

**Subject: *The Day of Atonement***

**Scripture: *Leviticus 16:1-34***

Leviticus 16 is all about the Day of Atonement. It was the most holy day in the year for the Jewish people. It took place on the tenth day of the seventh month and is still observed as “Yom Kippur,” meaning “Day of Atonement.” This chapter gives us a beautiful picture of Christ as High Priest and the atonement He made for us.

### **1. A SPECIAL PLACE (the Holy of Holies)**

Everything about the Tabernacle and the Temple was intended by God to be an object lesson of man’s sinfulness and God’s holiness. This was a place reserved for God. The Holy of Holies was a perfect cube (15 feet x 15 feet x 15 feet). A few things were in this holy place: the Ark of the Covenant which contained the Ten Commandments written on stone tablets, the Mercy Seat or lid which sat on top of the Ark and two cherubim facing each other with their wings stretched out toward one another and their faces looking down on the mercy seat. This was the holy place where God was uniquely present and atonement for sin was made.

### **2. A SPECIAL PERSON (the high priest)**

The high priest was the only person who could enter the Holy of Holies, and he entered only once a year on the Day of Atonement. God warned Moses and the people about anyone else entering this holy place at any time (vs. 1-2). We should note several things about the high priest on the Day of Atonement:

A. On the Day of Atonement the high priest was alone (vs. 17).

No one else could assist him. This reminds us of Jesus who accomplished the work of atonement by Himself.

*Hebrews 1:3* Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

B. On the Day of Atonement the high priest wore special clothing (vs. 4).

Instead of wearing the high priest’s customary ornate clothing that was “for glory and beauty,” on the Day of Atonement he wore special linen garments to indicate his humility as God’s humble servant on this holy day.

C. On the Day of Atonement the high priest was clean (vs. 4).

Aaron, the high priest, washed so he could be ceremonially pure to minister in God’s holy presence. In this way he reminds us of Christ as our perfect High Priest who was absolutely perfect and holy. *Hebrews 7:26-27* <sup>26</sup> For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; <sup>27</sup> Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.

D. On the Day of Atonement the high priest made a sin offering for himself (vs. 6).

Aaron was a sinner like all the people, so he made atonement for himself and his family.

### **3. A SPECIAL PLAN (The high priest offered incense and blood)**

A. Incense represented the presence and glory of God.

First and foremost, atonement was made for the glory of God. Christ made atonement for us so that God would be glorified. On the eve of His arrest and crucifixion, He prayed:

*John 17:1* *Father, the hour is come: glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.*

On the cross, Jesus was crucified and God was glorified.

B. Blood represented death (the penalty of sin).

The blood was shed and then sprinkled seven times on the mercy seat (means “the place of atonement”). This was in preparation for the atonement the high priest would make for the sins of all the people. *Leviticus 17:11* *For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.*

In modern-day observance of the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) there is no mention of blood. It is still a Jewish holy day, but it has lost its true meaning and significance because there is no atonement and therefore no forgiveness without the shedding of blood.

*Hebrews 9:22* *without shedding of blood is no remission (forgiveness).*

### **4. A SPECIAL PROVISION (the sacrificial goat and the scapegoat)**

A. The sacrificial goat provided the satisfaction of God’s wrath (vs. 8-9).

This goat was for the satisfaction of God’s wrath against sin. It was a reminder of God’s justice. This goat was killed as the sin offering and it was “for the Lord.” Who did Christ die for? He died for sinners, but first and foremost, He died for God to satisfy His holy wrath.

B. The scapegoat provided the separation of guilt from sinners (vs. 8, 20-22).

The scapegoat was a picture of God’s work in forgiveness. The Hebrew word is *Azazel* (“goat of departure”). The scapegoat carried all their sins far away. Aaron the high priest laid his hands on the scapegoat as a symbol of transferring the sins and deserved punishment of the people to the scapegoat. This is a picture of what Christ has done for believers, as prophesied in *Isaiah 53:6* *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

### **5. A SPECIAL PURPOSE (to make atonement for sin)**

The word “atonement” is found 15 times in this chapter: vs. 6, 10, 11, 16, 17 (twice), 18, 24, 27, 30, 32, 33 (three times), and 34. Atonement is translated from the Hebrew word *kaphar*, “to cover.” The blood of atonement covered the sins of the people. The word “all” is found 10 times in this chapter: vs. 2, 16, 17, 21 (twice), 22, 29, 30, 33, and 34, and indicates the

sufficiency of the atonement for all the sins of the people. A sufficient atonement was made for the Holy of Holies, for the entire Tabernacle, for the altar, for the high priest and other priests, and for all the people. We have a progression in Scripture called “the scarlet thread of redemption” showing how blood atonement was provided for sinners from the beginning of human history: 1) in the life of Abel and Abraham there was *a blood sacrifice for a man* (Gen. 4; 22); 2) in the Passover there was *a sacrificial lamb for every family* (Ex. 12); 3) on the Day of Atonement there was *a blood sacrifice for the Jewish people* (Lev. 16); and 4) in Christ there was *a Lamb slain for the world* (Jn. 1:29, *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*; see also Jn. 1:35).

## 6. A SPECIAL PICTURE (Christ’s work of atonement, vs. 29-34)

A. The Day of Atonement pictured Christ as the sacrifice for our sins.

**Hebrews 9:11-12** *But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.*

**Hebrews 9:24-26** *For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. “Once” (Greek, hapax) in both passages literally means “once for all.”*

B. The Day of Atonement pictured two great blessings in salvation: forgiveness (removal) of our sins and access to God through the work of Christ our High Priest.

**Psalms 103:12** *As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.* See also Isa. 38:17; Mic. 7:19; Heb. 8:12. It is important to note that Old Testament sacrifices including the Day of Atonement never took away sins in the absolute and final sense. These sacrifices only covered sins until Christ offered Himself on the cross as the final and sufficient sacrifice that took away sins completely.

**Hebrews 10:4** *For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.*

C. The Day of Atonement pictured our faith and repentance (vs. 29-31).

This holy day was to be a Sabbath of rest and repentance. It was a day of fasting, the only prescribed fast in the year for the Jews. They were to afflict (humble) their souls (vs. 29, 31). What a picture! The High Priest and his sacrifice accomplished everything for the people. They did nothing. They added nothing to the work of the High Priest on their behalf. Jonathan Edwards said, “You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary.” Atonement for sin was provided, but only those who were genuine in their repentance and faith received the blessings of atonement.

D. The Day of Atonement pictured the release of our debt and our liberty in Christ (see Lev. 25:9-10). Every 50<sup>th</sup> year, the trumpet sounded at the end of the Day of Atonement to proclaim that the Year of Jubilee had begun. Debts were cancelled and slaves were set free.

Two great hymns of the Christian faith deal with Christ's atonement for sin:

*Not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain,  
Could give the guilty conscience peace, or wash away its stain.  
But Christ, the heavenly Lamb took all our sins away,  
A sacrifice of nobler name, and richer blood than they. ~Isaac Watts*

*Guilty, vile, and helpless we,  
Spotless Lamb of God was He;  
Full atonement! Can it be?  
Hallelujah, what a Savior! ~Philip Bliss*