

The Day Of Atonement

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Text: Leviticus 16

Introduction:

- I. The Scriptures¹ note the fear of those who came into contact with Deity.
 - A. Moses: “And he said, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.” (Exodus 3:6).
 - B. Manoah, Samson’s father: “And Manoah said to his wife, “We shall surely die, for we have seen God.” (Judges 13:22).
 - C. Isaiah: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (Isaiah 6:5).
 - D. Peter: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” (Luke 5:8).
 1. Note the description of this event in the book *Killing Jesus* by Bill O’Reilly and Martin Dugard. “Rather than rejoice, Simon is terrified. From the moment Jesus first stepped into his boat, something deeply spiritual about his presence made Simon uncomfortable. He feels unholy in comparison, even more so after hearing Jesus’s teachings about repentance and the need to be cleansed of all sins. Simon wants this man out of his life immediately. He throws himself onto his knees atop a pile of writhing fish and begs Jesus to leave him alone. ‘Go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man.’” (Kindle Locations 1429-1432).
 2. Although I believe that Peter did indeed feel uncomfortable and unholy in comparison to Jesus, I also believe that O’Reilly and Dugard misunderstand the meaning of Peter’s words.
 - E. In each of these cases, their fear was apparently due to the recognition that they, in their sinfulness, had come into the presence of a holy God.
 - F. The high priest of Israel likewise came into the presence of God on the Day of Atonement.
- II. The book of Exodus is concerned with the themes of redemption and access to God.
 - A. In the early chapters of the book, the people of Israel were redeemed from their bondage in Egypt. The latter chapters of the book provide the instructions for the construction of the tabernacle and its actual construction.
 - B. Leviticus provides laws for holiness (without holiness no one will see God – Hebrews 12:14) and the specific means of access to God. Although the presence of God with His people was manifested in other ways (see Exodus 17:1-7; 33:14-23), it was only on the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) that the high priest came into the presence of God in the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle with blood for sin.
- III. Why should we study the ritual performed on the Day of Atonement?
 - A. Although sacrifices for sin were offered repeatedly (Hebrews 10:11), the annual Day of Atonement represented essentially the culmination of the Levitical sacrificial system.
 - B. “In the Jewish liturgical year there were several feasts but just one great fasting day, the Day of Atonement.”²

- C. The writer of Hebrews also emphasized the importance of the Day of Atonement as a “type” by revealing it to be the most extensive and detailed parallel to the new covenant sacrificial system.

Body:

I. The Ritual

- A. The Day of Atonement was celebrated on the 10th day of the 7th month (*Tisri*), five days before the Feast of Tabernacles. This would correspond roughly with the months of September/October in our calendar.

B. Overview of the Day of Atonement:

1. As noted by the author of Hebrews, the Day of Atonement was the only time during the year that the high priest entered the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary (Heb. 9:7).
2. The Day of Atonement is described as “a Sabbath of solemn rest” (Leviticus 16:31).
3. It was also the only regular fast required by the Law of Moses.
 - a. Leviticus 16:29, 31: 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...³¹ It is a Sabbath of solemn rest to you, and you shall afflict yourselves; it is a statute forever.”
 - b. Acts 27:9: ⁹ Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over, Paul advised them,
4. The beginning of the Year of Jubilee was signaled by the blowing of a trumpet on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 25:8-9).
5. The ritual of the Day of Atonement involved a number of animals. Those animals are identified in Leviticus 16 and Numbers 29.³
 - a. Burnt offerings:
 - 1) One bull, one ram and seven male lambs in their first year, all unblemished (Numbers 29:7-8)
 - 2) Two rams, one for the high priest and one for the people (Leviticus 16:3, 5, 24)
 - b. Sin offerings:
 - 1) One bull, for the high priest and his household (Leviticus 16:3, 6, 11)
 - 2) One kid of the goats, for the congregation (Leviticus 16:15, 27)
 - 3) One kid of the goats, as a “sin offering of atonement” (Numbers 29:11)⁴
 - c. These animals, listed above, were in addition to the regular burnt offering.
 - d. In addition to the animals to be offered as either burnt offerings or sin offerings, there were grain offerings (Numbers 29:9-11).
 - 1) Grain offerings:
 - a) Three-tenths of an ephah to be offered with the bull
 - b) Two-tenths of an ephah to be offered with the ram

- c) One-tenth of an ephah to be offered with each of the seven male lambs
 - 2) The drink offerings mentioned in Numbers 29:11 are either those associated with the daily offerings or additional offerings associated with the additional burnt offerings to be made on the Day of Atonement (Exodus 29:38-42).
6. There were several key elements in the day's ritual:
- a. The killing of the sacrifices
 - b. The presentation of the blood of the sacrifices
 - c. The cleansing of the sanctuary and the altar
 - d. The sending away of the scapegoat (Leviticus 16:10, 26; NKJV)
 - e. The burnt offerings
 - f. The disposal of the bodies of the sacrifices
7. It appears that Moses gave a general summary of the day's ritual in Leviticus 16:6-10, but returned to the beginning of the ritual in verse 11 in order to provide more specific details about the ritual.

C. Preparation:

1. Normally the priests only washed their hands and feet in the bronze laver found in the courtyard before entering the Holy Place or ministering at the altar in the courtyard (Exodus 30:19-21).
2. On this day, however, the priest washed his body thoroughly before putting on his linen garments (coat, trousers, sash & turban; Leviticus 16:4). It appears that he did not put on the ephod, breastplate of judgment or his blue robe (Exodus 28:5-38).⁵

D. The killing of the sacrifices:

1. The blood of the bull and the goat was apparently shed in the courtyard of the tabernacle (the high priest carried blood "inside the veil," *i.e.*, into the Most Holy Place" – Leviticus 16:15).
2. The bull (for the high priest and his household) was killed first and the goat (for the people) was killed later, after the presentation of the blood of the bull (Leviticus 16:11, 14-15).

E. Presentation:

1. The high priest clouded the Most Holy Place with the smoke of incense placed in his censer on coals taken from the altar before the Lord (Leviticus 16:12-13).
2. Some of the blood of the bull was carried first into the Most Holy Place where the high priest sprinkled it with his finger on the mercy seat (the covering of the ark of the covenant) and before the mercy seat seven times (Leviticus 16:14).
 - a. It is unclear to me whether the clouding of the Most Holy Place and the presentation of the bull's blood there involved one trip into the Most Holy Place or two trips.
 - b. The sense of the statement by the author of Hebrews that the high priest went into the "second [part]" (the Most Holy Place) "but once a year" clearly is that he went into the Most Holy Place on only one day of the year; it is clear that he entered the Most Holy Place at least twice, perhaps three times on that day.

3. Returning to the courtyard, the high priest then killed the goat determined by the Lord's lot as the sin offering and, taking some of its blood, sprinkled the mercy seat, as he had done with the blood of the bull (Leviticus 16:15-17).

F. Atonement for the temple:

1. The blood of the bull and the goat was used to sprinkle the "tabernacle of meeting" and the altar for the purpose of atonement, *i.e.*, to "cleanse it and consecrate it from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel" (vs. 19b; cf. Leviticus 16:16b-20a).
2. The high priest was to put this blood on the horns on the four corners of the altar and then the altar was to be sprinkled seven times with blood just as was done with the mercy seat (Leviticus 16:16-19).
3. "The point of this is that the circumstances of everyday life made it easy for people to contract forms of ceremonial defilement, while rebellion against the Lord was endemic among the Israelites (as among all men). All this meant that they had defiled the place where they came to worship and this part of the day's ceremonies was directed to removing the uncleanness. This is probably in mind also when the high priest came 'to the altar that is before the Lord' and put some of the blood of both animals on all the horns of the altar and sprinkled it on the altar seven times (verses 18-19). Leviticus does not say specifically which altar this was; most commentators today hold it to be the altar of burnt offering, though the Rabbis thought it was the incense altar."⁶
 - a. The language of Leviticus 16:18 ("Then he shall go out to the altar that is before the Lord") may give the impression that the altar of burnt offerings, located in the courtyard of the tabernacle, is the altar under consideration.
 - b. In the instructions for the construction of the altar of incense, it is stated that Aaron (*i.e.*, the high priest) would make atonement once a year for the altar of incense, using the blood of the "sin offering of atonement" (Exodus 30:10).
 - c. It is possible, of course, that Exodus 30:10 and Leviticus 16:18 are referring to two different altars, *i.e.*, that atonement was made for both altars and each passage simply refers to one of the two altars.

G. The sending away of the scapegoat⁷:

1. The fate of each of the two goats taken from the congregation of the children of Israel and associated with the sin offering was determined by lot.
 - a. One lot was for the Lord and the other lot was for *Azazel* (see the discussion of the meaning of this word in this section of the outline).
 - b. The goat "on which the lot for the Lord fell" (Leviticus 16:9) was the one killed and whose blood was carried into the Most Holy Place.
 - c. After the bull and the goat "on which the lot for the Lord fell" (Leviticus 16:9) had both been killed and their blood carried into the Most Holy Place, the high priest presented the other goat associated with the sin offering (Leviticus 16:20).
2. The high priest was to place both of his hands on the head of this goat and "confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins" (Leviticus 16:21). Myers comments that this was done before the altar of burnt offerings.⁸

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3. The goat was then taken by another individual into the wilderness where it was set free (Leviticus 16:21-22). Note the following comments on the significance of this action:
 - a. “Indeed vs 21 and 22 state that this goat is to bear away the sin of the people. Such a ritual would illustrate vividly the physical removal of defilement from the camp to a solitary place where it would no longer infest the nation. A parallel to the scapegoat can be seen in the ritual for a recovered leper. Two birds were selected. One was to be killed and both the leper and the living bird were to be touched with its blood. Then the living bird was released. This bird carried away the evil, the leprosy itself, into the open field and then the leper was pronounced clean (Lev 14:1-9).”⁹
 - b. “The one goat which was ‘for Jehovah’ was offered as a sin-offering, by which atonement was made. But the sins must also be visibly banished, and therefore they were symbolically laid by confession on the other goat, which was then ‘sent away for Azazel’ into the wilderness.”¹⁰
 4. Upon returning from the wilderness, the one who took the scapegoat was to wash his clothes and bathe his body before coming into the camp (Leviticus 16:26).
 5. Some translations describe this goat as the “scapegoat” (e.g., KJV, NKJV, NASB, NIV); other translations use the word “Azazel” (e.g., 1901 ASV, ESV, RSV, NRSV, NET, NLT, LEB). The word in the LXX is **ἀποπομπᾶτος** (*carrying away evil*, of the scapegoat).¹¹
 - a. “Azazel” appears in the Old Testament only in Leviticus 16 where it is found 4x (vs. 8, 10, 26). “In all four appearances of this word, it has the preposition ‘to’ attached to it.”¹²
 - b. The meaning of “Azazel” (אֲזַזִּיל) is uncertain. Suggestions for its meaning include:
 - 1) Etymological possibilities:
 - a) “entire removal”¹³ (derived from the Arabic word ‘*azala*,’ meaning *banish* or *remove*)
 - b) “goat of departure” – derived from two Hebrews words whose definitions are quoted below:¹⁴
 - 1] אֵז **’êz**, *aze*; from 5810; a she-goat (as *strong*), but masc. in plur. (which also is used ellipt. for *goats’ hair*):—(she) goat, kid.
 - 2] אֲזַל **’âzal**, *aw-zal’*; a prim. root; to *go away*, hence to *disappear*
 - 2) Location: “separations,” i.e., desert places
 - a) Myers notes that this was the interpretation favored in later rabbinic sources.¹⁵
 - b) Gesenius, however, observes that the place where the goat was to be taken is represented by different words in verses 10, 21 & 22.¹⁶
 - 3) A reference to an evil spirit or desert demon, perhaps even the name of such a spirit.
 - a) Some see a “balance” in the expressions “for the Lord” and “for Azazel,” i.e., one goat for Deity and the other for an evil spirit.
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- b) In the apocryphal book of Enoch, *Azazel* is the name of an evil spirit (8:1). Schultz observes that “the Enoch references to *Azazel* as a demon are doubtless dependent on the author’s own interpretation of Lev 16 and Gen 6:4.”¹⁷
- 1] In my opinion, trying to understand the meaning of Leviticus by means of the interpretation of the author of Enoch is not sound Bible study.
- c) Myers tries to “blunt” the implications of this suggestion by arguing that “Lev. 16 does not state that this goat is an offering to such a demon; rather the animal is an insult to it, laden as it is with Israel’s sins. Actually, human sin now belongs to the demon.”¹⁸
- d) Another suggestion is that Azazel is just another identification of Satan.¹⁹
- e) In the midst of the definition of this word by Gesenius, the comment is made: “no such idea as this can be admitted by any one who indeed believes in the inspiration of Scripture; God could never mix up idolatrous rites with his own worship.”²⁰
- c. Easton comments on the significance (rather than the meaning) of this word: “The form of this word indicates intensity, and therefore signifies the total separation of sin: it was wholly carried away. It was important that the result of the sacrifices offered by the high priest alone in the sanctuary should be embodied in a visible transaction, and hence the dismissal of the ‘scape-goat.’ It was of no consequence what became of it, as the whole import of the transaction lay in its being sent into the wilderness bearing away sin. As the goat ‘for Jehovah’ was to witness to the demerit of sin and the need of the blood of atonement, so the goat ‘for Azazel’ was to witness to the efficacy of the sacrifice and the result of the shedding of blood in the taking away of sin.”²¹

H. The burnt offerings:

1. In preparation for the burnt offerings, the high priest once again washed his body (Leviticus 16:24). Morris believes that he would put on his “glorious robes” at this point.²²
2. Burnt offerings were made for both the high priest and for the people in general.
3. The fat of the sin offering was also burnt on the altar at this point.

I. The disposal of the bodies of the sacrifices:

1. The bodies of the bull and the goat offered as sin offerings were carried outside the camp and burned (Leviticus 16:27).
2. The one who disposed of these bodies was to wash his clothes and bathe his body before returning to the camp (Leviticus 16:28).

J. By the time of Jesus, the Jews had developed a number of traditions surrounding the preparation for and procedure of the Day of Atonement.²³

1. Josephus briefly described the ritual of the Day of Atonement in his *Antiquities*.²⁴ It is interesting that his description of the ritual seems to conflict with the instructions given in Leviticus and Numbers.

2. The preparations for the high priest began seven days before the actual Day of Atonement. He was taken from his house and kept in the temple in order to avoid accidental defilement. He was sprinkled on the third and seventh days (*cf.* the ashes of a red heifer – Numbers 19) just in case he had become accidentally defiled.
3. A “deputy” was appointed to take his place in the event that he did indeed become defiled for seven days. At least one rabbi argued that another wife should be put on standby “lest his wife should die before the offering of sacrifice.” The idea was that he was required to offer a sacrifice for his household and the minimum requirement for a household was a wife.²⁵
4. During his seven days in the temple, the high priest would be reminded repeatedly about the ritual of the Day of Atonement so that he would be able to do everything in the proper order/way.
5. He ate a light meal the night before and was kept awake all night.
6. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would immerse his body a total of 5x during the course of the day, *i.e.*, every time he changed his robes. The first time was before he offered the daily burnt offering. He would wash his hands and feet 10x during the day.
7. As the high priest confessed his sins and those of his household over the head of the bull, he used the sacred name of God (not typically pronounced for fear of using it in vain).
8. He cast lots to determine the fate of the two goats.²⁶
9. The high priest came to the bull a second time, confessing the sins of “the children of Aaron, thy holy people” as well.
10. After killing the bull, he took coals from the altar and put two handfuls of incense into a ladle. He carried the censer and the ladle into the Most Holy Place, passing between the two veils that separated the Most Holy Place from the outer room.²⁷
11. The high priest returned to the Holy Place, prayed briefly, and then returned to the Most Holy Place with the blood of the bull which he sprinkled seven times “as though he were wielding a whip.”
12. Next, the goat for the Lord was killed and its blood was used in the same way as that of the bull.
13. The high priest departed the Most Holy Place and then used the blood of the bull to sprinkle the outer side of the curtain eight times. The blood of the goat was also sprinkled the same number of times on the outer side of the curtain.
14. The blood of the two animals was then mixed and the resultant mixture sprinkled on the horns of the altar of incense and the altar itself. Some of the blood was poured out at the western base of the altar of burnt offering; some of the blood was sprinkled on the altar of burnt offering and the remaining blood poured at the southern base of that altar.
15. The high priest then attended to the matter of the scapegoat, confessing the sins of the people with his hands on the animal. The taking of the scapegoat to the wilderness became an interesting process:
 - a. Ten booths were set up, each one a half of a Sabbath’s day journey from the next, allowing the occupants to travel to the next booth and back.

- b. Typically the booths were manned by the members of eminent families of Jerusalem who offered food and water to the “conductor” (as he was called) of the goat, each in turn, allowing him to travel another Sabbath day’s journey.
16. Leaving the last booth, the “conductor” would take the goat to a precipice and push it over the edge to kill him. This was done because the goat released during one year’s ritual had actually returned to Jerusalem!²⁸ When the goat was delivered into the wilderness, a signal was relayed via the booths back to Jerusalem.
17. As the goat was being conducted into the wilderness, the high priest finished cutting up the sin offerings for the portions to be burned, and the carcasses were carried outside of the camp to be burned. He then went into the court of the women where he read and recited from the law.
18. The high priest immersed himself again, changed robes and offered the burnt offerings.
19. Before retrieving the censer and ladle from the Most Holy Place, he again immersed his body and changed back into his linen clothes.
20. Finally, he immersed himself again and changed back into his colored robe in order to burn the afternoon incenses and trim the lamps in the Holy Place.
21. After all this, the high priest was free to go home.

II. The Significance of Atonement

- A. In Leviticus 16, the word “atonement” appears 15 times in 34 verses (ESV).
- B. The meaning of the words “atone” and “atonement”:
 1. Contextually, atonement is related to the idea of “cleansing” in Leviticus 16:
 - a. Leviticus 16:16-19: 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. (Emphases mine – asd)
 - b. Leviticus 16:30: 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**. (Emphases mine – asd)
 - c. Atonement is associated with purification or cleansing in what appears to be a cause-and-effect relationship.²⁹
 - 1) It should be noted that atonement was not always accomplished through blood.
 - a) Exodus 30:15-16: ¹⁵ The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than the half shekel, when you give the Lord’s offering to make atonement for your lives. ¹⁶ You shall take the atonement money from the people of Israel and shall give it for the service of the tent of

meeting, that it may bring the people of Israel to remembrance before the Lord, so as to make atonement for your lives.”

- b) Numbers 16:46-47: ⁴⁶ And Moses said to Aaron, “Take your censer, and put fire on it from off the altar and lay incense on it and carry it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone out from the Lord; the plague has begun.” ⁴⁷ So Aaron took it as Moses said and ran into the midst of the assembly. And behold, the plague had already begun among the people. And he put on the incense and made atonement for the people.
 - 2) It is also true that the term “uncleanness” is applied to both moral and physical defilement.
 2. Consider the following lexical information on the meaning of the word “atone” (*kāpar*):
 - a. Brown, Driver & Briggs: **cover over** (fig.), **pacify, make propitiation**³⁰
 - 1) *cover over, pacify, propitiate;*
 - 2) *cover over, atone for sin* without sacrifice
 - 3) *cover over, atone for sin and persons by legal rites*
 - b. Gesenius: **cover, to cover over**³¹
 - 1) *to cover over, to overspread* with anything, as with pitch, *to pitch*, Gen. 6:14
 - 2) covered with hair, *to be hairy, shaggy*
 - 3) *to cover* sins, *i.e.* to pardon
 - c. Harris, Archer and Waltke define (*kāpar I*) as meaning **make an atonement, make reconciliation, purge.**
 - 1) Harris, *et. al.*, do not concur with the consensus among lexicographers. They comment, “There is an equivalent Arabic root meaning ‘cover,’ or ‘conceal.’ On the strength of this connection it has been supposed that the Hebrew word means ‘to cover over sin’ and thus pacify the deity, making an atonement (so BDB). It has been suggested that the OT ritual symbolized a covering over of sin until it was dealt with in fact by the atonement of Christ. There is, however, very little evidence for this view. The connection of the Arabic word is weak and the Hebrew root is not used to mean ‘cover.’”
 - 2) They recognize a second stem (*kāpar II*) used only in Genesis 6:14 to mean **cover over with pitch.**³²
 3. “The Hebrew term frequently translated ‘atone’ has the basic meaning ‘to wipe out,’ ‘to erase,’ ‘to cover,’ or perhaps more generally ‘to remove.’ In the KJV it is translated by such expressions as ‘to make atonement,’ ‘forgive,’ ‘appease,’ ‘pacify,’ ‘pardon,’ ‘purge,’ ‘put off,’ and ‘reconcile.’³³
 4. It seems that the basic meaning of the Hebrew verb translated “make atonement” or “to atone” is “to cover.”
- C. The English word “atonement” does not appear in the New Testament in either the ESV or the NKJV. It appears only once in the KJV in Romans 5:11 (καταλλαγή). Others versions typically translate “reconciliation” in this passage.

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- D. There are several concepts related to forgiveness, the removal of guilt from an individual.
1. The guilt of sin is removed when the judicial price or requirement of justice is satisfied (propitiation).
 - a. Leviticus 17:11: ¹¹ For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.
 - b. Hebrews 9:22: ²² Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.
 2. Sin separates man from God, but the removal of guilt permits reconciliation. Reconciliation is thus the consequence of forgiveness.
 - a. However, the word “reconciliation” is sometimes used to indicate the process that brings two estranged persons together again. That process involves propitiation.
 - b. In other cases, the word “reconciliation” refers to the consequence of that process.
 - c. The meaning of propitiation is found in the definition of “conciliate,” part of the compound word “reconciliation.”³⁴
 - d. It is not surprising, therefore, that some sources define “to atone” as “make reconciliation” or associate atonement with propitiation.
 - 1) The LXX used the Greek verb ἱλάσκομαι (*hilaskomai*) to translate the Hebrew *kāpar* (make atonement) in such passages as Leviticus 16:6, 11, *et. al.* In Hebrews 2:17, the same Greek verb is translated “make propitiation” (ESV).
 - 2) The cognate word ἱλαστήριον (*hilasterion*) refers to “the lid or cover of the ark of the covenant.” The same word is translated “propitiation” in Romans 3:25.³⁵
 3. How does “atonement” relate to these ideas of purification, propitiation and forgiveness? Does “atonement,” for instance, have the same meaning as “forgiveness”?
 - a. Note the following example passages from the description of sacrifices (Emphases mine – asd):
 - 1) Leviticus 4:20: ²⁰ Thus shall he do with the bull. As he did with the bull of the sin offering, so shall he do with this. And the priest **shall make atonement for them**, and they **shall be forgiven**.
 - 2) Leviticus 4:26: ²⁶ And all its fat he shall burn on the altar, like the fat of the sacrifice of peace offerings. So the priest **shall make atonement for him** for his sin, and he **shall be forgiven**.
 - 3) Leviticus 4:31: ³¹ And all its fat he shall remove, as the fat is removed from the peace offerings, and the priest shall burn it on the altar for a pleasing aroma to the Lord. And the priest **shall make atonement for him**, and he **shall be forgiven**.
 - b. It seems that “making atonement” and “being forgiven,” while being closely related, are not quite the same thing.
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- 1) Note that the priest made atonement, but forgiveness is extended by God.
 - 2) Atonement is related to forgiveness in a cause-and-effect relationship.
 - 3) Forgiveness is not possible until the “debt” of sin has been paid (propitiation, *i.e.*, the requirement of the law has been satisfied).
- c. *Summary:* Atonement provided that which was required for cleanness/purification. Atonement provided that which was required for forgiveness.
- E. The question of whether sins were forgiven at the point that such a sacrifice was offered has long been debated.
1. *Affirmative:*
 - a. Leviticus and Numbers state, “and he shall be forgiven” (Leviticus 4:26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7; 19:22; Numbers 15:28).
 - b. Although only an animal was offered to make atonement, forgiveness of sins was granted on the basis of the sacrifice of Jesus.
 - 1) Obviously, Jesus was crucified long after many of the Old Testament sacrifices were offered.
 - 2) Nevertheless, the sacrifice of Jesus was so certain, because of the sovereign power of God, that Jesus was slain long before the actual event took place, as far as God was concerned. According to this viewpoint, the sacrifice of Jesus was essentially available for forgiveness even during the Old Testament dispensation.
 - a) Revelation 13:8 (NKJV): ⁸ All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of **the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.** (Emphasis mine – asd)
 - b) Revelation 13:8 (ESV): ⁸ and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written **before the foundation of the world** in the book of life of the Lamb **who was slain.** (Emphasis mine – asd)³⁶
 - c. Others of the same viewpoint argue that Romans 3:25 indicates that God extended forgiveness even though an effectual sacrifice had not yet actually been offered.
 - 1) Hebrews 10:4: ⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.
 - 2) Romans 3:25: ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.
 2. *Negative:*
 - a. Although Leviticus and Numbers promise the forgiveness of sins *after* atonement has been made, such passages do not specify that forgiveness was extended *immediately after* the offering of the sacrifice.
 - 1) These passages promising forgiveness are thus elliptical in that they do not mention the sacrifice of Jesus, which was also necessary for forgiveness to actually be extended.
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- 2) As an illustration of the point, 1 Peter 3:21 states that “baptism...now saves you,” a true statement as far as it goes. Although he mentions the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Peter does not mention in this passage the part that the blood of Christ plays in our salvation. That fact is, however, affirmed in other scriptures (*e.g.*, Ephesians 1:7; Revelation 1:5).
 - b. This viewpoint also cites Romans 3:25, understanding Paul to be saying that God “passed over former sins” in the sense that He did not mete out punishment for them even though they were not actually forgiven at the point of the animal sacrifices. In that God did not punish those still actually guilty of sins, He appeared unrighteous...until Jesus finally paid the judicial price for sins committed under the first covenant (Hebrews 9:15).
 - c. Hebrews 10:4 clearly states that it is “impossible” for the blood of animals to take away sins.
 - 1) It should be carefully noted, however, that Hebrews 10:4 only speaks to the *means* of forgiveness, not the *time* of such forgiveness.
 - 2) As previously noted, those who believe that sins were forgiven at the point of the offering of an animal sacrifice would affirm that the *means* of such forgiveness was the sacrifice of Jesus.
- F. The question of whether sins were forgiven at the point of the offering of the animal sacrifice or only after the death of Jesus is really a moot point for those of us living on this side of the cross.
1. It seems that nearly all involved in the discussion agree that ultimately the *means* of forgiveness of sins is the sacrifice of Jesus, regardless of *when* forgiveness was extended.
 - a. The animal sacrifices represented obedient faith, the condition to be met by the sinner to be forgiven.
 2. The question of whether or not atonement can be accomplished at one point in time and forgiveness extended later is relevant to the sacrifice of Christ as well inasmuch as Jesus made atonement centuries ago, yet forgiveness is extended to the obedient believer at the point of water baptism.

III. The Real Behind the Shadow

- A. The book of Hebrews is the only book in the New Testament that discusses the sacrificial system of the new covenant in any detail. In this book the sacerdotal work of Jesus is connected more with the ritual of the Day of Atonement than with other aspects of the sacrificial system.
 - B. Note these connections:
 1. The priest had to offer sacrifices for himself as well as for the people (Hebrews 5:1-3). This was well illustrated on the Day of Atonement in the sacrifice of the bull.
 2. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered into the presence of God in the Most Holy Place (Hebrews 9:6-7). Jesus likewise entered into the presence of God for us (Hebrews 9:11-12, 24).
 3. The Mosaic Law, with its animal sacrifices, made nothing perfect (Hebrews 7:19; 10:1-4). The Day of Atonement reminded the people of the ineffectual nature of the year’s sacrifices.
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4. The tabernacle was merely a copy of the true sanctuary, not made with hands (Hebrews 8:2).
 5. In the contrast of the Levitical high priest in Hebrews 9 to Jesus, the blood of “goats and calves” is a distinct reference to the Day of Atonement (vs. 12; vs. 13 – “goats and bulls”). Notice the plural; only one goat and one bull were killed each Day of Atonement for the purpose of carrying blood into the Most Holy Place. The plural implicitly draws attention to the annual repetition of the Day of Atonement ritual under the Mosaic Law. By way of contrast, Jesus entered the Most Holy Place once for all (vs. 12b).
 6. It seems that reference is made again to the Day of Atonement in Hebrews 10:4 – “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.”
 7. It is possible that Hebrews 13 makes reference to both of the sacrifices (bull and goat) of the Day of Atonement and probably the scapegoat as well.
 - a. The author of Hebrews clearly connects the blood sacrifices with that of Jesus, although his comparison is not strictly parallel, *i.e.*, the blood of these animals was not shed outside the camp (vs. 11-12).
 - b. The bodies of the bull and goat whose blood was carried into the Most Holy Place were burned outside the camp. The blood of Jesus was likewise shed for sin and He suffered “outside the gate” (vs. 12).
 - c. The reference in verses 13 to “bear(ing) the reproach he endured” is possibly a reference to the scapegoat.
 - 1) Note the language used with reference to the scapegoat:
 - a) Leviticus 16:22: 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.
 - b) In a figurative sense, the scapegoat carried the sins of the people into the wilderness.
 - 2) Note the language used with reference to Jesus (Emphases mine –asd):
 - a) Isaiah 53:6: ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord **has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**
 - b) Isaiah 53:11: ¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he **shall bear their iniquities.**
 - c) Isaiah 53:12: ¹² Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he **bore the sin** of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.
 - d) 1 Peter 2:24: ²⁴ He himself **bore our sins in his body** on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.
 - 3) Whether one believes that sins were imputed to Jesus or not (and I don’t, because of Ezekiel 18:4-20), there must be some sense in which He “bore” the sins of mankind.³⁷
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8. In summary, the connections between Jesus and the Day of Atonement are clear and extensive (unless otherwise indicated, the following references are to Hebrews).
 - a. He is our High Priest (2:17; 4:14; 5:10; 7:26; 8:1-2; 9:11; 10:11-13).
 - b. He is the offering for our sins (7:27; 9:12-14, 26, 28; 10:10).
 - c. He is One who bears our sins (9:28; 1 Peter 2:24; same Greek verb in both passages).
 - d. “In Christ are consummated all the atonement concepts of the OT.”³⁸
 - C. Note the parallel between the ritual of the high priest on the Day of Atonement and the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ.
 1. The high priest killed the sacrifices in the courtyard of the tabernacle, but offered the blood in the Most Holy Place, as previously described.
 2. In the case of Jesus:
 - a. His blood was shed on the cross.
 - b. Yet the author of Hebrews affirms that He entered the Most Holy Place (in “the greater and more perfect tent [not made with hands]” – 9:11), “into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (9:24).
 - D. Just as the ritual of the Day of Atonement involved both the shedding of blood and its presentation in the divine presence, so Jesus not only shed His blood on the cross, but also completed the work of a high priest by presenting that blood in the presence of God for us.
 1. The obviously figurative presentation of the blood would have been made after His resurrection and ascension to heaven.
 2. Until that point, Jesus had not returned to heaven. His spirit went to the Hadean realm during the time that His body was in the tomb (Acts 2:25-27).
 3. The importance of the bodily resurrection of Jesus is further seen in that it was necessary in order for Him to complete the work of presenting His blood in the Most Holy Place.

Conclusion:

- I. The Day of Atonement emphasized several things:
 - A. The solemnity of its ritual suggested the seriousness of sin.
 - B. The preparations made to enter the Most Holy Place spoke to the holiness of God and the privilege (and danger!) of man entering into His presence.
 - C. The repeated offering of sacrifices for the same sins (sacrifices would have been offered during the rest of the year because of the sins that were confessed on the Day of Atonement) highlighted the ultimately ineffectual nature of the Levitical sacrifices (cf. Hebrews 9, 10).
- II. Although the author of Hebrews emphasized the limitations of the Day of Atonement, in terms of access to God (*i.e.*, only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place; Hebrews 9:6-8), we can “draw near” to the presence of God with confidence because Jesus, the forerunner (Hebrews 6:20), has opened the way for us (Hebrews 10:19-22). What a tremendous privilege we have been given!

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End Notes

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptures quoted or referenced are from the English Standard Version, 2011.

² Morris, p. 69.

³ It becomes obvious to the reader of these texts that the sacrifices listed differ in number and description. In order to understand all of the sacrifices that were to be made on the Day of Atonement, one must put these two passages together.

⁴ It appears that in Numbers 29:11 (ESV), a distinction is made between the “sin offering” and the “sin offering of atonement.” I believe that the “sin offering of atonement” is a reference to the goat often referred to as the “scapegoat.” Compare Leviticus 16:10 (ESV): “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” (Italics for emphasis – asd). See also Exodus 30:10, where the phrase “the sin offering of atonement” is applied to the goat that was killed and whose blood was used to purify the altar. Leon Morris, in commenting on the practices of the Jews in the first century, claims that the high priest identified both goats as “a sin offering to the Lord,” making no distinction between the two animals. (*The Atonement*, p. 76)

⁵ In Exodus 28:31-35, the blue robe of the high priest was made with little bells woven into the hem of the garment so that their sound could be heard when he went into “the Holy Place before the Lord” (vs. 35). This Holy Place must be the outer room (not the Most Holy Place) since he did not wear his blue robe when he went into the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement. See, however, Leviticus 16:17.

⁶ Morris, p. 71.

⁷ Merriam-Webster defines the noun “scapegoat”: “*scape*; intended as translation of Hebrew ‘*azāzēl* (probably name of a demon), as if ‘*ēz* ‘*ōzēl* goat that departs—Lev 16:8.”

⁸ Myers, p. 106.

⁹ Schultz, *TWOT*, p. 658.

¹⁰ Easton, *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*, “Azazel.”

¹¹ Liddell & Scott.

¹² Schultz, *TWOT*, p. 658.

¹³ Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A., p. 736. (So also R. L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries: Updated edition*. Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc.)

¹⁴ Strong, pp. 10, 86.

¹⁵ Myers, p. 110. Schultz makes the same point (658).

¹⁶ Gesenius, p. 617.

¹⁷ Schultz, *TWOT*, p. 658.

¹⁸ Myers, p. 110.

¹⁹ Swanson. אֲזָזֵל

²⁰ Gesenius, p. 617. R. K. Harrison agrees: “Three principal explanations have been suggested: first, that the term describes the abstract concept of removal; secondly, that the word is a proper name synonymous with the powers of evil to which the sin-laden goat quite properly went; and thirdly, that it was the name of a wilderness demon which needed to be propitiated in some manner. Any mythological explanation can be dismissed immediately as having no place whatever in the most sacred ordinance of Hebrew cultic worship. **The notion that the Israelites ought to make propitiatory or other offerings to such supposed wilderness demons as satyrs was repudiated in the**

following chapter (Lev. 17:7), and thus it cannot be associated with the unique character of the day of atonement. Probably the best explanation is that the word was a rare technical term describing ‘complete removal’, i.e. of communal guilt, and that later personifications brought about myths and legends concerning Azazel in Jewish writings.” (*Leviticus: an introduction and commentary*, Vol. 3, p. 173; emphasis mine - asd)

²¹ Easton, *op. cit.*

²² Morris, p. 72.

²³ I have drawn heavily from Morris in this section. His section on the rabbinical traditions is a summary of the Talmudic tractate entitled *Yoma*. The eight chapters of this tractate are available in PDF files at www.jewishvirtuallibrary.com.

Leon Morris: “Leviticus 16 does not give us a complete guide to the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement. The main outline is clear and we may well argue that everything that is needed is said here. But it would not be possible to go through all the ritual with nothing more to guide us than the directions given in this chapter and the gaps might conceivably be filled in more ways than one. To cite one small example, the high priest is directed to take a censer full of burning coals into the Holy of Holies together with incense with which to make a cloud of smoke (Lv. 16:12). But there is no direction about taking it out. Did censers pile up in the Holy of Holies from year to year? Did the high priest remove last year’s censer when he took this year’s in? Or did he take his censer out at a later point in the day’s activities? There is no indication. The main points are quite clear and there would have been no difficulty in filling in the gaps by customary procedures. All that I am saying is that there were gaps.” (*The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance*, 74)

²⁴ “(240) On the tenth day of the same lunar month, they fast till the evening; and this day they sacrifice a bull, and two rams, and seven lambs, and a kid of the goats, for sins. (241) And, besides these, they bring two kids of the goats; the one of which is sent alive out of the limits of the camp into the wilderness for the scapegoat, and to be an expiation for the sins of the whole multitude; but the other is brought into a place of great cleanness within the limits of the camp, and is there burnt, with its skin, without any sort of cleansing. (242) With this goat was burnt a bull, not brought by the people, but by the high priest, at his own charges; which, when it was slain, he brought of the blood into the holy place, together with the blood of the kid of the goats, and sprinkled the ceiling with his finger seven times, (243) as also its pavement, and again as often toward the most holy place, and about the golden altar: he also at last brings it into the open court, and sprinkles it about the great altar. Besides this, they set the extremities, and the kidneys, and the fat, with the lobe of the liver upon the altar. The high priest likewise presents a ram to God as a burnt offering.” (*Antiquities*, Book 3, Chapter 10, 242-243)

²⁵ Morris, p. 75.

²⁶ *Leon Morris*: “The lots used to decide the fate of the two goats were originally wooden, but later golden ones were used. One was marked ‘For the Lord’ and the other “For Azazel”. They were placed in a casket which the high priest shook. Then he put in both hands and pulled them out, one in each hand. He put the lots on the heads of the goats and said, ‘A Sin-offering to the Lord’, apparently making no distinction between the two animals. He tied a cord of crimson wool on the head of the goat for Azazel and a similar cord about the throat of the goat that was to be slaughtered (Yoma 4:1-2).” (*The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance*, 76)

²⁷ *Leon Morris*: “The Mishnah says that there were two curtains guarding the entrance with the space of a cubit between them. The outer curtain was looped back on the south side and inner one on the north. The high priest could thus pass between them with both hands full. In the Holy of Holies he set the censer down between the two poles used to carry the ark (*Yoma* 5:1). After the ark was taken away the custom was to set it down on a stone called ‘Shetiyah’ (‘Foundation’), a stone three finger-breaths high. Then he heaped the incense on the coals so that the whole place was filled with smoke.” (*The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance*, 77)

Leon Morris: “An interesting provision is that he was to be continually instructed in the correct ritual and urged to recite it himself ‘lest thou hast forgotten or lest thou has never learnt’ (*Yoma* 1:3). On the eve of the Day of Atonement he was solemnly adjured not to change any of the things his mentors had said to him (*Yoma* 1:5). This appears to be a reference to a dispute between the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The former held that the incense should be lit outside the curtain, but the Pharisees abhorred this dreadful action and maintained that it should be lit

only inside the curtain.” (*The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance*, 75)

²⁸ *Easton*: “At a later period an evasion or modification of the law of Moses was introduced by the Jews. “The goat was conducted to a mountain named Tzuk, situated at a distance of ten Sabbath days’ journey, or about six and a half English miles, from Jerusalem. At this place the Judean desert was supposed to commence; and the man in whose charge the goat was sent out, while setting him free, was instructed to push the unhappy beast down the slope of the mountain side, which was so steep as to insure the death of the goat, whose bones were broken by the fall. The reason of this barbarous custom was that on one occasion the scapegoat returned to Jerusalem after being set free, which was considered such an evil omen that its recurrence was prevented for the future by the death of the goat” (Twenty-one Years’ Work in the Holy Land). This mountain is now called el-Muntar.

²⁹ “The notion that atonement was to be made for purification is not introduced here for the first time. Purification resulting from atonement occurred in the context of the cleansing of the young mother in 12:8 and the person with a skin disease in 14:18-19.” (Rooker, *The New American Commentary: Leviticus*, 219)

³⁰ Brown, p. 736.

³¹ Gesenius, p. 411.

³² Harris, *TWOT*, pp. 452-453. My opinion is that an artificial distinction is being made here.

³³ Elwell, W. A., pp. 231-232.

³⁴ Note these definitions of “conciliate”: “**1**: to gain (as goodwill) by pleasing acts; **2**: to make compatible : RECONCILE; **3**: APPEASE (*Merriam-Webster*)

³⁵ *Vine*: “The Heb. word is *kapporeth*, ‘the cover,’ a meaning connected with the covering or removal of sin (Ps. 32:1) by means of expiatory sacrifice. This mercy seat, together with the ark, is spoken of as the footstool of God, 1 Chron. 28:2; cf. Ps. 99:5; 132:7. The Lord promised to be present upon it and to commune with Moses ‘from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim,’ Exod. 25:22 (see cherubim). In the Sept. the word *epithema*, which itself means “a cover,” is added to *hilasterion*; *epithema* was simply a translation of *kapporeth*; accordingly, *hilasterion*, not having this meaning, and being essentially connected with propitiation, was added. Eventually *hilasterion* stood for both. In 1 Chron. 28:11 the Holy of Holies is called ‘the House of the Kapporeth’” (2:405).

³⁶ The translation of the NKJV seems to fit the Nestle-Aland Text (27th Ed.) better than the ESV. The relevant Greek text is: καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν αὐτὸν πάντες οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, οὗ οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀρνίου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου. (657)

³⁷ The understanding that Jesus was “made to be sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21) in the sense that He served as a sin offering is supported by the language of Isaiah 53:10b – “when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days.”

³⁸ Schultz, *TWOT*, p. 658.

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