



Lesson 10 / May 21, 2017

## HOLINESS AND ATONEMENT

Leviticus 16

### Key Verse

“For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”

Leviticus 11:45

### Question 19: What is holiness?

Short Answer: *Holiness is all that God is and all that we ought to become.*

Full Answer: *Holiness is all that God is and all that we ought to become, namely by being set apart to God and from sin so that we walk in God's will and love our neighbor as ourselves.*

### Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever tried to read through Leviticus? Describe the experience.
2. What is the book of Leviticus about?
3. What does it mean that God is “holy”?
4. How do God's people become holy?
5. Read Leviticus 16. What work does God require for the atonement of sins?
6. How has Christ fulfilled the Day of Atonement?
7. How is Jesus a *better* high priest? (See Hebrews 7:26-28; 9:11-14; 10:11-14).
8. How do we now draw near to God through Christ? (See Hebrews 10:19-25).

### Question 20: What is atonement?

Short Answer: *By his grace, God rids us of our sin that we might draw near to him.*

Full Answer: *By his grace, God rids us of our sin that we might draw near to him through the substitutionary death of Christ who bore our penalty and cleanses us from our sins by his blood.*

## Summary

Have you ever tried reading your Bible cover-to-cover? If so, then you know that the Bible begins with a series of fast-paced and exciting stories in Genesis and the first half of Exodus. The second half of Exodus begins slowing down, and then Leviticus becomes a downright slog. The Bible no longer reads like a bestselling thriller novel; now the Bible reads like it was written by a lawyer! Many Bible bookmarks reach Leviticus and never leave. But if we wade through the dense language of Leviticus, we will be richly rewarded with insights about the work of Christ and our relationship with God.

In Leviticus, we find Israel still camped at the foot of Mount Sinai. They have built the tabernacle, and God's glory now dwells vividly within its Holy Place (Exod 40:34-38). In the first verse of Leviticus, the LORD calls to Moses from the tabernacle and speaks to him the words recorded in Leviticus.

On the surface, Leviticus seems to be all about endless rules and regulations, but underlying all of these instructions we find a prevailing concern: How can a holy God dwell among an unholy people? Repeatedly in Leviticus we read that the LORD God is holy. His holiness means that, in his very being, the LORD is entirely unique and set apart from sinful creatures to such a degree that he is utterly unapproachable. Indeed, we read a shocking story in Leviticus 10 where two presumptuous young men enter the Holy Place to worship in an unauthorized manner, and fire comes from God's presence and consumes them! It is a terrifying reminder of God's holiness. How, then, can his people draw near to the LORD in worship when he is holy and when they are contaminated by sin? Leviticus answers the question in three ways: purity, rituals, and atonement.

Leviticus contains lengthy instructions for how the people are to purify themselves so they can be clean when they enter the tabernacle. They must remain clean in how they manage their diet, sanitation, leprosy, and so forth (Lev 11-15). And should they become unclean, God instructs them in how to cleanse themselves so they can be properly prepared for entering his tabernacle. They must also live morally pure lives by refraining from sin and being holy even as God is holy, namely by loving their neighbors as themselves (Lev 17-27; esp. 19:18). But how can they accomplish such holiness when, by definition, no one is holy except God alone? They will inevitably fall short and be guilty of sin.

God provides the remedy for such sin through a series of ritual sacrifices and feasts. Individual worshippers are to bring their sacrifices and offerings to the tabernacle that they might be cleansed from sin and guilt, extend thanksgiving to God, and have fellowship with God and man (Lev 1-10, 21-22). Leviticus also establishes holy days in Israel's calendar including weekly Sabbaths, annual feasts, and regular years of Jubilee (Lev 23-25).

This remedy for sin is fully and finally accomplished in the Day of Atonement (Lev 16). The word *atonement* refers very broadly to the work God does to rid his people of sin and to enable them to draw near to his holy presence. The Day of Atonement is the one day a year when God allows only the high priest to enter all the way into the Holy Place to make atonement for the people. But the high priest must carefully follow God's instructions, lest he too should be consumed by fire!

The work of atonement itself revolves around three animals – one bull and two goats. The high priest first sacrifices the bull for his own sin and then one of the goats for the sins of the people. He sprinkles their blood on the Mercy Seat, where God's presence rests within the Holy Place, and on the rest of the tabernacle. The blood creates a physical mess but it provides a spiritual cleansing from sin and impurity. The final goat becomes the "scapegoat." The priest lays hands upon the goat and confesses over it *all* the sins of Israel; the goat is then sent out into the wilderness never to return. The scapegoat provides a vivid picture of the removal of sin from Israel. The Day of Atonement leads to a remarkable verdict: the people are now "clean before the LORD from all your sins" (Lev 16:30).

As Christians today, let us remember again that in Christ, we have a better high priest who has accomplished a better atonement. He made a once-and-for-all substitutionary sacrifice of himself for our sins, bearing our penalty and dying the death we should have died, so we can be cleansed from our sin by his blood and so our sins can be removed far from us. In Christ, we now have better access to God's presence, for he has opened the way into the Holy Place so we too can draw near to God (Heb 10:19-22). Thanks be to God for his atoning work in Christ on *the* Day of Atonement when Christ died for our sins.