the sacrifices representing Christ's atoning sacrifice on the Cross, as well as the scapegoat representing Him taking away our sins.

Vs.1-5

1 The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died, **2** and the LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat. **3** But in this way Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with a bull from the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. **4** He shall put on the holy linen coat and shall have the linen undergarment on his body, and he shall tie the linen sash around his waist, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water and then put them on. **5** And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.

The reforms instituted after the deaths of Nadab and Abihu do not represent a change to the core of the Law, instead forming a series of safety precautions to prevent wrath breaking out on the people.

1 Hebrews 10:4

2 Hebrews 10:1-10

Having spent the past few chapters going over regulations concerning ceremonial cleanliness, now Aaron is warned that this does not mean he is “free” just because he is the high priest. To the contrary, his position requires even more care because he is now instructed to be in God's special presence on the Day of Atonement. God will arrive, with only the smoke of incense as a screen-like barrier preventing Aaron from seeing our Lord with his naked eyes and dying as a result. After all, God had informed Moses earlier that man shall not see His face and live.³ If Aaron has any sins which have not been atoned, if he gazes upon the face of God, if he is not wearing the proper attire and if he does anything amiss in the rite, then he forfeits his life: God will not countenance sin in His presence.

We may wonder at God appearing in this fashion. Previously and elsewhere men behold God face to face without perishing. Abraham speaks with our Lord before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah,⁴ the elders of Israel saw our Lord and *ate* with Him,⁵ and the later appearances of the Angel of the Lord are all said to be God Himself. What Moses writes of here is best understood then as the specific presence of God the Father. St. John explains that no one has seen Him, while Christ – who has a mediating presence of a human nature – reveals Divinity to us through Himself.⁶ Though the Israelites could see Jesus (then referred to as the Angel of the Lord) at various times just as Abraham beheld Him, to see our Heavenly Father with an unmediated presence would spell doom for any sinner. Thus the Day of Atonement includes these regulations as a form of precaution.

Vs.6-22

6 “Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. **7** Then he shall take the two goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting. **8** And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel. **9** And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and use it as a sin offering, **10** but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.

11 “Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. He shall kill the bull as a sin offering for himself. **12** And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil **13** and put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die. **14** And he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat on the east side, and in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.

15 “Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. **16** Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses. **17** No one may be in the tent of meeting from the time he enters to make atonement in the Holy Place until he comes out and has made atonement for himself and for his house and for all the assembly of Israel. **18** Then 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** And he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it and consecrate it from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel.

20 “And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. **21** And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head

3 Exodus 33:17-23

4 Genesis 18,

5 Exodus 24:9-11

6 John 1:18

of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. **22** The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.

The high priest must first offer up a bull, the standard sin offering required for any priest,⁷ covering any unintentional sins he may have committed. This permits him to then proceed with the casting of lots for two goats. One is a sin offering, the other the “scapegoat” called “Azazel.” This is the first mention of casting lots in Scripture. The function was likely by the use of the urim and thummim, small stones or dice given to the priest and worn on the breastplate.⁸ When seeking an answer from God about a matter, in the absence of a prophet the priest could use them in the same way someone might flip a coin to make a decision.⁹ The key difference is though that the priestly devices did not leave a matter up to chance as a coin flip would; to the contrary, with the urim and thummim what *would* be random chance becomes a revelation of the Lord's will. This decides which goat dies and which one lives.

The term “Azazel” has led to much unmerited speculation. Various Jewish myths¹⁰ and textual critics alike posit that Azazel is some desert-dwelling earth spirit, demon, or pagan deity. The word itself does not countenance such an interpretation. The proper word, **עִזָּאזֵל**,¹¹¹² is quite literally a composite derived from the two words for “goat” (**עִז**)¹³¹⁴ and “departure” (**אָזַל**),¹⁵¹⁶ making it “goat of departure” or “escape goat” - from which we receive our traditional word “scapegoat.” While the lamed (**ל**) prefix denotes an assignment *to* or *for* something - “that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel,” in this instance the composite nature of the word tells us that it is more accurate to say “it may be sent away into the wilderness to be Azazel.”

After the goats are chosen by lot, and the high priest has offered the bull of atonement for himself and his house, then entry is made with incense into the Holiest of Holies multiple times. As stated, the smoke of the incense creates a screening effect to prevent him seeing the Father's visage. Once the incense has filled this space, he enters fully so as to bring the blood of the bull in and sprinkle it on the mercy seat, the title for the lid of the Ark of the Covenant. Because the mercy seat covers the rest of the Ark, it receives the blood of the sacrifice as a means of declaring that the sins of the priest are *covered* by the blood of the bull; once his sins are covered, then he intercedes for the people with the sin offering goat.

The Day of Atonement is drenched in blood. The high priest does not stop at the mercy seat in the Holiest of Holies, but continues the sevenfold sprinkling of blood on the tent of meeting and the altar. Everything receives the seven sprinkles of blood as a term of “reset;” just as creation itself was perfect on the seventh day,¹⁷ the high priest and people and tabernacle and altar are drenched in this fashion so as to *return* them to being in such a state before God. The message is clear; in order to be returned to a state like the seventh day of creation, mankind must be covered in the blood of another – but *not* the blood of the animals just sacrificed.

After all of the sacrifices and bloodshed, a man stands by to lead the scapegoat away who will take their sins. The sacrifices of the Day of Atonement showed the people that they would not be saved without blood upon the mercy seat, but the blood of the animals did nothing to remove their sin. It still

7 Leviticus 4:1-4

8 Exodus 28:30

9 The urim and thummim are shown being used in this fashion during Saul's reign in 1 Samuel 14:41-42

10 Including, perhaps especially, the “book of Enoch.”

11 Transliterated directly as “Azazel,” Strong's #5799

12 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/5799.htm>

13 Transliterated “ez,” Strong's #5795

14 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/5795.htm>

15 Transliterated “azal,” Strong's #235

16 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/235.htm>

17 Genesis 2:1-3

remains, and must be placed on the scapegoat. The scapegoat showed them that atonement only happens when one being takes all of their sin and is castigated, but even then the children of Israel would know that their iniquity was still *somewhere* in the wilderness, not being truly removed. In both goats, the people see what the author of Hebrews would proclaim later on. Though they have absolution, it is not by the blood of animals or even by the goat which lived: they perform and observe this complex ceremony because they look forward to the One whose blood will truly bring them forgiveness, the Messiah who would truly do away with all their sins. Thus they find themselves forgiven and atoned for, not by sacrifice but by their *faith*.

Vs.23-34

23 “Then Aaron shall come into the tent of meeting and shall take off the linen garments that he put on when he went into the Holy Place and shall leave them there. **24** And he shall bathe his body in water in a holy place and put on his garments and come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people and make atonement for himself and for the people. **25** And the fat of the sin offering he shall burn on the altar. **26** And he who lets the goat go to Azazel shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp. **27** And the bull for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy Place, shall be carried outside the camp. Their skin and their flesh and their dung shall be burned up with fire. **28** And he who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp.

29 “And it shall be a statute to you forever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you. **30** For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins. **31** It is a Sabbath of solemn rest to you, and you shall afflict yourselves; it is a statute forever. **32** And the priest who is anointed and consecrated as priest in his father's place shall make atonement, wearing the holy linen garments. **33** He shall make atonement for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. **34** And this shall be a statute forever for you, that atonement may be made for the people of Israel once in the year because of all their sins.” And Aaron did as the LORD commanded Moses.

All those who worked during the Day of Atonement must bathe. They are not considered unclean (otherwise the high priest would have had to wash his clothes), meaning that a different message is being sent. The same goes for those who take the remains outside the camp to be burned. These are *not* requirements for the normal daily offering. Thus the message is sent to the people; those who are covered by the blood and who observe the castigation of the scapegoat must bathe to be among God's people. This of course is another picture of Baptism before the Sacrament's institution.

The people are instructed to afflict themselves and rest during the day's operations in the presence of the Tabernacle. This means that they are to do nothing *but watch* as the sacrifices are offered, as the scapegoat is sent away, and as the celebrants wash themselves. In other words, they are observing a pantomimed pre-enactment of the Gospel and the institution of the New Covenant. It is not the blood of the goats or bulls which works Atonement for them, but seeing the Gospel prophesied before their very eyes every year. They were to trust that our Lord would forgive their sins as they observed the holy day; while faith comes by hearing for us,¹⁸ for every generation under the Old Covenant the ancient Israelite awaiting the full expression of the Gospel would come to faith by hearing *and* sight.

¹⁸ Romans 10:17