

Leviticus Chapter 16 – John Karmelich

1. In the Book of Acts, Chapter 17 is a story of Paul visiting the City of Athens. There he sees a temple called, “To the Unknown God”. The idea is the people of Athens believed in lots of gods. They didn’t want to miss any. Just to make sure they didn’t miss one, they made a temple to an unknown god. (Nothing like opening a bible study with a reference to a pagan god! ☺)
 - a) On a similar line of thinking, there is a “tomb of the unknown soldier” in Arlington, Virginia in America’s most prestigious military cemetery. The idea is for Americans to pay tribute to any and all soldiers that might have been missed in gratitude for their service. Many countries have a similar tomb set aside.
 - b) Surprisingly, that leads us to Chapter 16 of Leviticus. In 15 chapters so far, we’ve covered how to be “clean” of all sorts of sins. There is always the possibility one might be missed. There needs to be a “catch-all” forgiveness ritual to cover any missed sins. That ritual is covered here in Chapter 16 of Leviticus. It is called the Day of Atonement. To a religious Jew, it is the most important day of the year. It is nicknamed “the day” among rabbis.
 - c) In many ways, this is the high point of the book of Leviticus. Of all the rituals discussed so far, this is arguably the most important.
2. On that somber note, ☺ welcome to my study of Leviticus Chapter 16. Let’s review a little and see how it leads up to this chapter:
 - a) The first eight chapters dealt with different types of offerings that a Jewish person could make to God. Most were for the forgiveness of sins. Others were about commitment and just spending time with God.
 - b) Next, we had several chapters dealing with training the high priest for service. The job of the priest was to assist people in their sacrifice rituals. The role of the high priest is to intercede between the people and God. It is to help people draw closer to God.
 - c) Next, we had four chapters dealing with believers in God in “everyday life”. On the surface, the issues were about what the Jewish people could eat and various hygiene issues. In particular, Chapters 13-15 contained word-pictures had to do with different types of sins that affect our relationship with God.
 - d) Which then leads to this chapter: It is about individual forgiveness of all sins and a corporate forgiveness of all sins. It would be so the average Israelite can think, “OK, I’ve obeyed all the rituals, and I’m pretty sure I kept all the “clean” laws described so far in the bible. Still, there is some doubt in my mind that I might have missed something”. That is why God has this “day of atonement” ritual. It is a time to confess any sins that might have been missed by other rituals, other individual sins as well as corporate (group) sins.
 - e) It is the Jewish equivalent of laying a wreath on the tomb of the unknown soldier. It is their way of saying, “I don’t want to forget anyone. I want all my sins dealt with.”
3. The good news about Chapter 16 is that the purpose for this chapter is stated in the chapter. (There is nothing a bible teacher likes more than when the text explains itself!)
 - a) Verse 30: “Because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the LORD, you will be clean from all your sins.”
 - b) Notice the word “all”. That is all-inclusive. This is a good thing. ☺
 - i) Any sins the average Israelite have committed that they desire to repent of can be cleansed by this ritual.
 - ii) Any sins the average Israelite thought they might have committed that they desire to repent of can be cleansed by this ritual.
 - iii) Any sins the average Israelite is unaware they have committed can be cleansed by this ritual.
 - iv) In other words, it is all-inclusive. Again, it is the Israelite equivalent of laying a wreath at the “Tomb of the Unknown Soldier”. It makes sure nothing is missed.

4. Now that we know the purpose of the chapter, let me briefly go over the chapter:
 - a) Note that this is not a narrative description, but a set of instructions. It is a set of commands given in future tense. In other words, the text is not describing Aaron performing the rituals of the Day of Atonement, but God giving Moses the instructions on how the ritual of the Day of Atonement is to be performed.
 - b) First, we need to quickly summarize how the tabernacle was built. This is where the Day of Atonement ritual takes place.
 - i) The tabernacle is a covered structure surrounded by an outdoor fenced area.
 - ii) Among the items in the outdoor area is a fire pit for sacrificing animals and a large "bathtub" for washing.
 - iii) The covered structure was divided into two areas:
 - a) In one area is "the most holy place" or the "holy of holies". This area is where the high priest only entered once a year on the Day of Atonement.
 - b) In this "holy of holies" was a box. It is roughly 2 feet by 3 feet by two feet in size. This box is called the Ark of the Covenant. In the box was a copy of the 10 Commandments among a few other things. The lid of the box, a separate item, is called the "mercy seat".
 - c) The presence of God dwells "above the mercy seat". It represents how God shows mercy for violation of His commandments, which is symbolized by the 10 Commandments being inside this box.
 - d) Again, this indoor structure is divided into two areas. In one area, the priest could enter at any time. Among the items in this "come in anytime" area is a small altar for incense. It represented prayers to God. Like incense rising up to the sky, it symbolizes prayers rising to heaven.
 - c) With all that said, the high priest performed a specific set of rituals on the Day of Atonement: He had to sacrifice animals, wash and go sprinkle blood on the mercy seat. The High Priest did this ritual twice: Once for himself and once for all the Israelites.
 - d) The last set of rituals on this day involved two goats. One was killed as a sacrifice for sins. The other was released in the wilderness. It was symbolic of both a blood sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins and at the same time, we are "set free" when we are forgiven.
 - e) This ritual is to be repeated once a year on a specific day of the year. It is to be the 10th day of the 7th month on the Hebrew calendar. All of Israel is to take the day off, fast, focus on God and confess their sins. It is not a "happy holiday", but one of internal reflection.
 - f) There, that pretty much sums up the chapter. For those who don't want to read any further, you're pretty much done for the week. ☺
5. So why is this chapter and this ritual necessary?
 - a) If most people could get a chance to ask God a question, especially in the latter years of one's life, one would wonder "Is my life acceptable to You?" In other words, do I get into heaven, are my sins forgiven and am I pleasing to God?
 - i) In other words, this ritual is about guilt relief. It covers any and all sins one has committed whether one is aware of it or not. It is a chance for the average Israelite to clear his or her conscience and know their sins are forgiven.
 - ii) That is why I like comparing it to a "Tomb of the Unknown Soldier", it covers all the bases of making sure nothing or no one is forgotten.
 - iii) Why is this ritual repeated once a year? Because we tend to carry guilt around like baggage. It gives us a regular opportunity to relieve one's guilt.
6. Now let's talk about this from the Christian perspective:
 - a) One problem Christians tend to have is a sense of guilt about our forgiven sins. The problem stems from our egos. We think we should have done better and we carry around the guilt of sins we have committed. We spend too much time focusing on the guilt of our sins and not enough on the fact we are forgiven of those sins.

- b) Note that there is a big difference between forgiveness and consequences of sins. We may have to spend a lifetime dealing with the consequences of our sins. That is a separate issue from being forgiven of our sins.
 - i) If I had to speculate what does more physical damage to the human body, the guilt of sin or the consequences of sin, I would bet on guilt. The stress caused by guilt causes far more damage to the human body than the consequences.
 - ii) I know there are exceptions to this. People who are physically abused by other's sins have to deal with the consequences far more than the guilt of their own sins. One of the reasons Christians are encouraged to forgive others is not so the innocent can avoid punishment, but so our conscious can be relieved of the anger. In other words, forgive them for the sake of one's own health, but still let the police file charges for the protection of society.
 - c) Getting back the Day of Atonement, the Christian does not have to perform this exact ritual for our own forgiveness. Understand that God does forgive sins, He is willing to forgive sins and He goes out of His way to set up a method to deal with sins that we are unaware we committed as well as the sins we know about. The Book of Hebrews teaches these sacrificial rituals are no longer necessary as the blood of Jesus covers all of our sins.
 - i) "When Christ came...he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" (Hebrews 9:11-14 NIV).
7. Finally, it is important that we understand the idea of "corporate sins" as well as personal sins.
- a) God holds people accountable in groups as well as individuals. There may be a sin that is common say in our church. We may not have personally committed it, but we are aware it exists and we ignore it. There is guilt, as we are held accountable as a member of that particular group.
 - i) For example, Jesus condemned whole cities for not recognizing Him as the Messiah. This implies group accountability for those cities. (Ref. Matthew 11:21 and Luke 10:13). The same could be said for the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah. They were punished, as they were accountable as a group. The punishment is not a salvation issue, but that the city would no longer exist.
 - ii) Jesus condemned several churches "as a whole" in Revelation Chapters 2-3. A punishment for "church failure" is that church would no longer exist.
 - iii) In the Old Testament, all of Israel had to suffer due because a large percentage of the population turning to idols. The Old Testament is full of stories of all of Israel being punished when a majority of individuals turned to idols.
 - b) The point is to comprehend that God holds people accountable as members of groups (be it our church denomination, our individual church, our hometown or our country) as well as individual accountability.
 - c) I bring this up here because the Day of Atonement is not just to confess individual sins but "corporate" sins as well. It was a time for all of Israel to get reflective the sins of the Nation as well as the sins of the individual.
 - d) One of my favorite prayers in the bible is most of Daniel Chapter 9. It is the only time God interrupts a prayer to answer that prayer! What was Daniel praying for? The preservation of the Nation of Israel! One individual can intercede for a large group!
 - e) Wow, three full pages already. What do you say we start Verse 1? ☺

8. Verse 1: The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the LORD.
- a) If you recall from Chapter 12 of Leviticus, the high-priest Aaron had four sons. Those four sons were Aaron's assistants and next in line to be the high priest. Two of the sons somehow did not perform their rituals exactly as prescribed and God killed them on the spot. Here we read of God speaking to Moses after this incident.
 - b) All of Leviticus can be broken into sections with either, "The Lord spoke to Moses" or "The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron". Chapter 16 begins with, "The Lord spoke to (just) Moses. He is the civil leader of Israel.
 - c) It may mean Leviticus was not written in the order of God's commands. Chapters 13-15 were all about the food laws, leprosy issues, mold, etc. (I.e., health and hygiene issues). My point is God could have told Moses "Chapter 16" prior to "Chapters 12-15". It's not a big deal. The important point is that God spoke to Moses about Day of Atonement right after two of Aarons' sons died.
 - i) It is important that Chapters 12-15 are written first as they cover what is "clean" and "unclean" for the Israelite. The Day of Atonement is the chance to ask forgiveness for any sin committed as a violation of those issues.
 - ii) Chapters 12-15 focus on how to be "clean". Chapter 16, the Day of Atonement chapter, is the high point where all sins are now forgiven. That is why they are written in that order.
 - d) Why did God speak to just Moses? After all, this ritual was for Aaron to perform. One reason is Aaron may have been grieving too much to focus on a new set of rituals.
 - i) Next, it was God's way of reminding all of Israel of the importance of this ritual. Again, Moses is the civil leader and was responsible to teach it to all the people. Aaron was the lead performer in this ritual, but it was for all of Israel to confess their sins and be forgiven.
 - ii) These instructions were given by God at this time, as all of Israel knew of the death of Aaron's two sons. Everyone understood the importance of performing the rituals correctly. It is God's way of saying, "OK, now that I have everyone's attention, ☺ let me explain the important ritual of the Day of Atonement".
9. Verse 2: The LORD said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.
- a) I already covered in the introduction how the tabernacle structure was built. To remind those of us with short memories, ☺ "The Most Holy Place" was the part of the indoor tabernacle where this "box" (i.e., "The Ark of the Covenant") was located. The priest was only to go into this room once per year.
 - b) What is Aaron's motivation to only go into this room once per year? "So he will not die" as stated in Verse 2. Now there is an executive incentive program that would work. ☺
 - c) Notice who is in waiting for Aaron in this room: God himself! Obviously, God is everywhere by definition. This verse implies that God somehow manifests Himself in this room. Specifically, the verse says God appears "in a cloud over the atonement cover".
 - i) That "atonement cover" is the lid of this box. This lid is also known as "mercy seat" when describing its construction in Exodus 25 and 37.
 - ii) The word "atonement" is often nicknamed "at-one-with". The idea is our sins are forgiven and for that moment, we are "at-one-with-God".
 - iii) I always love to point out that when the mercy seat or atonement cover (same thing) was described in Exodus 25 and 37, the width dimension is specified and the length dimension is specified, but not the height. It is a subtle word picture that there is no "height limit" to God's mercy!

- d) The text says God will appear in a cloud above this “box lid”. Whenever there is some sort of manifestation of God the Father in the bible, it is almost always with “clouds”. When we think of clouds at ground level, we think of fog. The idea is our vision is limited. The word-picture is that we can never fully comprehend God in our lifetime here on earth. That is why any manifestation of God is somehow “cloudy” to our appearance.
 - i) There is another purpose of this “cloudy” reference here. It is the incense that makes the clouds. Incense as it is used in this ritual is a word-picture of prayer, as the smoke rises up toward heavens (just like our prayers “rise up” to heaven). Aaron is approaching God with a petition to forgive us of our sins. That “prayer-filled” smoke now surrounds the presence of God.
 - e) What is the point of Aaron approaching God with incense? The point is God does not automatically forgive sins. We must ask for forgiveness. That is an underlying motive for this ritual. There is a free-will aspect to this whole ritual in that it is about people who want to be forgiven of sins. God responds to this free-will request by saying in effect, “OK, you want to be forgiven? Then you have to do it My way and follow My rules.”
10. Verse 3: "This is how Aaron is to enter the sanctuary area: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.
- a) As I stated in the introduction, Aaron makes two trips into the covered area of the sanctuary area. The first time is to make atonement for his own sins and the second time is for the sins of all of Israel.
 - b) In other words, Aaron cannot intercede for the sins of the people until he can intercede for his own sins. All of Aaron’s sins have to be forgiven, including the one’s he is aware of and any sins he is not aware of.
 - c) One of my premises all through these Leviticus studies is that Christians have the role of priests. We are all to help and support other Christians grow closer to God. One way we do that is to pray for others. This little section is a reminder that we need to be “clean” ourselves before approaching God. We are once-and-for-all clean by the blood of Jesus, but the guilt of sins can also block our relationship with Him. We can’t intercede for others until we clear out that guilt and realize we are forgiven.
 - d) Let me give a quick reminder again of the difference between a sin offering and a burnt offering: A sin offering is for the forgiveness of sins. The burnt offering is to renew one’s commitment to God. With a burnt offering, a whole animal is burnt up to remind us our “whole self” is offered to God in a commitment. A sin offering and a burnt offering are often paired together to ask God to forgive our sins and renew our commitment to Him.
 - e) A bull is used for the sin offering as it is the most valuable of all the domesticated animals. It is a reminder of Aaron’s “expensive” responsibility as High Priest over the people.
 - f) A ram is used for a burnt offering. The first mention of a ram in the bible is when Abraham was going to offer Isaac, God then provided a ram as a substitute. Here Aaron is offering a ram as a substitute blood to represent his commitment to God.
11. Verse 4: He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body; he is to tie the linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These are sacred garments; so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on.
- a) The uniform for the High Priest is described in Exodus 28 and 39. It is also mentioned again briefly in Leviticus Chapter 8. That uniform was colorful, had gold and jewelry. For the moment, forget about that uniform, because Aaron just wears plain linens when he performs this ritual.
 - b) So why does Aaron just wear plain linens when he owned this nice uniform?
 - i) The most common speculation is that Aaron is to approach God in “humility” as one of the Israelites as opposed to being their spiritual leader.
 - ii) Another speculation is that linen represents “purity”. This clothing ties to the idea that Aaron is to bathe completely and then go put on this all linen outfit.

12. Verse 5: From the Israelite community he is to take two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.
- a) We'll discuss the two male goats in a matter of verses. They are listed here as part of the inventory needed for forgiveness of the people.
 - b) Earlier we had a ram offered for a burnt offering for Aaron's "commitment". Now we have another ram being offered for all of Israel to show their commitment.
13. Verse 6: "Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household.
- a) Remember that Aaron goes through two sets of rituals: One for himself and a second time for all of Israel.
 - b) Apparently, part of the first ritual is to make atonement for his "household".
 - i) That would include his wife and children.
 - ii) Remember that part of the job of the High Priest is to train up the next high priest.
 - iii) To those who are the head of your families, think of yourself as a "high priest" of your family. (If you are single, you are the "high priest" for yourself!) My point here is not that we have to put a goat on the barbeque for our kid's sins! ☺
 - iv) The point is God calls us up to be responsible for those under us in our household. As a leader, God holds the household leader accountable for say, leading the family in prayer or leading the family to go to church together.
14. Verse 7: Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ⁸ He is to cast lots for the two goats--one lot for the LORD and the other for the scapegoat. ⁹ Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the LORD and sacrifice it for a sin offering. ¹⁰ But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement by sending it into the desert as a scapegoat.
- a) Now we actually get into the rituals that Aaron performs for "the people" as opposed to the rituals Aaron performs for himself and his household.
 - b) Let me summarize the ritual itself: Aaron takes two goats. One is randomly picked to be killed as a sin sacrifice for all the people. The other goat will be set free.
 - i) We'll get more details on this double-goat ritual in Verse 20. The idea is the goat to live is called the scapegoat. The sins of the people are associated with this living goat and it is set free. The modern term "scapegoat" originates in this chapter.
 - ii) The word-picture is we are to "die" for our sins and at the same time "set free". That is why one goat is sacrificed and other another is set free.
 - c) Why a goat? Just like the ram is associated with the first time it is mentioned in the bible (Abraham and Isaac's sacrifice story), the goat is associated with one of its first mentions.
 - i) The first time a goat is significantly mentioned is when Jacob deceived his father Isaac. Jacob wore goatskins on his arms to pretend to be his brother Esau. His father was essentially blind at this point in his life. Jacob sinned by pretending to be his brother. "Goats" are therefore a word-picture of sin. (Ref.: Genesis 27).
15. Verse 11: "Aaron shall bring the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household, and he is to slaughter the bull for his own sin offering. ¹² He is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the LORD and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain. ¹³ He is to put the incense on the fire before the LORD, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover above the Testimony, so that he will not die. ¹⁴ He is to take some of the bull's blood and with his finger sprinkle it on the front of the atonement cover; then he shall sprinkle some of it with his finger seven times before the atonement cover.
- a) One thing that is a little confusing about Chapter 11 is that it goes back and forth between Aaron making offerings for himself versus Aaron making an offering for the Israelites.
 - i) In these four verses, we are now back to Aaron making a sacrifice for himself.

- b) Verse 11 is almost identical to Verse 6. The difference is Verses 11-14 is designed to give more details. Verse 6 was an “overview” statement.
- c) Let me describe the different ritual steps Aaron has to go through for himself:
 - i) Step 1 is to slaughter a bull on the sacrificial offer for his own sins and for the sins of his family. The idea is to acknowledge any sins he did wrong, and acknowledge that he is a “sinner in general”. It is to cover sins he has committed and is aware of and ones he is not aware of. Since Aaron is the head of a family, this offering is for his family as well.
 - ii) Step two is to take some coals from the barbeque pit in one hand and some incense in the other hand, and go into the covered area of the tabernacle structure.
 - a) I assume Aaron is allowed to wear thick gloves to hold the coals in his hands, or at least a potholder. ☺
 - b) The incense is first mentioned back in Chapter 2 of Leviticus. The formula for making this incense is described in Exodus Chapter 30. It is a unique formula that is only to be used in this tabernacle. The idea to have a unique smell that is only associated with God.
 - iii) Step three is to go into the “holy of holies”, that section of the tabernacle where Aaron can only enter once per year. He puts the incense on top of the coals and this causes smoke to fill this room. This is all described in Verse 13.
 - iv) Step four is to take some of the slaughtered bull’s blood and sprinkle it seven times before the “atonement cover”, which is the lid or “mercy seat” for the Ark of the Covenant. This is all described in Verse 14.
- d) Verse 13 says Aaron is to do this “so he will not die”.
 - i) The idea is that Aaron is about to face the “presence of God”. Aaron cannot approach God and live without paying the price for his sins. That shed bull represents Aaron who had to “die for the guilt of his sins”. The bull died as a substitute for Aaron’s sins (hint hint ☺). Now Aaron can approach God and be “at-one-with” Him, which is what God desires.
 - ii) As I mentioned earlier, the incense smoke represents our prayers before God. Remember the purpose of this ritual is to ask God for forgiveness of sins. We must ask for forgiveness. God does not forgive without our asking. (Yes, there are exceptions for little children and other situations, but you get the basic idea.)
 - iii) The blood itself is sprinkled on the object that represents God himself. It is to acknowledge God “accepting” the blood sacrifice. The number seven in the bible is associated with “completeness”. God rested on the 7th day of creation. It is symbolic of God completely accepting the blood sacrifice on our behalf.
- e) OK, that’s all neat. What does it have to do with my life today? ☺
 - i) Christians don’t have to go through a ritual like this once per year. That is discussed in Hebrews Chapter 9, which I quoted in the introduction.
 - ii) What this does is show is a nice word-picture model of how we approach God.
 - iii) Let me put these word pictures into a prayer: “Father, we approach you not based on our goodness, but solely on the fact that Jesus paid the price for our sins. We acknowledge that we are a sinful people. We acknowledge we accept Jesus’ full payment for our sins. We now come before you “carrying” Jesus’ shed blood in our presence. We understand that You want us to communicate with You and just be with You. We understand that we can never fully comprehend You, as if our relationship with you is “cloudy” with understanding. We can’t let that cloud prevent us from approaching You in the first place. Thank You for providing a means that can approach You and we can be forgiven of all of our sins.”
- f) Meanwhile, back to the barbeque pit. ☺

16. Verse 15: "He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull's blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it.
- a) Aaron is now to perform the next step: Repeat the whole process for all of Israel.
 - b) The idea is that before Aaron can intercede for the sins of the people, he had to intercede for his own sins.
 - c) What are we to learn from this? Before we can ask God to help others, we need to be "clean" ourselves. Grant it, when a truck is coming at you full speed, you don't have time for a full confessional sin-prayer prior to praying for the truck's brakes to work. ☺
 - d) As Christians, we are "fully clean" by the blood of Jesus and can approach God at any time. The Gospels tell us that the curtain leading to this enter-once-per-only room was torn from top to bottom after Jesus died. (Ref: Matthew 27:51 et.al.) The symbolism behind that miracle is the "Holy of Holies" room is now open for business around the clock, all year round as the price for sins has been paid in full. There is no longer a separation "curtain" between God and man.
 - i) At the same time, it is important to confess one's sins as one becomes aware of them. It may be as simple as "Lord, I acknowledge what I did was wrong, and give me the faith and boldness to change from that behavior in the future". It is not a matter of being perfect. It is a matter of confessing that sin whenever and whatever it is. God does not want any guilt blocking our relationship with Him.
 - e) It is also important every now and then for the Christian to simply acknowledge the fact we are a sinner by nature and we do commit sins that we are not even aware of. If for no other reason, it can clear any guilt that could block our relationship with God.
 - f) Further, just as God called Aaron to pray for the sins of others, so God desires Christians to pray for others as well. Remember that the primary function of Christians is to help each other draw closer to God. That includes praying for each other's well being, praying for forgiveness, salvation etc.
 - g) On a related note, don't forget that if you are the "high priest" of your family or a leader of some specific group, pray for them regularly. If God has called you and me as "priests" to minister to some specific group, pray for them regularly that they may stay close to God and increase their relationship with Him.
17. Verse 16: In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been. He is to do the same for the Tent of Meeting, which is among them in the midst of their uncleanness.
- a) Here in Verse 16, God is giving a "why" statement for this ritual. The purpose of this ritual is so God can make "atonement" for the sins of Israel.
 - b) It is important to state that the word atonement literally means, "to cover". It would be like putting a cover over the sins so they could not be seen. That is the idea behind the lid (i.e., "the mercy seat") over the box (i.e., the "ark of the covenant"). The purpose of God ordaining this whole ritual is so that He can forgive us of all our sins. As I stated earlier, the easiest way to remember the word atonement is to think of "at-one-with" God. It is the idea that we are at one with God because He has forgiven our sins.
 - c) Getting back to Verse 16, notice this ritual is not only for the Israelites but also for the "Most Holy Place" itself. That term is another name for the part of the indoor structure that the High Priest can only enter once per year.
 - i) The idea is that the presence of God is manifested in that room.
 - ii) The room is "polluted" by the sins of man.
 - iii) A (not the) purpose of this ritual is to make atonement for the tabernacle itself. A "sinful" man cannot be in the presence of God. We pollute God's place of worship by being there in the first place! That place must be made clean so God can manifest Himself in that location.

- iv) And your point is? ☺ The only reason we as Christians can even communicate with God is because we approach Him based on the shed blood of Jesus. We are “cleansed” so we can pray to Him. Our new “cleanness” allows God to manifest Himself to us as we communicate with Him.
 - a) Does that mean God never hears the prayers of nonbelievers? No. It just means that in order to be forgiven of sins we must approach Him pleading the blood of a perfect sacrifice. God desires that all approach Him. In order to reach out to people, God must also hear and answer the prayers of nonbelievers in order to draw them to Him.
- 18. Verse 17: No one is to be in the Tent of Meeting from the time Aaron goes in to make atonement in the Most Holy Place until he comes out, having made atonement for himself, his household and the whole community of Israel.
 - a) The text is stating that when Aaron does this ritual, he must be alone. It is solely the responsible of the High Priest to ask forgiveness of not only himself but of all the Israelites on this “National day of asking forgiveness”. Only one person must be an intercessor between God and man. (Hint! Hint! ☺) Just as one person, Adam, caused sin to be in the world and past on to future generations, one man is picked as an intercessor between God and man for the purpose of asking forgiveness of sins. (Ref: Romans 5:12 and 5:19.)
 - b) Every now and then, you might hear a sermon how the high priest had a rope tied around him as he went in this room. If the high priest messed up the ritual and died, he had to be dragged out of there. That rope tradition is never mentioned in the bible. It may have been a historical tradition but it is not listed in the biblical text.
- 19. Verse 18: "Then he shall come out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement for it. He shall take some of the bull's blood and some of the goat's blood and put it on all the horns of the altar. ¹⁹ He shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times to cleanse it and to consecrate it from the uncleanness of the Israelites.
 - a) Verses 18 and 19 are the “how” verses that tie to Verse 17.
 - i) In Verse 17, the main idea is that Aaron is to do a cleansing ritual for the tabernacle itself. Verses 18 and 19 explain the methodology for this ritual.
 - b) Now we have to get back to describing the furniture in this covered structure. One of the pieces of furniture is an “altar of incense”. This is where the incense is burned. Again, it represents prayers. Just as the smoke of the incense rises to the sky, so do our prayers “rise up” to heaven. Visualize this altar as a rectangular object (sort of tall and skinny). The top four corners have “horns” sticking out. “Horns” represent power, just as animal horns represent power.
 - c) With that said, part of the ritual is to put some of the blood of the animal sacrifices on the horns of this altar. If the horns represent the “power” of our prayers, then they too must be “covered” in the blood of the perfect sacrifice. (Again, hint, hint! ☺)
- 20. Verse 20: "When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the Tent of Meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. ²¹ He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites--all their sins--and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. ²² The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert.
 - a) OK, the ritual continues. Aaron has killed all the animal sacrifices necessary for God to make forgiveness of sin. Aaron has now finished “cleansing” the room where the prayer of confession to God is made.
 - i) The ritual focuses on “death and life”. The “death” part is now completed and now comes the emphasis on “new life”. This is where the “scapegoat” comes in.

- b) As mentioned earlier in the chapter, this whole ritual involves and focuses upon two goats. One is to be killed as a sacrifice for all the people. The other is to be kept alive as a visual reminder that we too may live after our sins are forgiven.
 - c) This live goat is called the “scapegoat”. The idea is the sins of all the people are placed on this goat and then it is set free.
 - d) The actual ritual calls for Aaron to lay hands on this goat and then confess all the sins of all of Israel on this goat. If the Israelites are anything like you and me, that could take some time. ☺ I’m sure there was some generalized prayer here as opposed to a list of several thousand sins that individuals have committed.
 - e) The idea here is that all the sins of Israel are “transferred” onto this goat. That is why it is called the “scapegoat” and that term is part of our vocabulary today.
 - f) The ritual also calls for an unnamed man to take the goat out by itself into “a solitary place”. The idea is to pick someone who is in good physical shape to run with the goat and get it away from all people.
 - i) What is interesting is the ritual of the scapegoat got expanded over the centuries. There was a period of time where a red ribbon was tied to the “sin-covered” goat to make sure it didn’t wander back in town. There was even a period of time where the goat was pushed over a cliff “just to make sure” the goat didn’t return!
 - g) Most scholars believe the Hebrew word that is translated “scapegoat” has demonic origins. The word-picture is that this “sin-filled goat” is returning “to earth” as nothing with sin can be in heaven.
 - i) There is some cultic literature tying this goat to some demonic goat-god to which the sacrifice was being offered. Those theories are pure fiction.
 - h) The main idea to remember is that God is perfect and if we want to be with Him (i.e., go to heaven) then we have to play by His rules. Part of His rules is that a perfect God can stand no sin whatsoever. We must be “perfectly clean” to be with Him. Our uncleanness is “substituted” by an innocent animal paying the price for our sins. Another innocent animal “takes away” our sins away from our presence.
 - i) To the Christian, this is all prophetic of what Jesus did for us. He died as the substitute payment for our sins and also took our sins “far away from us”.
 - i) I always liked the verse is Micah that says, “You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.” (Micah 7:19).
 - ii) In this verse, God is saying in effect that he takes all of our sins and throws them into the depth of the sea. It is interesting in that when the Book of Revelation describes a “new earth”, it mentions there is no more sea! (Revelation 21:1). The idea is God throws our sins into the sea and then throws away the sea!
21. Verse 23: "Then Aaron is to go into the Tent of Meeting and take off the linen garments he put on before he entered the Most Holy Place, and he is to leave them there. ²⁴ He shall bathe himself with water in a holy place and put on his regular garments. Then he shall come out and sacrifice the burnt offering for himself and the burnt offering for the people, to make atonement for himself and for the people. ²⁵ He shall also burn the fat of the sin offering on the altar.
- a) OK, Aaron’s not done yet. Even after he has performed this double-goat ritual, he still has to go bathe himself again, put on his “regular” uniform and go offer more sacrifices.
 - b) Remember that Aaron was wearing plain linens when he performed this whole ritual as opposed to his regular uniform that is colorful and has gold and jewelry. Before Aaron can get dressed in his “normal” uniform, he must bath again.
 - c) Since Aaron just “successfully” asked God to forgive him and everyone else of his sins, why ritually bathe again? (We know Aaron was successful if he is not dead when he comes out!) I suspect the answer has to do with the fact he has blood-covered linens from killing the sacrifices.

- i) The word-picture here has to do with the main duty of the priests: To be intercessors between man and God. Aaron's bath here is to prepare him prior to getting back to his regular duties of being a priest.
 - ii) If we are to be priests to others, we need to be "clean". It is a reminder that if we are to perform this function, we are to regularly "bathe" in prayer before God so we can be of service to Him. In other words, God provides the power for us to be of use to Him. Examples of our priestly service include praying for and with others, being of service to others, especially in their relationship to God. It includes teaching others about God. These are all "priestly" duties.
 - d) After Aaron bathes, he then must offer a few more sacrifices. Notice in the text this is not sin sacrifices but burnt sacrifices. A burnt sacrifice is about giving one's all to God. The idea here is to say, "OK God, I have been forgiven of my sins and now I want to be of service to You. My job on earth is not done until You say it is time for me to come home with You. These burnt sacrifices are to remind me that I am to stay committed to serving You as long as I live."
 - i) The point is you and I easily get our focus off God and onto our problems. A "burnt" sacrifice is a reminder that all we do should be God-centered. One reason we are to pray regularly and often is to keep us mentally focused upon whatever God has called us to do in life. It is our way of saying in effect, "OK God, You called me to do this and that, help me to keep that commitment."
 - e) The final step in this post-goat-ritual, ☺ is to burn the fat. If you recall from earlier lessons, "fat" represents the best of animal, just like a "fatted calf" represents one that is prepared for slaughter. The idea is the "best" of our lives are given to God for service.
22. Verse 26: "The man who releases the goat as a scapegoat must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water; afterward he may come into the camp."²⁷ The bull and the goat for the sin offerings, whose blood was brought into the Most Holy Place to make atonement, must be taken outside the camp; their hides, flesh and offal are to be burned up.²⁸ The man who burns them must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water; afterward he may come into the camp.
- a) Verses 26-28 describe the clean-up operation after the ritual is over.
 - b) Verse 26 gets back to the guy who runs with the live "sin-covered" goat. Before he can join the Israelite society again, he must ritually bathe. The idea is he touched the sin-covered goat and is for the moment, associated with this goat.
 - i) Understand that all of this is ritual-oriented. This is not physical-health related.
 - ii) If we are to assist in removing sins, we must be cleansed afterward.
 - iii) The word-picture for us is if we are "involved" with sins of other people's lives, we have to be careful we don't get "infected" ourselves.
 - c) Remember that a bunch of animals were killed as part of this ritual process. Verse 27 says the hides and flesh are to be burnt up and the ashes are to be taken outside the "camp". Remember that all of Israel (that's several million people) is camped around this central tabernacle. The "sin-covered ashes" are to be taken outside the camp and the guy who takes them away must wash before he comes back.
 - i) Again, this is about a ritual cleaning. The idea is what is "associated with sin" must also be removed. The person removing the stuff (i.e., the guy removing the sin-covered-goat) must also perform a ritual cleaning.
 - d) There's an interesting New Testament interpretation of this specific event in Hebrews:
 - i) "The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come." (Hebrews 13:11-13, NIV)

- ii) What does this mean? When Jesus was crucified, he was crucified outside the city walls of old Jerusalem. Because Jesus was “covered in our sins”, that event of the cross took place outside of the temple.
 - iii) Hebrews 13 is telling us to go to Jesus “outside the camp”. That does not mean we are to be sinful. It means that we too are like those “dead animals covered in sin” and must outside the “clean” camp in order to meet Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins.
- 23. Verse 29: "This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves and not do any work--whether native-born or an alien living among you--³⁰ because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the LORD, you will be clean from all your sins.³¹ It is a sabbath of rest, and you must deny yourselves; it is a lasting ordinance.³² The priest who is anointed and ordained to succeed his father as high priest is to make atonement. He is to put on the sacred linen garments³³ and make atonement for the Most Holy Place, for the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and for the priests and all the people of the community.³⁴ "This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites." And it was done, as the LORD commanded Moses.
 - a) Here are the “purpose” verses of this Chapter. God is saying in effect, “This is not a ritual you are to perform just once and forget about it. It is something you are to do annually as long as there are Jewish people. It is always to be on the 10th day of the 7th month of the Jewish calendar. No one must go to work that day. Whoever is the High Priest at that time must do this ritual.”
 - i) So what is the purpose? Look at Verse 30: “on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you...you will be clean from all your sins”.
 - ii) This leads back to my introduction: When people think about God, they wonder if they are acceptable to Him. They want to know they are forgiven of sins. They carry guilt over past sins. They worry about sins they are unaware they committed. Here God provides a ritual to alleviate that guilt. It is a way of knowing that one’s sins are forgiven.
 - b) Let me discuss the Hebrew calendar date: It is the 10th day of the 7th month.
 - i) The Jewish calendar is a bit complicated. It has 360 days. Every so often, an extra month is added to get caught up with a 365-day calendar.
 - ii) It is complicated because the Jewish calendar has two “new years”. All of the holidays are calculated based on a spring-new year. Yet, the first day of an “official” new-year is in the fall. It is as if one “new year” is used to calculate the holidays and a separate date for a new year actually begins the new year. For example, if it is the Jewish year “5767”, the first day of “5767” begins in the fall. The 10th day of that fall new-year is the Day of Atonement. That same day is also the “7th month” as the spring-new-year is used to calculate the dates for the year.
 - iii) Confused? Just remember that the Day of Atonement is always in the fall. ☺
 - iv) The word-picture of “7th month, 10th day” is the number 7 is associated with “completeness”. That is because God rested on the 7th day. The number 10 is associated with God’s commandments as in the 10 Commandments. Thus, the Day of Atonement is a day of “completeness” combined with God’s commandments.
 - c) Here’s something to ponder: The text does not say, “You shall keep performing this ritually annually until the Messiah comes, and then you can pretty much toss it out the window as it is no longer necessary.” ☺
 - i) One of the interesting things is that the bible teaches that even after Jesus Second Coming, there are still animal sacrifices. (Reference Ezekiel 40:41-42, et.al.)
 - ii) The same way the animal sacrifices during the time of Leviticus point forward to the ultimate sacrifice for our sins, so there will be a day where animal sacrifices will be performed where we look back toward what Jesus did for us.

- iii) Jesus is the ultimate word-picture for these sacrifices. The ritual was ultimately fulfilled on the cross. Today, many people of Jewish origin who accept Jesus still observe some sort of Day of Atonement ritual, not to get forgiveness, but to remember the ultimate sacrifice was already paid and to ask God to keep on cleansing the sins they commit in their lives.
 - d) This might be a good time to deviate and discuss modern Judaism and this (same) Day of Atonement rituals:
 - i) In 70AD, the Romans destroyed the Jewish temple. The Jewish leadership got together soon afterwards. Among the discussion was what to do about animal sacrifices without a central temple. It was decided that they should just confess their sins and still fast. It was decided that the only place “the” temple could be built was the same location, historically of the previous temple(s). Since the temple was destroyed, the ritual would focus on the confession of sins. That practice, with some modifications, has continued for the last two millennia.
 - ii) In other words, modern Judaism still observes the Day of Atonement. There are no scapegoats or blood rituals. It is now a day of fasting and confession of one’s sins to God.
 - iii) The reason modern Israel hasn’t rebuilt “the” temple is they want it to be on the same spot as the old temple. That spot holds a valuable mosque to Muslims and could start a word-war if it is torn down. I’ll save that discussion for another day.
- 24. OK, let’s stop and take this all in:
 - a) Chapter 16 is a “heavy” chapter. It is designed as such. It is full of specific details on how the Israelites were to receive forgiveness of sin.
 - b) Most veteran Christians understand these rituals are no longer necessary as we have Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. So my final question is, “Why should I study this stuff?”
 - i) Stop and think about the fact that God wants us to “go to all of this trouble”. From God’s perspective, He wants us to understand how serious sin is and how seriously it is to be dealt with on a regular basis. The idea for the Christian is to give us a greater appreciation for what Jesus did for us.
 - ii) Is it necessary for the Christian to understand all the details of this ritual? No.
 - iii) What is important to understand is “God does not change”. His requirements to deal with sin have not changed. The only difference is we don’t have to kill goats today as the ultimate price for sin has been dealt with.
 - iv) God wants us to remember and think about that ultimate event. Even after Jesus Second Coming, there is going to be animal sacrifices again to remember Jesus’ shed blood for us. The idea is that God wants us to regularly focus on that event.
 - c) If there is one practical thing to take away from this study, it is the idea of alleviating the guilt for things we did wrong. Yes, there are consequences from sins, but we should not feel guilty about committing them in the first place. We are forgiven. It’s easy to accept that mentally, but our egos tend to creep up and say we should have done better. The point is we can approach God and we can turn that guilt over to God so we can have a relationship with Him. The Day of Atonement ritual is all about guilt relief. It is about knowing one is saved and one is forgiven of sins.
- 25. Let’s Pray: Heavenly Father, Help us to let go of the guilt we carry around in us. Help us to remember we are sinful people by nature. That doesn’t mean we don’t try to live up to the standards You desire for us, it means that when we do mess up, we are to realize what we did was wrong and then realize that You have forgiven us. Help us to live our lives with the sense of peace and joy of knowing we are forgiven and no matter what happens to us, we are saved and we will spend eternity with You. As long as we are trusting in the fact of Jesus’ resurrection, we can have assurance that all is forgiven. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.