

The Gospel Project® for Adults

Daily Discipleship Guide CSB, Unit 6, Session 3

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A Picture of Atonement

Session in a Sentence: Holy God provided a way for a priest to make atonement for the people's sins.

Main Passages: Leviticus 16:2-6,15-22

What are some situations you can think of that might be overwhelming, especially when experienced for the first time?

Do you ever find approaching God overwhelming? Do you ever wonder about addressing God, the Creator of everything? Do you consider how to show Him the proper respect? Surely the people of Israel in the Old Testament felt the weight of these questions. They had numerous rules, sacrifices, and rituals from God that comprised a complex system of worship, and they had priests to represent them before God and God before them, but how could anyone approach a holy God, let alone with confidence, in such a complicated system of worship? The answer—with the blood of a sacrifice.

Group Time

Point 1: The priest makes atonement for his sins against a holy God (Lev. 16:2-6).

2 The LORD said to Moses: “Tell your brother Aaron that he may not come whenever he wants into the holy place behind the curtain in front of the mercy seat on the ark or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud above the mercy seat.

3 “Aaron is to enter the most holy place in this way: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. **4** He is to wear a holy linen tunic, and linen undergarments are to be on his body. He is to tie a linen sash around him and wrap his head with a linen turban. These are holy garments; he must bathe his body with water before he wears them. **5** He is to take from the Israelite community two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering.

6 “Aaron will present the bull for his sin offering and make atonement for himself and his household.

God appointed only the high priest, Aaron, to enter His presence in the most holy place on one day of the year to make atonement for the sins of the people. If Aaron tried to enter on any other day, he would die. God was not and is not to be approached casually.

God Is Holy: God's holiness refers to His _____ in being separate from all He has created. God's holiness also refers to His absolute _____. God is _____ by the evil of the world.

How would you describe your typical approach to holy God?

Apathy

Contempt

Rote

Reverence

Before the high priest could represent the people on the Day of Atonement, he needed to be cleansed and forgiven of his own sins. Permitting an atonement sacrifice by a sinful high priest was a grace God afforded the people so He could dwell among them, but one day He would send a high priest better than Aaron—the sinless Son of God.

How does Jesus, the great high priest, enable us to approach holy God?

Point 2: The priest makes atonement for the people's sins against a holy God (Lev. 16:15-19).

15 “When he slaughters the male goat for the people's sin offering and brings its blood inside the curtain, he will do the same with its blood as he did with the bull's blood: He is to sprinkle it against the mercy seat and in front of it. **16** He

will make atonement for the most holy place in this way for all their sins because of the Israelites' impurities and rebellious acts. He will do the same for the tent of meeting that remains among them, because it is surrounded by their impurities. 17 No one may be in the tent of meeting from the time he enters to make atonement in the most holy place until he leaves after he has made atonement for himself, his household, and the whole assembly of Israel. 18 Then he will go out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement for it. He is to take some of the bull's blood and some of the goat's blood and put it on the horns on all sides of the altar. 19 He is to sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times to cleanse and set it apart from the Israelites' impurities.

The high priest would have started the day in pristine white linen. By now his robes would have been stained with blood, providing a powerful illustration for the people. They had been forgiven of their sin, but that forgiveness had come at a cost. God had promised that sin would lead to death, and on this day it had. But in God's grace and mercy, it was not their death that was required but another's death that made atonement—in this case, the death of a goat.

Why is it important that we hold God's justice and His grace and mercy together in balance?

While the people had reason to celebrate the grace and mercy God had extended to them, they knew the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement were imperfect and temporary because they would be repeated every year. Ultimately, sinners need Jesus Christ, the perfect mediator, to make true and complete atonement with His own blood.

Christ as Substitute: At the heart of the _____ is Jesus Christ substituting Himself for sinners as He died on the cross. This truth is seen against the backdrop of the Old Testament sacrificial system, which provided a picture of humanity's need for sin to be covered and guilt to be removed by an _____ sacrifice.

Point 3: The scapegoat carries away the people's sins against a holy God (Lev. 16:20-22).

20 "When he has finished making atonement for the most holy place, the tent of meeting, and the altar, he is to present the live male goat. 21 Aaron will lay both his hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the Israelites' iniquities and rebellious acts—all their sins. He is to put them on the goat's head and send it away into the wilderness by the man appointed for the task. 22 The goat will carry all their iniquities into a desolate land, and the man will release it there.

The atonement for the people's sin that occurred privately between Aaron and God in the tabernacle was displayed publicly in the scapegoat. The high priest placed his hands and head on the goat's head and confessed the sins of the people over it, symbolically placing them on the goat, which was then led into the wilderness, never to be seen again. The blood of one goat was taken into the tabernacle and presented before God. The other scapegoat was led out of the camp in the opposite direction.

How does the Day of Atonement picture of the two goats help you understand the completeness of God's forgiveness of your sin?

We all need forgiveness. The blood of bulls and goats was never enough to take away sin, nor was it intended to. The picture of sacrifices and scapegoats was always intended to point to the atoning work of Jesus; His blood alone can remove our sin as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:12). Christ is the better high priest. The better sacrifice. The better mediator. Because of the finished work of Christ on the cross for our salvation and His ongoing work of intercession for our sanctification, we are free to live forgiven and clean, confident as we serve the living God.

How should understanding Jesus' sacrifice give us confidence to serve the living God?

Voices from Church History

"He took my sins and my sorrows, He made them His very own. He bore the burden to Calv'ry, And suffered and died alone. How marvelous! How wonderful! And my song shall ever be; How marvelous! How wonderful! Is my Savior's love for me!" 1
—Charles H. Gabriel (1856-1932)

My Mission

Because we have been cleansed from our sin through Christ's atoning work, we offer others the hope of purification that comes

only through trusting in Him.

- **In what ways will you trust in Jesus because of His atoning work on the cross for our sins?**
- **Just as the Day of Atonement was done corporately, how can your group live and worship together in light of Christ's atonement?**
- **With whom will you share about Christ's payment for sin and the cleansing He offers, and what steps will you take to share the gospel with this person or persons?**

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Leviticus 1

The Book of Leviticus opens by describing several types of recurring offerings the people could offer at the tabernacle. Each of these sacrifices was to be offered in a certain way and had a specific purpose.

The first offering is the burnt offering, a voluntary sacrifice where the entire animal was burned and the fire and smoke were a pleasing aroma to God. While the burnt offering involved atonement for sin (v. 4), it also signified a person's full dedication to God, pictured by the sacrifice being completely burned.

For believers today, in this offering we see images of Christ's full dedication to the Father expressed through His life of obedience and His willing sacrifice on the cross. Christ gave Himself fully for us to make atonement for our sin (Heb. 9:12). Our only reasonable response, then, is total surrender to Him. The voluntary nature of this offering captures both Christ's willingness to endure shame on our behalf and also our proper motivation in living for Him. Our obedience is not to be offered by compulsion but motivated by love and gratitude.

In what areas of your life are you holding back from surrender to God? What is preventing you from giving these to God joyfully?

Voices from the Church

"Are we trying to atone for our sins? We can't. Only Jesus can, and He already did. Don't try to repeat the atonement—just accept it! Embrace God's forgiveness. Relax. Rejoice." 2

—Randy Alcorn

Day 2: Read Leviticus 2

The second offering described in Leviticus is the grain offering. Like the burnt offering, this was a voluntary sacrifice, but this one, as the name suggests, did not involve an animal but rather grain. The fine flour was mixed with oil, frankincense, and salt and burned, and the fire and smoke were a pleasing aroma to God. This offering pictured a person's gratitude for God's provision and his or her desire to live with generosity in response.

We can look at this offering, like the burnt offering, and see how it points to Christ, who demonstrated unmatched humility and generosity in taking on flesh, coming to earth, and offering Himself—a priceless treasure—so that we might have forgiveness and eternal life. As believers, then, we too should seek to demonstrate scandalous generosity to those around us so that they might see the beauty and power of the gospel.

How can you be more generous this week with your time and resources?

Day 3: Read Leviticus 3

The third offering is the fellowship, or peace, offering. Once again, like the burnt offering and grain offering, this was a voluntary sacrifice. Unlike the grain offering, this was an animal sacrifice, but unlike the burnt offering, not all of the animal was consumed by the flames. The part of the animal that was burned produced an aroma pleasing to God, but the rest of the offering was shared as part of a meal between the offerer and the priests, symbolizing fellowship with God. The fellowship offering was given to express gratitude for a person's relationship with God. Implicit in this offering, then, is the awareness of a person's sins

being atoned for.

Once again, it is not difficult for us to connect this offering to Christ. Jesus was the willing sacrifice who provided forgiveness for our sin to remove the barrier between God and those who trust in Him. Because we have been given Christ's righteousness, we are not spiritually neutral before God; He has restored relationship between holy God and forgiven humanity. As believers, each of our days should be marked by deep gratitude and joy for the relationship with God we have been given in Christ.

What can you do today to live out and enjoy the relationship with God that Christ has provided?

Day 4: Read Leviticus 4–5

The fourth and fifth offerings are the sin offering (chapter 4) and the guilt offering (chapter 5). These two offerings were not voluntary; both were to be made as a result of sin and reaffirmed the need for forgiveness. The sin offering was made after unintentional sin or being rendered unclean. The guilt offering was made after intentional acts of sin against others or after desecrating something holy.

Both of these offerings point to the one-time sacrifice Jesus made for all sin—intentional and unintentional. Jesus' sacrifice was necessary to provide the forgiveness that gives the believer confidence that he or she is accepted by God. Not even a single sin remains to bring condemnation. This is the source of the believer's hope and joy. When Christians sin, they live like their dead selves instead of who they are now in Christ. Remembering the scope and depth of Christ's sacrifice for sin should cause us to cast aside our sin and seek to live holy lives pleasing to the Lord, who is so good to us.

What sins have you committed that you have not confessed to God and rested in His complete forgiveness and acceptance of you in Christ?

Day 5: Read Leviticus 16

After reading the details of how the Day of Atonement was to be observed each year, we find that another aspect of this day was the people's rest and self-denial (vv. 29-31). The Day of Atonement was a Sabbath for God's people.

For practicality's sake, work and the typical distractions of life were set aside. But there is perhaps another reason: rest and self-denial are central to the gospel.

God's people were to rest in affirmation that there was nothing they could do to earn forgiveness for their sins, a truth accentuated in them being spectators during the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement.

Likewise, the people of Israel were to practice self-denial because humility is a defining characteristic of the gospel. After all, Christ took on flesh to become the Suffering Servant for us, and every person who comes to Him for salvation does so admitting their complete and utter need for His atonement.

Which do you find more difficult to maintain as a follower of Christ—rest or self-denial? Why?

Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- The priest makes atonement for his sins against a holy God (Lev. 16:2-6).
- The priest makes atonement for the people's sins against a holy God (Lev. 16:15-19).
- The scapegoat carries away the people's sins against a holy God (Lev. 16:20-22).

How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?

How can we help one another better appreciate portions of Scripture like the Book of Leviticus that might seem dry on

the surface?

What are some steps we can take to remember that holiness is a group effort for Christians in the context of the covenant community?

References

1. Charles H. Gabriel, "I Stand Amazed in the Presence," in *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: LifeWay Worship, 2008), 237.
2. Randy Alcorn, *The Grace and Truth Paradox* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2003), 84-85.