

Atonement



Week Ten

inTro



Read This Week's Passage:
Leviticus 16:1–28

AT-ONE-MENT

There is hardly a word more beautiful in all of Scripture than “atonement.” It is without question one of God’s major values in the book of Leviticus (it appears nearly fifty times!), and that should make us overjoyed.

Being atoned for means you are not only forgiven for a wrong you have committed against another, but your sin is completely covered and your relationship restored with no lingering guilt or shame. The New Living Translation brings this meaning out the best: “Lay your hand on the animal’s head, and the Lord will accept its death in your place to purify you, making you right with him” (Lev. 1:4). Atonement means at least three things: you are purified, forgiven (Lev. 4:20), and made right with God.

Have you ever forgiven someone for harming you but never really trusted them again? In other words, you gave forgiveness, but real friendship was no longer an option? This is not atonement! Atonement brings two parties that were divided back together as one, as if they were never parted in the first place. In other words, it includes forgiveness but offers much more: a restored friendship with God.

The Hebrew word for atonement means “to appease, pacify, cover, and cleanse,” so atonement is having your sins cleansed and covered so perfectly that your once broken relationship with God is restored completely (Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ From Leviticus: Foundations for Expository Sermons* [William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2011], p. 49). Jesus died so we could receive these gifts of eternal life, forgiveness, purity, and restored relationship with God.



inScribe

Write out Leviticus 16:1–28 from the translation of your choice. If you're pressed for time, write out Leviticus 16:16. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map it.

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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 does the Day of Atonement mean in your life?

What emotions do you think were the Israelites going through on the morning of the Day of Atonement?



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OF GOATS AND GARBAGE

God wants to make our broken relationship with Him (Isa. 59:2) completely whole again. This is the meaning behind the beautiful word “atonement” in the book of Leviticus. God doesn’t just want to forgive you for your sins—He also wants to bring you back as a close and dear friend. In John 15:15 He actually calls us “friends”—how awesome is that!

In Leviticus 16 we find the word atonement used several times in conjunction with descriptions of Yom Kippur, which literally means “Day of Atonement.” This was the most important day in an Israelite’s life. It was considered a solemn day because God would draw near to judge Israel for their sins. All year long the people had confessed their sins upon their sacrificial offerings, and those sins, by way of the blood and the food the priests ate, were carried into the sanctuary (Lev. 4:13–18). This meant the sanctuary became a receptacle for all the lawbreaking (sin) the people had done throughout the year. By the time the Day of Atonement arrived, the sanctuary was in need of some serious cleansing. The Day of Atonement was the day God came to take away all the garbage of sin that had been defiling the sanctuary. This was therefore a very special day for serious heart searching, prayer, fasting, and rest (Lev. 16:29, 31).

After washing and dressing in the prescribed clothes as all Israel waited in anticipation and hope, the high priest made sacrifices for his own sins and took two goats, one of which represented Jesus, whose death on the cross would atone for the sins of Israel and for the whole world (Lev. 16:4–9; Heb. 9:12; 1 John 2:2). The other goat represented Satan, who would ultimately be executed for being the original deceiver, accuser, liar, and murderer. After sacrificing the first goat, the high priest entered the Holy Place. Then, carefully and reverently, surrounded by the smoke from the incense, the high priest went into the Most Holy Place and sprinkled the blood seven times on the “mercy seat,” which was the cover of the ark of the covenant and where God’s presence hovered in the temple (Lev. 16:2, 12–15). When he did this, all of Israel’s sins were atoned for (Lev. 16:16).

Even though they had broken the law of God, which was kept in the ark of the covenant (Exod. 25:16, 21, 22), and even though God was ready to dispense justice for all who had broken His commands, the blood placed on the mercy seat between God and His broken law was a pledge, a symbol of Jesus’ atoning death for the sins of the world. God’s just wrath was stopped, and His people were made one with Him again. Then the high priest went out of the tabernacle, symbolically carrying the sins of Israel upon himself, and laid both hands on the head of the second goat, called the scapegoat, therefore transferring to it the guilt and garbage of sin (Lev. 16:20–22). Then a man chosen specifically for the task led the goat and all the sins of Israel into the wilderness (vv. 21, 22), leaving it there to wander, as Satan will before the final judgment (Lev. 16:10, 11, 21, 22; Rev. 20). The sanctuary was cleansed and God’s people were cleared.

A NECESSARY CLEANSING

Some may wonder why there needed to be a Day of Atonement if atonement was already offered to God's people throughout the year (Lev. 1:4; 4; 5). Did they need to be forgiven and atoned for twice? The answer to this important question is found by carefully comparing Leviticus 4 and 16.

For each sin offering in Leviticus 4, the sins that were transferred to the lamb were taken into the tabernacle or courtyard by the blood of the sacrifice (vv. 5, 16, 25, 30). The blood was a visible and smelly reminder to all that sin had taken place in the camp and that death occurred as a result of the sin. Every time the priest sprinkled blood in the sanctuary it freshened the odor of death—the death that had been demanded by the law that was residing nearby in the ark of the covenant.

When blood from a sacrifice was not carried into the Holy Place, the sacrifice was eaten by the priest and the priest symbolically carried the sin into the Holy Place (Lev. 10:16–20). Whether through the sprinkling of blood or through the eating of the sacrifice by the priest, the Holy Place was polluted by the continual reminder or record of sins coming into the sanctuary from the daily sacrifices.

Every day, any sinner who brought a sacrifice was granted full and immediate forgiveness with the promise of atonement (Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35). After the daily sacrifice is offered no additional forgiveness is needed; the forgiveness offered through the daily sacrifice is complete and whole. However, atonement is incomplete until the Day of Atonement. While the daily service in Leviticus 4 promises forgiveness and atonement (vv. 20, 26, 31, 35), the yearly service on the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16 promises cleansing and atonement (vv. 19, 30). In Leviticus, atonement is illustrated as a two-step process: forgiveness and cleansing. Forgiveness + Cleansing = Atonement. The forgiveness part of atonement was supplied through the daily sacrifice described in Leviticus 4. The cleansing part of atonement was supplied through the yearly Day of Atonement described in Leviticus 16. Together, both forgiveness and cleansing completed the atonement. The Day of Atonement made the people's atonement complete.

This two-step process of the atonement is also affirmed in the New Testament when John writes, "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Notice that the ministry of Jesus offers both forgiveness and cleansing distinctively.

One important question is why are the two steps of forgiveness and cleansing separated? Why couldn't sin and the record of sin be immediately cleansed when sin was forgiven? One answer is found in Ezekiel 18:24 and Matthew 18:27, 32–35. These two passages teach that it is possible for some to seek forgiveness without having a sincere heart. (Cont. on p. 85.)



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 this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

Why is it so important to keep our spiritual leaders in prayer? What should we pray for them?



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

Romans 3:25

Romans 5:11, 19

1 John 1:9; 2:1, 2

1 John 4:10

Revelation 20

What other verses come to mind in connection with Leviticus 16:1–28?

(Cont. from inTerpret, p. 84):

For these people there is no real repentance and therefore no real change in their lives. It is also possible for some who are truly repentant at first to later “repent of their repentance” by failing to change how they live (M. L. Andreasen, *The Sanctuary Service* [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2007], p. 178). Sins will be completely erased (cleansed) from the record (Isaiah 44:22) once destinies have been fixed and there is no turning back. Forgiveness of sin is available today! Cleansing of sin is promised in due time! In dealing with sin and saving sinners, God has chosen the process that is most fair, merciful, and just!

Review your memorized verse from Leviticus 16:1–28.

HOW TO REMOVE GUILT

Maybe you are currently carrying a heavy burden of guilt and condemnation. Maybe it's so heavy that you're ready to give up on ministry, church, or even life itself. I have good news for you: Jesus wants to take away all your guilt and condemnation. He wants to atone (cover) for your sins and make you pure, right with God, and forgiven! Unlike the blood of animals, the blood of Jesus can even erase your condemning thoughts and soothe your tortured conscience (Heb. 9:13, 14; Rom. 8:1).

The gospel according to Leviticus reveals how to remove guilt, teaching that a person must *first realize their guilt*. There are four ways this happens: conviction of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7–11), the conscience (Rom. 2:12–16), studying the Word of God (Heb. 4:12, 13), and the preaching and teaching of the Word (Acts 2:36, 37). Interestingly, Leviticus 5:17 tells us it's possible to be guilty of a sin and not know it! It is so important that we tell people the truth in love and don't turn a blind eye to their sin—because if we don't, they are robbed of a reason to run to Christ for forgiveness. This also reveals that our conscience is not always trustworthy (Titus 1:15). Sometimes it misses things or has become so corrupt by our violations of the law that it no longer sounds the alarm, and we no longer feel any guilt. We must spend time in the Word daily to avoid this sad state; to keep our consciences sharp and informed by God's law. Additionally, we should look for preachers and teachers who tell the truth about sin and not just what our “itching ears want to hear” (2 Tim. 4:3, NLT). On the other hand, we should also be aware of individuals who try to convict us of sins we are not personally guilty of. It is becoming more and more common for some to lay blame where blame is not deserved. Always let the Holy Spirit inform you; do not take guilt or condemnation on yourself when it is not warranted.

Once we have become aware of our sins, the Bible requires us to *confess* them (Lev. 5:5). In other words, we should acknowledge the specific ways we have hurt God or those around us. This is not a time to make excuses or try to justify what we have done; it is a time to recognize the ways we have broken God's law and violated our relationship with Him.

Next, we must *by faith lay our sins upon Jesus*, who is our substitute. When we lay our sins upon Him, we are trusting that His one-time death was enough to cover our sins completely and restore our relationship to God (provide atonement). But what if you don't feel it? The good news about forgiveness and atonement is that they are based on God's promises, not our emotions. The feelings of peace, joy, and assurance will come, but only as we trust our God—who literally cannot lie! Trusting God's promises comes first. The feelings will come later as our knowledge and understanding of God's honest character and Jesus' gospel grows deeper.

Under the old covenant, the Israelites looked forward to Jesus' death with hope, but under the new covenant, we look back at the cross with confidence! As we've discovered in other lessons, the blood of the animal sacrifices in Leviticus could save the sinner only if they pointed him or her to the blood of Jesus. Nothing but the blood of Christ could save the Israelites, and so, too, nothing but the blood of Christ can save you and me (Heb. 10:4).



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Meditate on Leviticus 16:1–28
again and look for where Jesus is.

←
What is He saying to you
personally through these texts?

How does the knowledge that
we live under the new covenant
affect your walk with God?

How do you see Jesus differently
or see Him again?

Prayer Response:



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

After this week's study of the
passage, what must be changed
in your life in light of the Day of
Atonement personally?

What are some practical
applications you must make in
your school, family, workplace,
and church?



Read more inSight from the
Spirit of Prophecy at
www.inverseible.org/stw10-7

SOUL TEMPLE CLEANSED

“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 the type the blood of the sin offering removed the sin from the penitent, but it rested in the sanctuary until the Day of Atonement.

“In the great day of final award, the dead are to be ‘judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.’ Revelation 20:12, KJV. Then by virtue of the atoning blood of Christ, the sins of all the truly penitent will be blotted from the books of heaven. Thus the sanctuary will be freed, or cleansed, from the record of sin. In the type, this great work of atonement, or blotting out of sins, was represented by the services of the Day of Atonement—the cleansing of the earthly sanctuary, which was accomplished by the removal, by virtue of the blood of the sin offering, of the sins by which it had been polluted” (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1890, 1908], pp. 357, 358).

“Satan invents unnumbered schemes to occupy our minds, that they may not dwell upon the very work with which we ought to be best acquainted. The archdeceiver hates the great truths that bring to view an atoning sacrifice and an all-powerful mediator. He knows that with him everything depends on his diverting minds from Jesus and His truth....

“We are now living in the great day of atonement. In the typical service, while the high priest was making the atonement for Israel, all were required to afflict their souls by repentance of sin and humiliation before the Lord, lest they be cut off from among the people. In like manner, all who would have their names retained in the book of life should now, in the few remaining days of their probation, afflict their souls before God by sorrow for sin and true repentance. There must be deep, faithful searching of heart. The light, frivolous spirit indulged by so many professed Christians must be put away. There is earnest warfare before all who would subdue the evil tendencies that strive for the mastery. The work of preparation is an individual work. We are not saved in groups. The purity and devotion of one will not offset the want of these qualities in another. Though all nations are to pass in judgment before God, yet He will examine the case of each individual with as close and searching scrutiny as if there were not another being upon the earth. Everyone must be tested and found without spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911], pp. 488-490).



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.



How should the knowledge that your relationship with God has been completely restored influence your daily life?

What does it mean to be not only God's creation but His friend as well?

What sins do you need to lay at Jesus' feet today? What sins have you been holding on to, perhaps out of guilt or shame?

What can we do if we no longer recognize our consciences' prodings when we sin? What steps can we take to begin hearing the proverbial alarm again?

How much should we rely on the Holy Spirit to convict us when we're sinning? Can we rely on Him alone, or are there other steps we should take to recognize sin?

What would you do if someone you trust tried to convict you of a sin you're not guilty of?

Why is it so important to confess our specific sins?