

10. The Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16)

Introduction

I have always loved to see the spring come each year, with all that it brings, with one notable exception—spring cleaning. You married men know that dreaded day as well as I do. Your wife gets that certain restlessness and a peculiar look in her eye. She wants to throw out half of the treasures you have gathered over the year. Worse yet, she wants you to help her move things around, and around, and around.

Israel's annual Day of Atonement was something like a spiritual spring cleaning, except for the fact that this sacred day came in the fall of the year, in September-October, six months after the celebration of Passover. According to the Israelite calendar, it came on the tenth day of the seventh month (cf. [Lev. 23:26-32](#); [Num. 29:7-11](#)).

In one sense, Israel did not look forward to the coming of this day any more than I look forward to spring cleaning. Unlike the other Jewish holidays, the Day of Atonement was no festive event. It was a day of national mourning and repentance. This was a Sabbath day celebration, which meant that no work could be done ([Lev. 23:26-32](#)). Anyone who did not observe this Sabbath was to be cut off from his people ([Lev. 23:29](#)), which is a euphemism for being put to death. Beyond this, this was a day when the people were to "humble their souls" (cf. [Lev. 16:31](#); [23:27](#); [Num. 29:7](#)), which, according to many, included fasting. This would thus be the only religious holiday which was characterized by mourning, fasting, and repentance.

Relationship of Chapter 16 to the Preceding Chapters

There is a very logical development of the argument of the Book of Leviticus evident in the first 16 chapters. Chronologically chapter 16 should follow directly after chapter 10, for the first verse of chapter 16 informs us that God gave the instructions of chapter 16 to Moses "after the death of the two sons of Aaron," which, as we know, is recorded in chapter 10. The first section of Leviticus, chapters 1-7, outlines the sacrificial rituals the priests must follow; chapters 8-10 records the inauguration of the Aaronic priesthood, who will offer the sacrifices; chapters 11-15 distinguishes the clean from the unclean, and proper procedures for dealing with uncleanness. In short, we have:

[Leviticus 1-7: Ritual \(Offerings\)](#)

[Leviticus 8-10: Religious Officials \(Priests\)](#)

[Leviticus 11-15: Reasons for Sacrifices \(Uncleanness\)](#)

[Leviticus 16: Repentance and Restoration \(Day of Atonement\)](#)

[Leviticus 16](#) builds upon the preceding chapters by outlining the sacrifices of the great Day of Atonement. This instruction is directed primarily toward Aaron and the priests (vv. 1-25), but not exclusively so, for the people have a role to play as well (cf. vv. 26-31). No other sacrifice in Leviticus more clearly anticipates the future, greater, atonement of Israel's Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. And no other sacrifice provides a better backdrop against which to see the vast superiority of our Lord's atonement over that of Aaron. Let us learn well from this chapter.

The Structure of [Leviticus 16](#)⁶⁸

Verses	Content
1-2	Introduction
3-5	Animals and priestly dress needed for the ceremonies
6-10	Outline of the ceremonies

11-28	Detailed description of the ceremonies
11-19	the blood-sprinkling rites
20-22	the scapegoat
23-28	cleansing of the participants
29-34	The people's duty

The chapter is not strictly chronological in its organization. Verses 6-10 serve as a preliminary summary of the offering of the bull and the two goats, but this is then taken up in greater detail in verses 11-22.⁶⁹

Background of the Day of Atonement (Exodus 30:1-10)

The first reference to the Day of Atonement comes in the Book of Exodus, chapter 30. The first nine verses detail the plans for the Altar of Incense. There is then a special word of warning, followed by a brief reference to the Day of Atonement: "You shall not offer any strange incense on this altar, or burnt offering or meal offering; and you shall not pour out a libation on it. And Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year; he shall make atonement on it with the blood of the sin offering of atonement once a year throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD" (Exod. 30:9-10).

It is noteworthy that in this passage, the warning about offering "strange incense" immediately precedes reference to the Day of Atonement, just as [Leviticus 16](#) introduces the instructions concerning the offerings by referring to the death of Nadab and Abihu, who were smitten of God for offering "strange fire" (cf. [Lev. 10:1](#)).

AN OVERVIEW OF THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

Before we discuss the significance of some of the events of the Day of Atonement, let us pause to "walk through" the entire ceremony which is outlined in Leviticus chapter 16. This will enable us to get a feel for the ceremony as a whole, before we move to an examination of its parts.

From all appearances, the rituals outlined in our text do not begin the day's activities for Aaron, but come after the exercise of some of his regular duties. The day would seem to begin as usual with the offering of the morning sacrifice, the burnt offering of a one year old lamb (cf. [Exod. 29:38-42](#); [Num. 28:3-6](#)). After these duties were performed, the High Priest would commence the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement, as prescribed in our text:⁷⁰

- (1) Aaron was to take off his normal priestly garments, wash, and then put on the special garments which were prescribed for the sacrifices which took him into the holy of holies** (v. 4; cf. [Exod. 28; 39](#)).
- (2) Aaron secured the necessary sacrificial animals:** a bull for his own sin offering and two male goats for the people's sin offering; two rams, one for Aaron's and the other for the people's burnt offering (vv. 3, 5).
- (3) Aaron slaughtered the bull for his own sin offering** (vv. 6, 11).
- (4) Before entering into the Holy of Holies with the blood of the bull, Aaron had to create a "cloud" of incense** in the Holy of Holies, covering the mercy seat, to "veil" the glory of God so that he could enter in (vv. 12-13). The best approximation to this in my experience is what a bee-keeper does, smoking the hive of the bees, before he begins to remove the honey. In the case of Aaron, he was to offer only the prescribed incense so as to create an obscuring veil of smoke, thus dimming the glory of God's presence and sparing his life.
- (5) Aaron then took some of the blood of the bull and sprinkled it on the mercy seat seven times** (v. 14).
- (6) Lots were then cast for the two goats, to determine which would be slaughtered and which would be driven away** (vv. 7-8).
- (7) The goat for slaughter, the goat of the people's sin offering, was sacrificed, and its blood was taken into the Holy of Holies and applied to the mercy seat, as the bull's blood had been** (v. 15).
- (8) Cleansing was then made for the holy place** (v. 16), seemingly by the sprinkling of the blood of both the bull and the goat. The atonement of the holy place is done alone, without anyone present to help, or to watch (v. 17).

(9) Next, outside the tent, Aaron was to make atonement for the altar of burnt offering,⁷¹ using, it would seem, the blood of both the bull and the goat (vv. 18-19).

(10) Now the second goat, the one which was kept alive, had the sins of the nation symbolically laid on its head, and was driven from the camp to a desolate place, from which it must never return (vv. 20-22).

(11) Aaron then entered the tent of meeting, removed his linen garments, washed, and put on his normal priestly garments

(12) The burnt offerings of rams, one for Aaron and his family and the other for the people, was now offered (v. 24)

(13) The earlier sacrifices of the bull and the goat were completed. The fat of the sin offering was burned on the altar (v. 25), and the remains of the bull and the goat were taken outside the camp, where they were burned (v. 27).

(14) Those who had been rendered unclean by handling the animals on which the sins of Aaron or the people were laid were to wash themselves and then return to camp (vv. 26, 28).

The People's Role in the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-31)

The people were not to be passive in the Day of Atonement, although they (and those dwelling in their midst) were to observe a Sabbath rest. They were commanded to remember this ordinance as a permanent statute, by "humbling their souls" (v. 29).

OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

There are several features of the Day of Atonement which are worthy of our attention, which prepare us to consider the meaning of this text. Let us briefly consider each of these.

(1) God's instructions to Aaron concerning the offerings of the Day of Atonement begins with a reminder of the death of his two sons, as recorded in chapter 10. This serves as a chronological clue, indicating that the commandments given here must have come shortly after the death of Aaron's sons. There is also the logical connection. Aaron's sons died while in the tabernacle, specifically while they were burning incense. In the course of Aaron's duties on the Day of Atonement, he too will offer incense. This note thus serves to underscore the importance of Aaron's very meticulous obedience to these instructions.

(2) The priestly garb which Aaron was to wear on this one occasion was very different from that which he normally wore in the course of his duties.

Beautiful colored materials, intricate embroidery, gold and jewelry made him look like a king. On the day of atonement he looked more like a slave. His outfit consisted of four simple garments in white linen, even plainer than the vestments of the ordinary priest ([Exod. 39:27-29](#)) ... On this one day the high priest enters the 'other world,' into the very presence of God. He must therefore dress as befits the occasion. Among his fellow men his dignity as the great mediator between man and God is unsurpassed, and his splendid clothes draw attention to the glory of his office. But in the presence of God even the high priest is stripped of all honor: he becomes simply the servant of the King of kings, whose true status is portrayed in the simplicity of his dress. Ezekiel (9:2-3, 11; 10:2, 6-7) and Daniel (10:5; 12:6-7) describe angels as dressed in linen, while [Rev. 19:8](#) portrays the saints in heaven as wearing similar clothes.⁷²

In the course of his daily sacrifices, Aaron, the High Priest, represented God, and thus his garments were of great beauty and splendor. But when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies in performing the atoning ritual of the Day of Atonement, he went before God in simplicity and humility. One cannot help but think of the 13th chapter of John's Gospel, where our Lord took off His garments, and stripped down to the garb of a slave, so as to cleanse His disciples. On both these occasions ([John 13](#) and the Day of Atonement) there is a symbolic representation of the kenosis, the setting aside of our Lord's glory and splendor, so that the work of atonement could be accomplished (cf. [Phil. 2:5-8](#)).

(3) The ceremony of Aaron's offering the bull for his sins and his family (especially among whom were the priests) is similar to that described in 4:3-12, but is also different. In both offerings, a bull is sacrificed, and in the same way. In chapter 4, the blood of the bull is sprinkled only on the horns of the altar of incense, but in chapter 16 the blood is also sprinkled on the mercy seat itself. The offering of the Day of Atonement is more extensive than the normal offering of the priest.

(4) The ceremony of offering the bull in chapter 16 is also similar to, yet different from, the offering of the bull which was a part of the ordination of Aaron and his sons. In this case, too, the offering on the Day of Atonement was similar to the former offering, but was

greater in that there was an entrance into the Holy of Holies.

(5) The sin offering for the people is both unique and compound. With the exception of the two birds ([Lev. 14:3-9](#), 49-53), there is no other sacrifice quite like this, which involves both a dying and a living animal. There has been a great deal of discussion as to the term “Azazel,”⁷³ associated with the goat which lives, but there is no totally satisfactory answer, and the discussion is hardly needed to understand the ritual.⁷⁴

As a rule I think that most of us are inclined to look at the slaughtered goat as paying for the sins of the people, while the living goat lives, as though it symbolizes the forgiveness of the people. This is not the case, however. The goat which was “the LORD’s” was sacrificed for the sins of the people, like the bull, and the blood was applied in the same ways. The fate of the goat which lived (Azazel) is, in my opinion, worse than that of the one which is slain. On this goat, the sins of the people are placed, and then it is handed over to an Israelite (Azazel?), whose task it is to drive the goat into the wilderness, so that it will never return.

Can you imagine the impact on the people if the goat somehow found his way back to the camp? This thought must have haunted the one in whose charge the living goat was placed. I am sure that he was most diligent to take the goat far away. Jewish tradition has it that the goat was led to a high cliff, and then pushed backward, over the precipice. The possibility of these goats returning to the camp is just one more indication that this Day of Atonement was not permanent,⁷⁵ and that there was a tentativeness about what was accomplished on this day. To have killed this second goat, as the Jews may later on have done, would have made the people feel much more secure about this sacrifice. To leave the goat living, roaming about the wilderness, must have caused some uneasiness and insecurity.

(6) The Day of Atonement is the cleansing of a place and of a people. I have always had a certain mental picture of the Day of Atonement, and I have just now discovered how partial and incomplete it was. I thought that the sole purpose of this annual sacrifice was to cleanse the people from their sins. I have always visualized individual Israelites waiting anxiously outside the tent, wondering if Aaron would return, if the sacrifice he offered would be accepted, and if penalty for my sins of the past year would be delayed yet longer. This is one of the things which the Day of Atonement accomplished for the people. God said, “For it is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; you shall be clean from all your sins before the LORD” ([Lev. 16:30](#)).

Even more emphatic in this chapter is the fact that the Day of Atonement was provided by God to cleanse His holy dwelling place, the Tabernacle, and the holy things associated with it.⁷⁶ That for which atonement is made is that with which God came in contact, that which had become defiled over the past year, due to the sins of the people and their priests: “And he shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel, and because of their transgressions, in regard to all their sins; and thus he shall do for the tent of meeting which abides with them in the midst of their impurities” ([Lev. 16:16](#)).

So the priest who is anointed and ordained to serve as priest in his father’s place shall make atonement: he shall thus put on the linen garments, the holy garments, and make atonement for the holy sanctuary; and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar. He shall also make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly ([Lev. 16:32-33](#)).

The issue at stake is whether or not God will continue to abide within the camp, in the midst of His people. The uncleanness of the people contaminated the dwelling place of God, and the Day of Atonement was provided to remove these sins. The most dreaded evil for Israel was the absence of God’s presence in the midst of the people. This is that for which Moses eloquently and passionately pleaded, after the apostasy of the nation, when they worshipped the golden calf ([Exod. 33-34](#)). God promised to dwell with His people, and the Tabernacle, along with the priestly system and the offerings was the provision for Him to do so. Their highest use was seen on the Day of Atonement.

Note that there were two kinds of impurity atoned for on the Day of Atonement: “And he shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel, and because of their transgressions, in regard to all their sins; and thus he shall do for the tent of meeting which abides with them in the midst of their impurities” ([Lev. 16:16](#)).

The first “impurity” was that with which contaminated every Israelite by virtue of being a child of Adam and living in a fallen and corrupted world. Thus, God spoke of the “impurities of the sons of Israel.” In addition He referred to “their transgressions, in regard to all their sins.” This was the impurity resulting from disobedience to the commandments of God—personal sin. The Day of Atonement cleansed from both kinds of impurity.

(7) The Day of Atonement foreshadowed and anticipated a greater, permanent cleansing of God’s people and of His dwelling place, which was to be accomplished by a better priest, who offered a better sacrifice. I believe, for example, that both Israel’s goats for her sin offering symbolize the death of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, in the years to come. The dying goat signifies the death which Christ died, as did the other sacrificial animals. The goat which is driven away from the camp, into the wilderness, never to return, symbolizes the even greater agony of our Lord, His separation from the Father, due to the fact that the sins of all men were borne by Him. This is the agony

which caused Him to agonize in the Garden of Gethsemane. This is the one Old Testament sacrifice which reflects one of the most gruesome aspects of our Lord's atoning work as our substitute.

The New Testament, particularly the Book of Hebrews, stresses the superiority of the death of our Lord, in contrast to the Old Testament sacrifices, of which those of the Day of Atonement are most prominent. Our text clearly indicates the **superiority of the person of Christ** to Aaron. Aaron was a sinner, if we had not already figured this out (cf. [Exod. 32](#)). Our Lord, Christ, was (and is) sinless. He did not need to make an offering for Himself. As the Scriptures put it,

For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever ([Heb. 7:26-28](#)).

Further, Aaron died, but Christ lives forever ([Heb. 7:15-25](#)). Christ is vastly superior to Aaron, and to all the high priests of Israel.

The **place of Christ's ministry** is also superior to the place of Aaron's ministry. Aaron ministered in a small earthly sanctuary, entering into the Holy of Holies but once a year. The people could never enter into this privileged place. Christ "tabernacled" among us in His flesh, during His earthly ministry (cf. [John 1:14](#); [Heb. 3:14](#); [10:5, 11](#)). And after He offered Himself once for all, He entered into the heavenly sanctuary ([Heb. 8:1-2](#); [9:1-10](#)).

The **sacrifice of Christ was superior to those offered by Aaron**. Aaron and all the other priests could but offer the blood of bulls and goats, but Christ offered His own precious blood:

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption ([Heb. 9:11-12](#), cf. also vv. 13-14).

The superiority of Christ's one offering to that of Aaron's many offerings is also seen in the fact that the **results of Christ's sacrifice are greater**. The best that one could hope for with the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement was that the impurity of sin would be *put off* for another year. Christ's death *put away* sin altogether:

For all have sinned and have come short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed ([Rom. 3:23-25](#)).

Aaron's offerings could only produce forbearance; Christ's offering brought forgiveness.

The last aspect of the superiority of Christ's atonement to Aaron's (which we shall consider here) is that **Christ's sacrifice brought better access to God**. Aaron himself could only "draw near" to God, that is to the Holy of Holies, but once a year. The people could not come this near ever. But when our Lord was crucified and His blood was shed for the sins of the world, the veil which formerly kept men apart from God was torn asunder, signifying that every believer has full and unlimited access to God. Thus, the writer to the Hebrews can say,

Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water ([Heb. 10:19-22](#)).

(8) Just as the Israelite awaited that which the Day of Atonement anticipated, so the Christian awaits that which the atonement of Christ has accomplished.

In the laws of clean and unclean, we saw how the fall of man in the Garden of Eden brought suffering and adversity to the Israelites. Israelite women, for example, were afflicted with 40 or 80 days of separation and ceremonial uncleanness for having a child.

Romans chapter 8 deals with the spiritual life of the believer and describes the present difficulties and adversities of life. In the development of Paul's argument in the book, the atonement of Christ has won forgiveness of sins and justification for the one who believes ([Romans 1-5](#)). It has also accomplished the sanctification of the believer (chapters 6-8). Nevertheless, the lot of the Christian is present difficulty (cf. [5:3-5](#); [7:14-25](#); [8:18-39](#)).

Nevertheless, there are a number of schools of thought which do not take the teaching of Romans (especially chapter 8) seriously enough.

These various schools of thought have one error in common: they suppose that since the death of Christ has accomplished many wonderful things, the full realization of His victory in every area of life can be claimed and experienced now.

For example, some say that the death of Christ made physical healing a possession for all to claim.⁷⁷ This simply is not true. It flies in the face of biblical revelation and of practical experience. Satan was defeated on the cross of Christ ([John 12:31; 16:11](#)), and yet he is still very much alive and at work, resisting the work and the people of God ([2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 6:11-12; Rev. 12:9](#)). It is not until the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ that Satan will finally be put out of circulation forever (cf. [Rev. 20](#)).

So, too, the believer is saved and sanctified through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago, but the suffering, sickness and struggles resulting from sin will not be eliminated until Christ's return. Thus, [Romans 7](#) describes the struggles of a Christian and chapter 8, which speaks of our victory in Christ, also speaks of our present frustration, along with all of creation (cf. [Rom. 8:18-25](#)).

The Holy Spirit does not miraculously deliver us from these "groanings," but intercedes for us in order to bring us through them safely ([Rom. 8:26-27](#)). Knowing that God is both good and sovereign, Paul assures us that God is able to use even the present evils of this world to bring us to the perfection which only heaven will bring ([Rom. 8:28-30](#)), thus none of those destructive and damaging present evils can separate us from the love of God ([Rom. 8:31-39](#)).

(9) The Day of Atonement was a time for dealing with unknown sins, for which no offering had been made in the past year.⁷⁸ The text does not specifically state this, but the inference of the text is that there were so many sins which might go unnoticed, that these, had they been neglected beyond the year, would have produced intolerable contamination. It was not those sins for which atonement had already been made that the Day of Atonement was given for, but for those which had not been recognized, and for which a sacrifice had not been offered.

Remember, too, that the sacrificial system was provided to atone for unintentional sins, not intentional sins. The offerings of chapters 4-6 were those which were made for sins **unintentionally** committed (cp. [4:13, 22, 27; 5:15, 18](#)). Willful sins could not be atoned for by these sacrifices, no was there any sacrifice for them ([Num. 15:27-31](#)). The sacrificial system God established assumed that some sins which were not recognized as such at the time they were committed would come to the attention of the individual at a later time ([Lev. 4:13-14, 27-28; 5:2-5](#)). I believe that the Day of Atonement is based on the assumption that some sins never come to the attention of the sinner.

This matter of unknown sin was one that concerned godly Israelites. David prayed, "Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults" ([Ps. 19:12](#)). Knowing this led him to pray elsewhere, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way" ([Ps. 139:23-24](#)).

Moses, the author of the Pentateuch, was also the author of this psalm, in which he prayed, "Thou hast placed our iniquities before Thee, Our secret sins in the light of Thy presence" ([Ps. 90:8](#)).

Unknown sins are hidden sins, those transgressions which we, in our fallen state, are either unable or unwilling to acknowledge. Proverbs has much to say about the unseen evils in our lives:

There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death ([Prov. 14:12](#)).

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel ([Prov. 12:15](#)).

All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the Lord weighs the motives ([Prov. 16:2](#)).

These passages tell us that fallen man is not capable of seeing many of his own sins. Thus, a godly man must seek the knowledge of his sin from God and from the wise counsel of others.

New Testament Christians are not as concerned about unknown sins as they should be. Some seem to think that "ignorance is bliss." It is not true. I am convinced that it is often our unconscious sins which are the most damaging to ourselves and to others. These sins are not so deeply hidden that they cannot be discovered. Indeed, these sins, while unknown to the sinner, are blatantly obvious to those who are close to him (or her). Marriage has been designed, in part I believe, so that we cannot say there was no way of being informed of our sins. Our mates know our sins all too well.

The wonder of this matter is that often our "secret" or "unknown" sins are often sanctified by us by the use of spiritual terminology and biblical texts. Let me briefly mention how this can work, and then leave the reader to ponder the implications. A man who is domineering and dictatorial may very well justify this sin in his life as a real strength. He may see this as "taking a stand for the truth or for what is right." He might justify domineering over his wife as "assuming his biblical place of headship." Beware of wolves in sheep's clothing.

The wife, on the other hand, may have learned early in life that the way to please her father was to totally bend to his every whim. She would do nothing to offend or to lose his approval. Then, when she marries, she continues the same kind of blind conformity. And she commends herself for her “submission.” The evil here is not in being “submissive,” but in the woman’s self-seeking desire for approval, at any cost. She sacrifices her convictions and her unique contribution in the name of submission. True submission is seeking the best interest of the other, rather than our own interest. Some seek self-interest by domineering, while others seek it by “door-matting.” In either case it is evil, by whatever label we name it.

The Day of Atonement was a time for each Israelite to reflect on his own sinfulness, and to respond appropriately with mourning and repentance. I urge you to follow the example of the saints of the Bible, especially the psalmists, and to make your unknown sins a matter of priority. These are very likely sins which greatly hinder our fellowship with God and men.

(10) The Day of Atonement was a time for the priest to confess before God the sins of the nation. I have wondered to myself how long Aaron’s confession for the people’s sins, briefly mentioned in verse 21, actually took. One could imagine him confessing for hours. No doubt the confessions of Moses ([Exod. 32-34](#)), Ezra ([Ezra 9](#)), and Daniel ([Dan. 9](#)), among others, provide us with an idea of what the high priest’s prayer might have included.

Since we who are New Testament believers are priests ([1 Pet. 2:5, 9](#)), we need to make intercession for our nation as well (cf. [1 Tim. 2](#)). How, then, should we pray? What should we confess? These are not easy matters, for we are a part of the evil fabric of our country. We find it difficult to stand back from our culture and see its sins. Many times our national sins are concealed by government or the press. It is good to confess those obvious sins, such as the legalization of abortion, but we need to become much more sensitive to the more subtle (unknown?) forms of sin as well.

Doing this will have great personal benefits. You see, the evils of our nation are those practices and pressures which constitute our “world” (as in, the “world,” the “flesh,” and the devil). To become sensitive to the evils of our age is to become sensitive to the evils which press upon us and tempt us.

As I conclude this message, I want to urge you to act upon the truths of which you have been convicted by the Holy Spirit. In particular, I would encourage you to read through the Book of Hebrews in the next day or two, seeking to see those ways in which Christ’s death surpassed the sacrifices and ministry of the Aaronic priesthood.

Furthermore, I want to urge you to take that first step of application which the writer to the Hebrews urges his readers: “Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith ...” ([Heb. 10:22a](#)). It may be that you need to draw near in personal faith and commitment. In other words, it may be that you need to be born again, to be saved. Have you had a day of atonement in your life, when you repented of your sins and trusted in the sacrifice of Christ? You need but one such day to be saved, but you must have one. Let Leviticus chapter 16 be the point in your life when you come to experience God’s atonement in Christ.

For those of you who are saved I must admit that I have no idea of what “drawing near” may mean for you. I am convinced, however, that every one of us has many ways in which we need to continue to draw near. I urge you to meditate upon the Book of Hebrews, and to pray the prayers of the psalmists concerning hidden sins. I encourage you to ask God to show you what drawing near means for you, today.

⁶⁸ This is the structure as outlined by Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), p. 228. As a result of my study of this chapter, I have come to break the chapter up somewhat differently: I. Introduction—Requirements: Verses 1-5; A. Caution required, vv. 1-2; B. Materials required—animals and clothing, vv. 3-5. II. Survey of the Sin Offerings: Verses 6-10; A. Aaron’s sin offering, v. 7; B. Israel’s sin offering, vv. 8-10. III. Detailed Description of the Day of Atonement Rituals: Verses 11-28; A. Aaron’s role, vv. 11-25; B. The role of others, vv. 26-31; 1. Those who have had contact with the sacrificial animals, vv. 26-28; 2. The people of Israel as a congregation, vv. 29-31. IV. Provisions for the Perpetuation of the Day of Atonement: Verses 32-34.

⁶⁹ The rituals outlined in verses 6-10 are reiterated in greater detail in verses 11-22, with the exception of the process of casting lots for the goats, which is only mentioned in verses 7 & 8. I believe that the omission of this process in verses 11-22 is significant. Some of those who insist that there is a mere duplication of material press the matter to demonstrate their hypothesis that there are multiple authors of the Pentateuch. The **one** author of this book, Moses, did not feel that it was necessary to repeat the casting of lots for the goat in verses 11-22 because he had already sufficiently covered the subject in verses 6-10.

⁷⁰ The exact order of events is not certain in some cases, but this is at least the general order of the ritual.

⁷¹ There is a difference of opinion as to whether the “altar” in verse 18 is the altar of incense inside the veil or the altar of burnt offering outside. Noordtzij argues forcefully for the latter: “(1) The term ‘altar’ in verse 20 must clearly refer to the altar of burnt offering, yet it

would have no previous reference apart from verses 18 and 19. (2) Verses 20 and 33 speak of atonement for the 'Holy Place,' the 'Tent of Meeting,' and the 'altar.' Since the 'altar of incense' is a part of the 'Tent of Meeting' there is no need to specify it, while there would be a need to specify the altar of burnt offering, outside the tent." A. Noordtjij, *Leviticus*, trans. by Raymond Togtman (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, Zondervan Publishing House, 1982, pp. 167-168.

⁷² Wenham, p. 230. Bush adds, "There were eight different garments belonging to the altar of the high priest, four of which, called by the Jews 'the white garments,' and made wholly of linen, are here mentioned as to be worn on this day. The remaining four which are mentioned [Ex. 28.4](#), were called 'the golden garments,' from there being a mixture of gold in them. Inasmuch as the day of atonement was a day of sorrow, humiliation, and repentance, the high priest was not to be clad in his rich pontifical robes, but in the simple sacerdotal vestments which were thought to be more appropriate to this occasion." George Bush, *Leviticus* (Minneapolis, Klock and Klock Publishers [reprint], 1981), pp. 144-145.

⁷³ The difficulty of this term is reflected by the variety of ways it is translated: "The translation of this word [Azazel] has varied considerably, and includes such renderings as 'that shall be sent out' (Wycliffe), 'for discharge' (Knox), 'Azazel' (RSV), and 'for the Precipice' (NEB). The idea of 'precipice' seems to have been derived from Talmudic tradition, where ... was translated by 'steep mountain.' The allusion appears to have been to the precipitous slope or rock in the wilderness from which in the post-exilic period the goat was hurled to death." R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), p. 170.

⁷⁴ Bush goes into a lengthy discussion on the various explanations for the meaning of Azazel, associated with the scapegoat. He surveys and critiques these views and concludes with his own. In short, these are: (1) The name of the place the goat was led. (2) The name of the goat itself. (3) The one goat symbolized Christ's death, the other His resurrection. (4) The scapegoat is offered to Satan or demons, as Christ allegedly was. Bush's view, which I find hard to grasp, is that the second goat typifies Israel, who, due to their disobedience and rejection of Christ, had their sins heaped upon themselves. Cf. Bush, pp. 145-158.

⁷⁵ Harrison states, "In view of this injunction [Day of Atonement to be a permanent statute, v. 34] it is curious that no specific reference to the day of atonement occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament, despite the periodic occurrence of certain significant events in the seventh month (cf. [1 Ki. 8:2](#), [65-66](#); [Ezr. 3:1-6](#); [Ne. 8:17-18](#))." Harrison, p. 175.

⁷⁶ Wenham goes so far as to say that the main purpose of the day of atonement was not to cleanse the people, but to cleanse the holy place: "The main purpose of the day of atonement ceremonies is to cleanse the sanctuary from the pollutions introduced into it by the unclean worshippers (cf. [16:16, 19](#)). ... The aim of these rituals is to make possible God's continued presence among his people." Wenham, p. 228. Wenham also says that the purpose of the day of atonement was "... to prevent Aaron, in theory the holiest man in Israel, suffering sudden death when he enters the tabernacle (vv. 2, 13)." Wenham, p. 236.

⁷⁷ Many of the Bible scholars with whom I am familiar would choose to argue this matter on the grounds of what is meant by the expression, "by His scourging we are healed" ([Isa. 53:5](#)). I would differ. I would grant that whether the text proves it or not, the death of Christ remedies all of the consequences of the fall (cf. [Rom. 5](#)), which includes sickness. The issue is not whether or not there is physical healing in the atonement, but rather when we can expect the full manifestation of healing. In my understanding of [Romans 8](#) and the rest of Scripture, we cannot expect (and certainly cannot demand) the full realization of any aspect of Christ's work (salvation, sanctification, healing, etc.) until He comes again, destroys and renews the earth, finally and fully limits Satan, and transforms our physical bodies.

⁷⁸ Bush writes, "The idea of the institution seems to have been, that inasmuch as the incidental and occasional sin-offerings had, from their very nature, left much sin for which no expiation had been made, there should be a day in which all omissions of this sort should be supplied, by one general expiation, so that at the end of the year no sin or pollution might remain for which the blood of atonement had not been shed." Bush, p. 164.

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