

LESSON 5

March 30, 2025

Unit I: Tabernacle, Sacrifices, and Atonement

What a Day!

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 40:9-17

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Leviticus 16

PRINT PASSAGE: Leviticus 16:11-19

KEY VERSE

He shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness. (Leviticus 16:16, KJV)

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“In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been. He is to do the same for the tent of meeting, which is among them in the midst of their uncleanness.” (Leviticus 16:16, NIV)

LESSON AIMS

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Explore the Day of Atonement as an annual purification of the sacred space, the people, and their general surroundings.
- Appreciate God’s work to repair the relationship with the covenant people.
- Commit to disciplines such as the *examen* that nurture a spiritual practice of confessing sin accompanied by God’s assurance of pardon.

*KEY TERMS

Censer (verse 12)—Hebrew: *machtah* (makh-taw’): a fireholder, snuff dish; a firepan; the vessel in which incense was presented on “the golden altar” before the Lord in the Temple.

Hallow (verse 19)—Hebrew: *qadash* (kaw-dash’): to set apart, “consecrate” (NIV); to dedicate, sanctify, make clean; purify; bless; anoint. This word is used in one form or another to represent being set apart for the work of God.

Incense (verse 12)—Hebrew: *qetoreth* (ket-o’-reth): smoke, odor of (burning) sacrifice; perfume; an aromatic substance that exhales perfume during combustion; the odor of spices and gums burned as an act of worship.



The Biblical Context

The primary theme of Leviticus is “the holiness of the Lord.” The book details divine instructions for every aspect of worshipping a holy God and living holy before Him. Given the limitations of their spiritual history, the Israelite people needed to learn how to approach God with the holiness He requires. The book’s opening chapters provide detailed instructions for offering sacrifices that symbolized repentance and obedience. God wanted the people to know the seriousness of sin and the necessity of divine forgiveness and restoration. God also intended for His people to live holy lives, separated from the idolatrous nations around them. Thus, a significant section of Leviticus describes moral purity laws and standards for community and family relationships and responsibilities. Leviticus 16 is a pivotal chapter focused on the necessity of receiving atonement for sin as a prerequisite for worship. The chapter also outlines procedures regulating the Day of Atonement, the most solemn of Israel’s holy feast days. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest performed elaborate rituals to atone for (or cover) the people’s individual and communal sins and renew their relationship with God.

fear. Leviticus 16 outlines a special day of spiritual cleansing for Israel, the Day of Atonement for God’s people to practice the “spiritual hygiene” (holiness) required for restoring their relationship with God and living in His presence.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

The High Priest’s Atonement (*Leviticus 16:11-14*)

KJV

11 And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and shall

Mercy seat (verse 15)—Hebrew: *kapporeth* (*kap-po’-reth*): propitiatory; “cover over sin”; the mercy seat was a solid slab of gold that acted as a lid for the Ark and was held in place by the gold molding (see Exodus 25:11) around the top of the Ark; “atonement cover” (NIV).

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

INTRODUCTION

Maintaining personal hygiene and appearance is critical for several reasons. The practice helps to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, boosts professional and social acceptance, and positively influencing one’s self-confidence and self-esteem. Even with the very best hygiene efforts, however, the human body is never entirely “sterilized” because of its contact with the environment and the host of “microbes” that accumulate on the skin and hair. Even more important than physical hygiene is the commitment to maintaining spiritual hygiene. Every believer must remain spiritually healthy and presentable to God by resisting and addressing the contamination of sin and ungodly influences. By His grace, a holy God called sinful people into a covenant relationship with Himself. God’s people had been spiritually “contaminated” by the idolatrous influence of the Egyptians while in bondage in Egypt and their own unbelief. Still, God desired to dwell among them and made a way for the people to purify themselves spiritually, receiving forgiveness for their sins—so that they might approach His holiness without

make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself:

12 And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail:

13 And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not:

14 And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times.

NIV

11 “Aaron shall bring the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household, and he is to slaughter the bull for his own sin offering.

12 “He is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the LORD and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain.

13 “He is to put the incense on the fire before the LORD, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover above the tablets of the covenant law, so that he will not die.

14 “He is to take some of the bull’s blood and with his finger sprinkle it on the front of the atonement cover; then he shall sprinkle some of it with his finger seven times before the atonement cover.”

Leviticus 16 outlines the rituals and procedures for the Day of Atonement (Hebrew: *Yom Kippur*), an annual holy day that God established for the people to atone for their sins and reconcile their communal relationship with Him. Thematically, the Day of Atonement was about purification, meditation, and repentance. Jews today (and some Christian churches) still observe the Day of Atonement, but the prescribed rituals were originally led by the high priest at the time, Aaron. Before presenting an offering according to God’s exact instructions, Aaron was required to make atonement for himself and his household by slaughtering a bull as his sin offering (**verse 11**). Aaron entered the Most Holy Place (Holy of Holies) three times during this ceremony. On the first time, he was instructed to take a censer (special container) filled with burning coals from the bronze altar of burnt offering and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant spices, and place them on the altar of incense’s fire in the Most Holy Place (**verse 12**). The burning incense created a smokescreen shielding Aaron from God’s direct glory represented by the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant, thus preventing his death (**verse 13**). Aaron’s final act of self-purification was sprinkling the sacrificed the blood of a bull on and in front of the mercy seat seven times, cleansing the Most Holy Place from the people’s inherent sin and uncleanness (**verse 14**).

In this context, the book is an instructional guide for Israel’s spiritual leaders, urging them to acknowledge, confess, and turn from personal sin, and humbly submit to God for ongoing spiritual transformation. Leviticus teaches that God holds leaders to a high standard of spiritual accountability and expects them to set the example for godly living (see 1 Timothy 3:1-10). The book sets a biblical foundation for the holiness God requires of those in ministry leadership. God still seeks servant leaders who are committed to living before Him and those whom they serve as godly examples of integrity and humility (see 1 Peter 5:2-3).

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Why is the concept of “leading by precept/example” essential, especially for this generation of believers?

The People’s Atonement (*Leviticus 16:15-19*)

KJV

15 Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat:

16 And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness.

17 And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place, until he come out, and have made an atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel.

18 And he shall go out unto the altar that is before the LORD, and make an atonement for it; and shall take of the blood of the bullock, and of the blood of the goat, and put it upon the horns of the altar round about.

19 And he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.

NIV

15 “He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull’s blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it.

16 “In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been. He is to do the same for the tent of meeting, which is among them in the midst of their uncleanness.

17 “No one is to be in the tent of meeting from the time Aaron goes in to make atonement in the Most Holy Place until he comes out, having made atonement for himself, his household and the whole community of Israel.

18 “Then he shall come out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement for it. He shall take some of the bull’s blood and some of the goat’s blood and put it on all the horns of the altar.

19 “He shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times to cleanse it and to consecrate it from the uncleanness of the Israelites.”

After Aaron completed the atonement rituals for himself and his family, he was to make a sin offering on behalf of the entire community, using two male goats for the people’s atonement. After sacrificing the goat designated as the Lord’s, Aaron sprinkled the blood on and

in front of the mercy seat. This act symbolized the covering of the nation's sins, as outlined in verses 7-8 and detailed in **verse 15**. Following this, Aaron was to sprinkle some of the goat's blood within the Holy Place and the tabernacle, addressing the community's impurity, wrongdoing, and sin, as mentioned in **verse 16**. This procedure of sprinkling blood served multiple purposes: it atoned for Aaron and his household, the entire nation, the Most Holy Place, and the tent of meeting (or tabernacle), restoring the nation's relationship with God, as described in **verses 17-19**.

The Day of Atonement underscores a pivotal message: to approach God's holiness, one must acknowledge and turn away from sin. Separation from sin is essential for acceptable worship and ministry. Today, many believers and church leaders alike consider any emphasis on holiness to be outdated or excessive, but God's people must live before God according to His standards, not their own. Pleasing God requires a fundamental understanding of and engagement with the Word, the daily practice of spiritual disciplines, and an ongoing commitment to holy living. Because of the people's sin, God required the high priest to purify His dwelling. This practice is informative for believers today concerning how they should enter and conduct themselves in sacred spaces dedicated to communal worship. Disrespectful, irreverent attitudes and actions can desecrate these holy places, offend God, and hinder the Holy Spirit's work and influence there. Church leaders should be intentional about teaching people to maintain godly reverence for these sacred spaces.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How can churches today ensure the purity of sacred spaces set apart for worship?

A CLOSING THOUGHT

The Day of Atonement rituals highlight the reality and consequences of human sin and God's holiness. Without exception, both "priest and people" must sanctify themselves before entering God's holy presence. Additionally, spaces that are designated or set aside as God's sacred sanctuaries should be physically and spiritually clean at the hands of those who gather in them for worship by avoiding ungodly attitudes and behaviors. Christ's sacrificial death frees believers from sin's condemnation but it does not exempt them from the duty of keeping themselves spiritually clean (in attitude and conduct) as they worship and serve a holy God. Believers must acknowledge and confess personal sins, and seek God's forgiveness before making prayer requests, taking communion, or attempting to minister in His name (see Matthew 5:24; 1 Corinthians 11:28-29).

YOUR LIFE

The message of living holy lives and maintaining a certain level of reverence in worship teaches us that believers must not approach God too casually. God deserves honor and holiness. This basic teaching urges believers to set spiritual maturity as a goal because God does not accept any act of worship or service that is presented by "unclean" hands. Therefore, consider evaluating your approach to God against *His* standards, not yours. That is, are you giving God the kind of worship and holiness He deserves and requires? Examine your spiritual conduct

and conversation. Is there an area of this facet of your life that contradicts or falls short of God's holiness? Recommit yourself to the spiritual disciplines (e.g., prayer, fasting, witnessing, Bible reading, sexual purity, guarding your tongue, etc.) that strengthen your Christian walk and witness.

YOUR WORLD!

In some arenas, a casual approach to worship elevates people-centered worship above God-centered worship. This lesson challenges the faith community to ensure that the focus of public and private worship is guided by God's standards, to include acknowledgment, confession, and repentance of sin. God does not expect sinless perfection but godly living and purity characterized by a heart that seeks to please Him every day.

CLOSING PRAYER

God, we thank You for our "Day of Atonement"—the day of Jesus' death at Calvary, when He atoned for our sins. Help us to honor His tremendous sacrifice by living to reflect Your holiness and to draw others to You for salvation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

CONCLUSION

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Next week's lesson explores the significance of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 9:23-28; 10:1-4, 11-14, 19-25).

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, March 31	"Enter God's Courts with an Offering"	(Psalm 96)
TUESDAY, April 1	"Christ's Suffering and Exaltation"	(1 Peter 3:18-22)
WEDNESDAY, April 2	"Suffering Servant"	(Isaiah 52:13–53:3)
THURSDAY, April 3	"Light out of Anguish"	(Isaiah 53:4-12)
FRIDAY, April 4	"A Ransom for Many"	(Mark 10:41-45)
SATURDAY, April 5	"Christ in Heaven on Our Behalf"	(Hebrews 9:23–10:4)
SUNDAY, April 6	"Confidence in God's Presence"	(Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25)

NOTES
