

***“The Day Of Atonement”*** Delivered by E A Terry 10 01 17

Romans 3: 9 – 31; Hebrews 2: 9 – 13; Hebrews 10: 1 - 25; **Leviticus 16: 1 – 34 (Sermon)**

Leviticus Chapter 16 is the bridge between Leviticus 1-15 which describe the rituals of sacrifice and the purity regulations with chapters 17-27 which describe the characteristics of holy living expected by the covenant community

Therefore, the message contained in Leviticus 16 is very important.

Passover is the most important festal day in the Jewish year; whereas the Day of Atonement is the most solemn day and the most holy day in the Jewish year.

The Hebrew name for the Day of Atonement is “*Yom Kippur*”.

The word *atonement* means “*to wipe clean*”.

The purpose of the Day of Atonement was to cleanse the Children of Israel from any and all sins they had committed during the past year.

God designed The Old Testament Tabernacle to teach the Israelites that sin separates us from God’s holy presents.

The Holy of Holies was a part of the Tent of Meeting and the Tabernacle.

The Holy of Holies represented the presence of God and The Arc of The Covenant was located in The Holy of Holies.

The Holy of Holies was separated from the rest of the Tent of Meeting by curtains.

The Jewish Historian, Josephus, tells us that the curtain separating the Holy of Holies was as thick as the width of a man’s hand.

Neither the people nor the priest could enter The Holy of Holies.

The High Priest was the only person who could enter into the Holy of Holies and The Day of Atonement was the only day of the year that The High Priest could enter into The Holy of Holies.

The Day of Atonement is unique because of the special role of the High Priest on that day.

There were three important events on the Day of Atonement: the atonement for the High Priest, the atonement for all the people, and the scapegoat.

The first event on the Day of Atonement was the ritual cleansing of the High Priest.

The High Priest was ritually cleansed by the High Priest slaying a bull as a sin offering.

Cleansing of the High Priest was necessary since the High Priest could not perform the purifying ceremony on behalf of the people if he remained in his own sin and guilt.

Sins committed by the priest resulted in pollution of the Tent of Meeting and Tabernacle.

If the High Priest was contaminated then the sacrifices he offered and the altar where the sacrifices were offered were contaminated with sin thus rendering the offerings unacceptable to God.

Before entering the Holy of Holies the High Priest would add two handfuls of fragrant incense to a censer filled with burning coals from the altar.

This produced a perfumed smoke which filled the Holy of Holies.

The perfume smoke prevented the High Priest from gazing at the Mercy Seat on the Ark of the Covenant.

A Jewish legend which is not found in the Bible says a rope was tied around the High Priest's ankle before he entered into the Holy of Holies.

If the wrath of God flared up against the High Priest and the High Priest died on the spot, the priest in the outer court could pull the High Priest's dead body out of the Holy of Holies.

While a legend, it shows the respect for God's requirement for purity and our need for total obedience to God's ordinances.

In Leviticus 10 we read that Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu disobeyed God's instructions for the priest and ***"fire came out from the presence of The Lord and consumed them"*** (Leviticus 10:1-2).

Once the perfumed smoke filled the Holy of Holies the High Priest returned to the altar and retrieved some of the blood from the bull that he offered as a sin offering.

Then the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies again and sprinkled the atoning blood on the Mercy Seat seven times.

Seven is the number for perfection or completeness in The Bible.

So sprinkling the blood seven times signifies complete atonement.

After the High Priest had made atonement for his own sins, the High Priest turned to offerings on behalf of the people.

Two male goats were brought before the High Priest.

The High Priest cast lots before The Lord at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting to determine which goat was ***"for The Lord"*** and which goat was ***"for Azazel"*** (Leviticus 16:8).

The lots The High Priest used were two stones inscribed with the word ***"Urim"*** on one stone and ***"Thummim"*** on the other stone.

These stones were kept in a pouch in the High Priest's garments (Lev. 8:8; Ex. 28:30).

The word *Urim* came from the word *"curse"* indicating a negative response.

The word *Thummim* came from the word “*perfect*” or “*complete*” and indicated a positive response.

The goat identified as “*for The Lord*” was the one chosen to be a blood offering sacrificed on the altar.

Blood was sprinkled on the altar symbolizing cleansing all of the sins committed by all the people throughout the year.

This coupled with cleansing of the Mercy Seat symbolized the whole sanctuary was purified and available for another year.

The word “*Azazel*” is translated as “*scapegoat*”, meaning “*the one who departs*”.

The High Priest would place both of his hands on the scapegoat’s head and confess all of the sins of all of the people (verses 20-22).

The placing of the High Priest’s hands symbolized that all of the sins of all of the people were transferred to the scapegoat.

Then the scapegoat was led out of the camp symbolizing carrying away all of the sins of all of the people.

Jewish tradition says the scapegoat was killed by pushing it over a cliff to ensure that the sins of the people would never return to the camp.

We can not grasp the role of Jesus our Great High until and unless we understand the duties and responsibilities of The High Priest in Leviticus 16.

We need to study The Day of Atonement because as we read in our lesson from Hebrews The Day of Atonement is a picture of Jesus our High Priest.

Jesus’ death on the cross and the shed blood of Jesus provided the complete covering of sin and the eternal forgiveness for all Christian believers.

The author of Hebrews compares the old ritual system of sacrifices with the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The Day of Atonement only supplied temporary atonement since it was necessary to be performed every year.

Whereas Jesus’s sacrificial death provided complete and permanent atonement.

Hebrews 10:10 says, “*And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*” And Hebrews 10:12 says, “*For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.*”

Jesus was not only the Perfect Sacrifice; Jesus is also the Perfect Eternal Priest.

As the Perfect Eternal Priest Jesus was given eternal access to the heavenly throne room of Almighty God.

The earthly Tabernacle provided a picture of the Heavenly Tabernacle where God resides.

The High Priest could only enter the Holy of Holies once a year, whereas Jesus remains at the right hand of The Father in heaven.

Our atonement is based entirely on Jesus's death and resurrection.

There is not an act or a ritual that we can do to win our salvation.

Our salvation comes by belief that Jesus is The Christ and our faith that Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins.

Since we have the Perfect Eternal High Priest the writer of Hebrews encourages all believers to enter the heavenly throne room of God.

Hebrews 4:16 says, ***“Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”***

And Hebrews 10:22 says, ***“let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”***

Since the Day of Atonement was a ritual that had to be performed each year the people lived in fear wondering if the High Priest's sins had been atoned for.

The people lived in fear wondering if the sacrificial goat was acceptable to God, and wondering if their sins transferred to the scapegoat.

But as Christians we do not live in uncertainty, but rather we live in confidence knowing that when we repent, our sins are forgiven.

As Christians we live in confidence knowing that our prayers are heard and our prayers are answered.

As Christians we live in confidence knowing that when we ask Jesus to be our Savior we will spend eternity with Him in heaven.

We are confident because Jesus was the Perfect Sacrifice and Jesus is our Perfect High Priest. **AMEN**