

Season 3: Day of Atonement

Lesson 11, February 15, 2026, The Day of Atonement Leviticus 16:11-19

Bible Basis: Leviticus 16:11-19

BIBLE TRUTH: God commanded the Israelites to set aside day to sacrifice animals for payment of sin debt.

MEMORY VERSE: *“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” (Leviticus 16:16)*

Lesson Aim: Key Takeaways

1. God Takes Sin Seriously
2. God Provides a substitute to carry what we cannot
3. God removes sin completely

1. Background & Context

This chapter comes after the death of Aaron’s sons (Leviticus 10), emphasizing that **God must be approached His way, not ours**. Leviticus 16:[1](#) *Now the Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they offered profane fire before the Lord, and died;* [2](#) *and the Lord said to Moses: “Tell Aaron your brother not to come at just any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat.*

Leviticus 16 describes the most sacred day in Israel’s calendar: **The Day of Atonement**.

It took place once a year and served as:

- A national cleansing
- A reset of the people’s relationship with God
- A reminder of God’s holiness
- A foreshadowing of Christ’s ultimate sacrifice

Words that Matter:

Atonement- the act by which sin is covered, forgiven, or removed so that a broken relationship with God is restored.

Holy- set apart, pure, and belonging entirely to God.

The **mercy seat** was the **golden cover** placed on top of the **Ark of the Covenant** in the Old Testament. It represented the **throne of God's presence** among His people.

Censer - a container in which [incense](#) is [burned](#), typically during a religious ceremony.

Sacrifice - the act of giving up something valuable—often a life, an offering, or a possession—as an expression of worship, devotion, or atonement before God.

Scapegoat - a person who is [blamed](#) for the [wrongdoings](#), mistakes, or faults of others, especially for reasons of [convenience](#).

Tent of Meeting - The **tent of meeting** is the portable sanctuary Israel used in the wilderness where God's presence dwelled and where Moses and the priests met with Him. It is another name for the **tabernacle**.

Who is speaking: The Lord is speaking to Moses

Audience: Aaron, the High Priest, Children of Israel

Purpose: Atonement of sins

Place: encamped around the Tabernacle at the foot of Mount Sinai.

Missing Pieces

I. The High Priest Prepares (v. 1–10)

Aaron must:

- Wash himself
- Put on special linen garments
- Offer sacrifices for his own sin

Teaching Point:

Even the holiest human needed cleansing. No one approaches God casually.

The Lesson

I. Sin Offering For the High Priest (vv. 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.

¹²Then 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.

¹³And 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.

¹⁴He 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.

What’s Happening Here? The high priest:

God now provides instructions to His people on how to obtain pardon for sins committed against Him and one another and enter into communion with Him.

NOTE: Moral sin could not be permanently eradicated, so it was necessary to purify both the tabernacle (later the Temple) and the people once a year on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) by transferring the impurities to a goat that would take those sins into the wilderness, never to return.

Aaron offers a Sin Offering for Himself (v. 11)

Before Aaron can represent the people, he must deal with his own sin.

- Offers a bull as a sin offering
- Kills it for himself and his household
- This is about cleansing the priest before he can cleanse the nation

Meaning:

Even the high priest is sinful. No one can approach God without atonement-not even the holiest man in Israel.

This sets the stage for understanding why Jesus, our High Priest, had to be sinless.

Aaron Take Incense Inside the Veil (v.12-13)

This is the moment he enters the Holy of Holies, the most sacred space on earth.

He must bring:

- A censer full of burning coal
- Two handfuls of finely beaten incense

When he puts the incense on the coals, it creates a **thick cloud of smoke** that covers the mercy seat.

Why this matter?

“Lest he die.”

The cloud of incense:

- Acts as a protective covering
- Symbolizes reverence
- Represents prayer rising before God
- Shields Aaron from the full intensity of God’s glory

Meaning:

God’s holiness is overwhelming. The incense is a mercy that allows a sinful man to stand in God’s presence without being consumed.

Aaron Sprinkles the blood on the Mercy Seat (v. 14)

Now that he is protected by the incense cloud, he performs the central act of atonement.

He:

- Takes the bulls blood
- Sprinkles blood on the east side of the mercy seat –

Meaning of the blood:

- Life offered in place of life
- A covering for sin
- A way for God's justice and mercy to meet

Meaning of "seven times":

- Completeness
- Total cleansing
- Perfect atonement

Why the east side?

East Symbolizes the Direction of Humanity's Fall

- In Genesis, when Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden, they were sent **eastward**.

Later:

- Cain went east
- People settled east of Eden
- East became associated with exile, distance, and separation from God

So sprinkling blood on the **east side** symbolically says: **"Atonement meets humanity where sin drove them."**

- Sprinkles it seven times in front of the mercy seat

Teaching Point:

Atonement requires blood—life given in place of life.

Why A Bull for Aaron? : Because His Responsibility Was Greater

Aaron was the **high priest**, the spiritual representative of the entire nation. His sin carried **greater weight** because:

- He stood closest to God
- He represented the people before God
- His failure affected the whole community
- His holiness mattered for the nation's holiness

A **bull** was the largest, most valuable, most costly sacrifice

Symbolically:

- A greater position requires a greater sacrifice
- Greater responsibility means greater accountability
- The priest's sin had broader consequences

The bull reflects the **seriousness** of Aaron's role and the **costliness** of his own sin

II. Sin Offering For the People (v. 15-16)

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.

¹⁶So 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.

What's Happening Here? The Goat for the People is Killed

Earlier, Aaron sacrificed a bull for his own sin. Now he sacrifices the goat that represents the people's sin.

The goat is:

- Chosen by lot (coin toss)
- Designated as the sin offering for the nation
- A substitute for the people

Meaning:

Atonement requires an innocent life to stand in the place of the guilty.

Blood Is Brought Inside the Veil

Just like with the bull's blood, Aaron carries the goat's blood **into the Holy of Holies**, the most sacred space.

He repeats the same actions:

- Sprinkling blood on the mercy seat
- Sprinkling blood in front of the mercy seat

Why repeat the ritual?

- Because the bull's blood cleansed the priest.
- The goat's blood cleanses the people.
- Two different sacrifices for two different purposes.

Why A Goat for the People: Because It Matches Their Role and Condition

The people were not priests. They didn't carry the same spiritual responsibility or leadership weight.

A **goat** was the standard sin offering for the community.

Symbolically:

- The people's sin is real, but not of the same representative weight
- The goat reflects their position as followers, not leaders
- It shows that God makes atonement accessible to everyone

The goat is still costly, but not to the degree of the bull.

Atonement Is Made for the Holy Place (v. 16)

Aaron isn't just cleansing the people—he's cleansing the **sanctuary itself**.

Why would the sanctuary need cleansing?

Because:

- Sin contaminates
- Sin pollutes
- Sin affects everything it touches

Even though the people never entered the Holy of Holies, their sin still “reached” it symbolically.

So the priest must:

- Purify the Holy Place
- Purify the tent of meeting
- Purify the altar
- Purify the entire worship space

Meaning:

Sin doesn’t just affect individuals—it affects the whole community and even the environment of worship.

The Reason for All This: “Because of Their Uncleanness... Their Transgressions... All Their Sins”

Notice the three layers:

- **Uncleanness** (impurity)
- **Transgressions** (rebellion)
- **Sins** (missing the mark)

This covers:

- Intentional sins
- Unintentional sins
- Hidden sins
- Public sins
- Private sins
- Sins of the heart
- Sins of behavior

Meaning:

God provides atonement for every kind of sin—not just the obvious ones.

III Atonement For the Holy Place (v 17-19)

¹⁷There 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.

¹⁸And 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.

¹⁹Then 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.

What's Happening Here?

No One Else Is Allowed Inside (v. 17)

- Atonement is a one-man work
- Only the high priest can stand before God on behalf of the people.

He Moves From the Holy Place to the Altar (v. 18)

After finishing inside the Holy of Holies, the priest comes **back out** to the altar in the courtyard to clean the altar.

Why cleanse the altar?

- Because the sins of the people symbolically “polluted” everything connected to worship.
- Sin doesn't just affect people—it affects the whole environment

He Applies Blood to the Horns of the Altar

- Blood on the horns means: **“God’s mercy and power are now applied to the place of sacrifice.”**

He Sprinkles Blood Seven Times (v. 19)

- Sprinkling seven times means: **The cleansing is complete. Nothing is left unpurified.**

Why?

Because the sins of the people had defiled it

The Scapegoat (vs. 20-22)

²⁰And when he hath made an end of reconciling the holy *place*, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat:

²¹And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send *him* away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness:

²²And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.

What's Happening Here?

These places had to be “reconciled” (purified) because they symbolically carried the sins and impurities of the people.

Once that cleansing work is complete, Aaron then **brings forward the live goat**—this is the **scapegoat**.

Why This Moment Matters

Up to this point, the blood of the first goat has been used to cleanse the sanctuary. Now the focus shifts from **cleansing God's space** to **removing the people's sins**.

The live goat represents:

- **Transfer of sin**
- **Removal of guilt**
- **A visible picture of forgiveness**

Aaron will soon place his hands on the goat's head and confess the sins of the entire nation over it.

It shows two sides of atonement:

1. **God's space is made clean**
2. **God's people are made clean**

Both are necessary for restored relationship.

How Leviticus 16 Points to Jesus

The New Testament picks up this imagery:

Jesus is the sin-bearer (1 Peter 2:24)

- He takes our sins "away" (John 1:29)
- He removes them "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12).

Jesus fulfills both goats:

- The sacrificial goat (blood for cleansing)
- The scapegoat (removal of sin).

Hebrews 8:1-2

¹Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens;

²A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.

³For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer.

⁴For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law:

5Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.

6But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

7For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

8For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

9Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

10For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

Use this section to help students connect Old Testament ritual to New Testament reality.

Day of Atonement	Fulfilled in Jesus
High priest enters once a year	Jesus entered once for all
Blood of animals	Jesus' own blood
Scapegoat carries sins away	Jesus removes our sins completely
Temporary cleansing	Eternal redemption
Restricted access to God	Open access through Christ

Discussion Questions

1. What does the Day of Atonement teach us about God's holiness?
2. Why do you think God required both a sacrificial goat and a scapegoat?

3. How does Jesus fulfill the meaning of this chapter?
4. What does it mean for us to have “access” to God today?
5. How should understanding atonement shape the way we live?