

Forgiveness



Week Five

inTro



Read This Week's Passage:
Leviticus 4:27–31

ENDING SLAVERY

When the book *Uncle Tom's Cabin* came out in 1852, it sold more copies than any other book on the planet except the Bible. The book's primary purpose was to inspire an end to the atrocities of slavery, but it was also about forgiveness. The protagonist is a Christian slave named Uncle Tom who lived under several different slave masters and who secretly helped his fellow slaves escape through the Underground Railroad. Inspired by Jesus' teachings, he also prayed for his enemies, the worst of whom was Simon Legree, his final and cruelest slave master. Legree hated Black folk *and* Christianity, making Uncle Tom the target of horrific abuse. Tragically, Legree and several other slaves beat Uncle Tom to death, but shortly before he died he said his own version of Jesus' plea when He hung dying on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). At the end of the day, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a call to forgive even your worst enemies.

Forgiveness isn't always easy. It's one thing when someone wrongs you in a minor way, but it's entirely different when they cause you harm in a destructive and painful way. No, forgiveness is not always easy! But when we forgive, we display one of the beautiful attributes of God Himself (Luke 23:34). Unsurprisingly, forgiveness is yet another value in Leviticus.

If we miss God's promise and desire to forgive in Leviticus, the book is completely misunderstood. While Exodus gives us ten commandments, Leviticus gives us ten promises of forgiveness (Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7; 19:22). The Ten Commandments in Exodus convict the sinner, but the blood of the lamb in Leviticus frees the sinner.



inScribe

Write out Leviticus 4:27–31 from the translation of your choice. If you're pressed for time, write out verse 31. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map it.



Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you

Draw **Arrows** to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?

Memorize your favorite verse. Write it out multiple times to help with memorization.

What do we learn about forgiveness from the sin offering?

What feelings of guilt and shame do you need to lay at Jesus' feet today?



Read more at
www.inversebible.org/stw05-3

A PATH TO FORGIVENESS

Unlike the three offerings we have already discussed (the burnt, grain, and fellowship offerings), the sin offering found in Leviticus 4 was not optional; it was mandatory. Interestingly, before the sin offering was introduced to Israel, the burnt offering had served in its place for hundreds of years. God in His wisdom created this distinct sacrifice to help us better understand the high value He places on forgiveness. It became the most important of all the sacrifices, and it most beautifully described Jesus' future work!

If an Israelite wanted their sins forgiven and covered (atonement), and if they wanted to be restored to a right relationship with God, they needed to bring a sin offering and present it “before the Lord” (Lev. 4:4, 7, 15, 18, 24). It had to be offered before the Lord because sin is in essence an act of disobedience and rebellion against God and His law. Yes, sin hurts our fellow human beings, but it is first and foremost an atrocity against God.

Leviticus 4 shows again and again that God defines sin as breaking the Ten Commandments (vv. 2, 13, 22, 27). This definition is found in both the Old and New Testaments, for in 1 John 3:4 we learn that “sin is contrary to the law of God” (NLT). It is in complete opposition to God's beautiful, loving character (Matt. 22:37–40; 1 John 4:8).

In His great mercy God offered complete forgiveness to all who came to Him with a repentant heart, confessed their sins, and made a sacrifice (Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35). Whether it was a member of the Israelite community, a leader, or a priest, a person could offer a sacrifice at any time and receive complete forgiveness and peace in the presence of the Lord. The process was simple but intense. The person would bring a goat, lamb, or bull to the Lord, lay their hand upon the animal, confess their specific sin (Lev. 5:5) and thereby transfer it to the sacrifice, which became their substitute. They would then take the life of the innocent animal, which, as we have discovered in our study of the previous sacrifices, represented our wonderful Savior (John 3:16).

Throughout this incredible chapter we see glimpses of Jesus everywhere: Just as the sacrifices were to be without defect, Jesus is our perfect and spotless Savior (Lev. 4:3, 23, 28). Just as the sin offering—minus its fat—was taken outside the camp of Israel and burned, so Jesus was taken outside the city of Jerusalem and experienced the burning wrath of God (against sin) in our place at Calvary (vv. 12, 21). Just as Christ's sacrifice was a pleasing aroma to God, the sin offering was too (v. 31). And just as Jesus suffered the penalty of our sins, which is death (Rom. 6:23), and freely gave us forgiveness, the sacrifices did the same (Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35). Like the sin offerings, Jesus is “the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world” (1 John 2:2; see also Heb. 2:17).

GONE FOREVER

Despite all these similarities between Jesus and the sacrifices, the sacrifices in the Old Testament always fell short of Christ’s work. Notice that the sin offerings covered only unintentional sins, not intentional ones (Lev. 4:2–4, 22). This kind of forgiveness was possible only through the shed blood of Christ Himself, which was in the distant future. The Israelites had access to this depth of forgiveness only by faith in the coming Savior. It could never be supplied by the sacrificial animals, even symbolically. Notice that both confession and repentance were necessary, but were not enough to warrant God’s forgiveness. They were essential, but not until the blood was shed did the offeror have assurance of forgiveness. The Bible is clear that “without the shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9:22). This is because “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23), and the sacrifices that symbolized Jesus had to die the death the offeror should have died.

Perhaps you are wondering how you might receive forgiveness and right standing with God today. Leviticus 4 makes it crystal clear: First, you must be aware of your guilt (vv. 14, 23, 28). In other words, when you come before the Lord, you need to confess the specific sin you are wanting forgiveness for. By faith, you are in essence placing your hand upon Jesus’ head and transferring your guilt to Him. On the cross 2,000 years ago Jesus took your guilt and with His own blood paid your debt in full. Both your unintentional and intentional sins have been forgiven! Shout “Amen!” with me!

Sadly, there are many people in the world today who do not know this simple fact. Many suffer psychological disorders as a result of the effects of guilt, real or perceived. So often they attempt to find freedom from that guilt on a professional’s couch without realizing that freedom from deep spiritual guilt as a result of sin is found only at the foot of the cross. The Bible teaches that Jesus’ blood can cleanse the guilt from our consciences (Heb. 9:14). Of course, this does not mean there is no place for counselors, psychologists, or psychiatrists, but as wonderful as these individuals are, they are unable to do what only the blood of Christ can do.

Just like the offeror in Leviticus 4, after laying our sins by faith upon Jesus, we can walk away knowing our sins have been forgiven and we are free from their guilt and shame. There are sadly many who have trouble believing this because their feelings of regret and shame hold them in continual bondage to their sins, but when sinners realize and understand that forgiveness is a promise and is therefore based on faith, not feelings, they then begin to experience the joy of having their sins truly taken away.

Micah 7:19 says God throws our sins “into the depths of the sea” (see also Ps. 103:12) when we repent. Corrie ten Boom put it like this: “When we confess our sins, God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever. And even though I cannot find a scripture for it, I believe God then places a sign out there that says, ‘No fishing allowed’ ” (*Tramp for the Lord* [1971], p. 53). Again, shout “Amen!” with me!



inTerpret

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks seem to point to overall?



What questions emerge after studying Leviticus 4:27–31? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

How can we help those who are trapped in their guilt and shame escape those bonds?



Read more at www.inverseible.org/stw05-4



What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

1 John 1:9

Matthew 6:14, 15

Luke 11:4

Luke 7:36–50

Luke 23:34

Psalms 103:12

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with Leviticus 4:27–31?

Review your memorized verse from Leviticus 4:27–31.

FORGIVEN TO FORGIVE

God has given us helpful tools to alert us when we have committed or are about to commit a sin and unleash shame, pain, and death into both our own lives and the lives of others: First, God has given us a conscience; when not continually ignored, it tells us when our actions “fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). The Holy Spirit speaks to our conscience and convicts us “of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8). In other words, the Spirit alerts us to sin and warns us of the coming judgment, but also empowers us to live righteously for God. Second, God has given us His Word, including the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, and the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7, in which Jesus expands and deepens our understanding of God’s law so that we can identify sin more clearly. If you really want to know how a disciple of Jesus should live, carefully read these three chapters of Matthew.

Have you ever wondered what happened to the sins when the Israelites confessed them and laid them upon their sacrifices? According to Leviticus 4, a person’s sins were transferred into the sanctuary by the shed blood of the sacrifice (vv. 5–7). Put simply, the blood both cleansed and contaminated—it cleansed the sinner but contaminated the sanctuary! The priest went into the sanctuary with the blood and sprinkled it before the curtain that divided the Holy place from the Most Holy Place seven times before anointing the horns of the altar of incense. Because of this practice, while the people were being cleansed and forgiven by the blood of the sacrifices, the sanctuary was becoming more and more contaminated by the people’s sins as the year went on. That’s why a special Day of Atonement was necessary in order to cleanse the sanctuary (Lev. 16).

God models forgiveness and values it in His people. Although forgiveness is not easy and often requires incredible sacrifice, God expects His people to pay it forward—to forgive others because He forgives us (Matt. 6:14, 15; Luke 11:4). In fact, in Luke 17:3, 4, He commands it! Before we think God harsh in making this a requirement, let’s remember that we are not just victims—we are also victimizers. If you are a sinner (and we all are), then we have not only wronged God but hurt others as well. This does not mean your pain is not real and forgiveness is easy, but it does mean that in light of Calvary, the way in which we must live has been clearly mapped out. Remember His heartbroken words on the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). This prayer was not just for the Romans or the Jews, but for you and me as well. To take up the cross and follow Jesus most certainly includes forgiving those who have wronged us.

When we discover the good news of forgiveness found in the gospel, we have an obligation to return the same to the people around us. It is nearly impossible to find an unforgiving person who has experienced the depth of God’s grace and forgiveness in their lives.



inVite

Meditate on Leviticus 4:27–31 again and look for where Jesus is.

←
What is He saying to you through these texts?

If we find it particularly difficult to forgive a certain person or a certain sin, how can we work toward forgiveness?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

Prayer Response:



Read more at
www.inversebible.org/stw05-6

Forgiveness



Review the memory verse.
How does it apply to your
life this week?

After this week's study of the
passage, how is God speaking
to you?

How is God speaking to you to
deal with others?



Read more inSight from the
Spirit of Prophecy at
www.inverseible.org/stw05-7

BALANCE TRANSFERS

“The most important part of the daily ministration was the service performed in behalf of individuals. The repentant sinner brought his offering to the door of the tabernacle, and, placing his hand upon the victim's head, confessed his sins, thus in figure transferring them from himself to the innocent sacrifice. By his own hand the animal was then slain, and the blood was carried by the priest into the holy place and sprinkled before the veil, behind which was the ark containing the law that the sinner had transgressed. By this ceremony the sin was, through the blood, transferred in figure to the sanctuary. In some cases, the blood was not taken into the holy place; but the flesh was then to be eaten by the priest, as Moses directed the sons of Aaron, saying, ‘God hath given it you to bear the iniquity of the congregation.’ Leviticus 10:17, KJV. Both ceremonies alike symbolized the transfer of the sin from the penitent to the sanctuary.

“Such was the work that went on day by day throughout the year. The sins of Israel being thus transferred to the sanctuary, the holy places were defiled, and a special work became necessary for the removal of the sins. God commanded that an atonement be made for each of the sacred apartments, as for the altar, to ‘cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.’ Leviticus 16:19, KJV” (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1890, 1908], pp. 354, 355).

“As Christ at His ascension appeared in the presence of God to plead His blood in behalf of penitent believers, so the priest in the daily ministration sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice in the holy place in the sinner's behalf. The blood of Christ, while it was to release the repentant sinner from the condemnation of the law, was not to cancel the sin; it would stand on record in the sanctuary until the final atonement; so in type the blood of the sin offering removed the sin from the penitent, but it rested in the sanctuary until the Day of Atonement” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 357).

“Important truths concerning the atonement were taught the people by this yearly service. In the sin offerings presented during the year, a substitute had been accepted in the sinner's stead; but the blood of the victim had not made full atonement for the sin. It had only provided a means by which the sin was transferred to the sanctuary” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 355, 356).



Share insights from this week's memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.



What are some examples of intentional versus unintentional sins?

According to Leviticus 4, what is sin? What is needed to have it forgiven?

Describe the kind of forgiveness you've given others or received from others.

The saying goes, "Forgive and forget," but is forgetting always required?

Why is it so important to forgive others, not just from the standpoint of wanting God's forgiveness for our own sins?

Do you have deep regrets or guilt for past sins? What can Christ's blood do for you? How can you accept His forgiveness and move on, leaving the guilt and regret behind?

How does forgiveness bring freedom?

Forgiveness