

# The Holiness of God

## Leviticus: The Holiness of God (Week 4/6) Day of Atonement

### Small Group Discussion Questions

**Connect** *Is there anything in your life that causes you to doubt God's acceptance of you? Bring them before the Lord, and spend time meditating on the good news that Jesus has made us permanently holy, in him.*

#### Read Leviticus 16:1-10

1. What do the detailed instructions in Leviticus 16 reveal about God's holiness?
2. Why do you think God set such strict boundaries for approaching his presence?
3. What does Aaron's need to make atonement for himself before the people tell us about the human condition?
4. Why is sin not just a bad habit but an offence against God's holiness?
5. In our world today, how do people often treat sin casually — and what's lost when we do that?
6. When was a time you became aware of the gap between God's holiness and your own life? How did that awareness change you?

#### Read Leviticus 16:11-28

7. What do the two goats in Leviticus 16 symbolise?
8. Why was blood sprinkled in the Most Holy Place? What does that say about the cost of forgiveness?
9. Imagine being an Israelite watching this ceremony — what emotions or thoughts might you have felt?
10. The word atonement means "to cover" or "to make reconciliation." How does this ceremony help bridge the separation between God and his people?
11. Why do you think God chose a visible act (the scapegoat sent into the wilderness) to deal with sin?
12. How would the Day of Atonement have reminded Israel both of God's justice and mercy?
13. What does this chapter teach us about how sin affects not just individuals but the whole community?

#### Read Hebrews 9:11-15

14. How is Jesus' priesthood different from Aaron's?
15. Jesus entered the "greater and more perfect tabernacle." What does that mean for us today?
16. Why is Jesus' blood described as doing what animal sacrifices could never do?
17. Jesus' blood "cleanses our conscience." What's the difference between *being forgiven* & *being cleansed*?
18. How does knowing that Jesus made "once for all" atonement change the way we relate to God?

**Apply** *How can you live boldly yet reverently before our holy God this week?*

**Pray** *Heavenly Father, we thank you for your mercy and forgiveness. Teach us to live with humble hearts, grateful for your grace, and confident in the access we now have to your presence. May our lives reflect your holiness and our hearts stay responsive to Your Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



# GOING DEEPER

## **Leviticus: The Holiness of God (Week 4/6) The Day of Atonement**

Small Group Discussion Questions

### **On Your Frontline this Week**

*Join us for the Prayer Night (Wednesday 5:30pm - 7:30pm) to pray for the church, your frontlines, and the world.*


### **For Families**

- *Download:* some of the family resources to use at home: [stbartskids.org](https://stbartskids.org)

### **Listen, Watch, and Read**

- *Listen (sermon):* “Atonement: Forgiveness from God” by Pete Wilkinson:  
<https://stebbes.org/sermons/atonement-forgiveness-from-god/#sermons>
- *Listen (sermon):* “A Scapegoat: The Day of Atonement” by Chris Wright:  
[https://www.allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show\\_media=49985&show\\_file=57761](https://www.allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show_media=49985&show_file=57761)
- *Listen (sermon):* “Leviticus 16:1-34” by Andrew Sach:  
<https://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/talk/52394/>
- *Listen (sermon):* “The Day of Atonement” by Des Smith:  
<https://www.trinity.org.au/lockleys/sermons/4-the-day-of-atonement/>
- *Listen (talk):* “Atonement Culture” by Rory Shiner:  
<https://ridleycollege.transistor.fm/episodes/atonement-culture-by-dr-rory-shiner>
- *Watch (Video):* “Sacrifice & Atonement” by the Bible Project:  
<https://bibleproject.com/videos/sacrifice-and-atonement/>

### **Series Resources**

- *Read (book):* “Leviticus: A 12-Week Study” by Michael LeFebvre.
- *Read (book):* “Rediscovering Holiness” by J I Packer.
- *Read (book):* “Holiness” by J C Ryle. 
- *Read (commentary):* “Leviticus” by Katy Davis.
- *Watch (website):* “The Book of Leviticus” by the BibleProject:  
<https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-leviticus/>

 [Available to borrow in the Church library](#)

For sermons and additional resources, visit [stbarts.com.au](https://stbarts.com.au)

**st bart's**

## Talk 4/6 (LEVITICUS): 2 NOVEMBER 2025

### “The Day of Atonement”

by the Rev'd Dr Daniel Rouhead

Bible Passage: Leviticus 16:1-34

The Grand Canyon is an awe-inspiring place, a massive gorge carved by time, wind, and water. As the sun rises, the cliff's striking bands of red, orange, pink and brown rock seem to almost ignite. Meanwhile, the Colorado River flows far below, winding like a silver thread through ancient stone. I've had the awesome privilege of seeing the canyon from every perspective, from above, from below – rafting down the Colorado River through the canyon, and from bottom to top, hiking up the canyon in the middle of summer. When you look out over the canyon from the main visitor centre on the South Rim, you can see the North Rim about 16 km straight across the canyon. But, if you want to get there, the distance you need to drive is about 340 km and it would take about 5 hours – because there's no bridge across the canyon. Does this make you think about the distance that sin puts between us and our holy God?

Imagine standing at the edge of a massive canyon – one so wide and deep you can't see the other side. That's what sin does between us and God. It's not just a small mistake, a white lie or a bad habit – sin creates an impossible *distance*. Because God is *holy* – completely pure, perfect, and good – and we are not. And holiness and sin cannot live side by side. But the good news is this: God didn't leave us on the other side of the canyon. He built a bridge.

And one of the clearest pictures of that bridge – of God's holiness meeting human sin – is the Day of Atonement.

The Day of Atonement was the holiest day in Israel's calendar, set apart for cleansing from sin and restoring fellowship between God and his people.

There were three main purposes for this special day of repentance:

1. To atone (or make covering) for the sins of the nation of Israel, both the people and the sanctuary.
2. To cleanse the tabernacle, the altar, the priests, and the community from the impurity caused by sin.
3. To renew the covenant relationship between God and his people, ensuring his holy presence could remain among them.

The Day of Atonement reminded Israel, and reminds us, that holiness matters, and that access to God requires cleansing and repentance. It symbolises God's mercy and forgiveness, that he provides a way for sin to be dealt with, not ignored. The sacrifices show that sin requires a substitute, innocent life given in place of the guilty...and the scapegoat illustrates sins being removed, carried far away into the wilderness, showing the nature of God's forgiveness.

Through this chapter we see the problem of God's holiness and our sin, the solution of atonement, and the ultimate fulfillment of this solution in Jesus.

## 1. HOLINESS & SIN \ LEVITICUS 16:1–2

“The Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the Lord. The Lord said to Moses: “Tell your brother Aaron that he is 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. For I will appear in the cloud over the atonement cover” (Lev 16:1-2)

Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, walked into God's presence on their terms and died instantly. It seems harsh to our 21<sup>st</sup> century ears, but it shows something critical to us: God's holiness is dangerous to sin.

Think of it like the sun. The sun gives light, warmth, and life. But if you get too close (without protection), you're destroyed. The Earth is exactly the right distance from the sun to sustain life. Not because the sun is bad, but because it's *so good, so powerful, so pure*. That's holiness. It's the blazing centre of who God is. And that's why we can't just “walk in”. Our sin separates us — not because God hates us, but because his holiness burns away anything unclean.

The curtain (or veil) in the tabernacle (and, eventually, the temple) is an important visible sign of this separation, but it also protected the people and the priests from approaching God's presence casually or irreverently. The curtain was a thick, richly woven fabric that hung inside the tent of meeting, separating two sacred spaces:

1. The Holy Place – where priests served daily, offering incense and bread.
2. The Most Holy Place (Holy of Holies) – where the ark of the covenant was kept, representing God's throne and presence.

The curtain symbolised the barrier caused by sin between a holy God and sinful people. Only the high priest could go beyond it—and only once a year on the Day of Atonement, but only according to God's instructions.

## 2. THE SOLUTION OF ATONEMENT \ LEVITICUS 16:3–19

So what did God do? Because he is loving and merciful, he made a *way* for his people to come close — without being destroyed.

Once a year, the High Priest would perform this sacred ceremony. Let's walk through it:

1. Aaron first had to wash himself and put on simple linen clothes — leaving behind his fancy robes. Even the holiest man in the nation had to *humble himself*.
2. He offered a bull for his own sin — because no one, not even the priest, is clean enough to stand before God.

3. Then came two goats: one for the Lord and one called *the scapegoat*.
  - i. The first goat was sacrificed — its blood sprinkled on the mercy seat — showing that sin brings death, but that a substitute could take the punishment.
  - ii. Then, the priest would place his hands on the head of the second goat — confessing all the sins of Israel — and send it into the wilderness, symbolically carrying their sins away.
  - iii.

Imagine that moment — the entire camp watching as the goat disappears over the horizon. A physical picture of *God removing their sin*.

“As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” — *Psalms 103:12*

That’s atonement - the restoring of relationship between a holy God and sinful people, *they become at-one with their God*.

### **3. THE FULFILLMENT IN JESUS \ HEBREWS 9:11–15**

But here’s the thing: they had to do this *every year*. Over and over. More goats, more blood, more reminders that the job wasn’t finished. The Day of Atonement pointed people to their need for forgiveness and reconciliation but did not permanently solve the problem of sin.

Then Jesus came. He didn’t just *bring* a sacrifice — Jesus was the sacrifice.

At the cross, holiness and mercy meet perfectly. Jesus was both goats — he was the sacrifice and the scapegoat. Jesus’ death on the cross, his body broken and blood shed, paid the price for our sin. Jesus took our sin on himself, and so he was also like the scapegoat, facing the judgment we deserved and taking our sin and its consequences far from us. And then, in his resurrection, he opened the way for us to stand in God’s presence without fear.

When Jesus died, the curtain in the temple tore from top to bottom. That’s God saying I have dealt with the problem of sin, the separation between me and you: “The distance is gone. The way is open. Come in through faith in my son, Jesus”

Jesus Is the Perfect High Priest. “But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves...” (Heb 9:11-12) On the Day of Atonement, only one person — the High Priest — could enter the Most Holy Place. He represented the people before God and offered sacrifices for their sin. Because Jesus is without sin, he was able to fulfil the role of the high priest, but perfectly and permanently.

Jesus Is the Perfect Sacrifice. On the Day of Atonement, the blood of a bull and a goat was sprinkled on the mercy seat to cover sin. But animal blood could never truly

remove sin — it was symbolic, a temporary covering. “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb 10:4)

When Jesus died on the cross, his blood was the real atonement — not just covering sin, but *cleansing* it completely. “He has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself” Heb 9:26).

His death satisfies both:

- God’s justice — sin is paid for, not ignored.
- God’s mercy — sinners are forgiven and restored.

The atonement Jesus brings is not just ritual — it’s real transformation. He doesn’t just wipe the slate clean; He gives us a new heart and fills us with his Spirit so that we can live holy lives.

“How much more, then, will the blood of Christ... cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” (Heb 9:14)

The old sacrifices had to be repeated year after year, but Jesus’ sacrifice is so complete that it never needs repeating.

Jesus is the true Scapegoat. On the Day of Atonement, the priest placed his hands on the head of a live goat, confessing all the sins of the people. That goat was then sent away into the wilderness — symbolically carrying the guilt of Israel far from them. That’s what Jesus did — not symbolically, but spiritually and literally.

“The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53)

“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross.” — *1 Peter 2:24*

Jesus experienced being “cut off”, separated from the Father, so we could be brought close. When he cried, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46), He was bearing the full weight of human guilt. He carried our sins away, not merely into the desert. Through Him, our sins are truly gone — as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12).

## CONCLUSION

Jesus defeated sin and death and opened the way into God’s presence.

“Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus... let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings” (Heb 10:19-22).

The yearly ritual is over. The way to God is open. The relationship is restored. The distance is gone.

How should we respond to this good news? After all, The Day of Atonement wasn't just about forgiveness — it was also about transformation. God says, "Be holy because I am holy." Holiness isn't about being perfect — it's about being set apart, belonging to God. We don't earn it; we live from it.

Because of Jesus, we don't approach God trembling in fear — but we also don't come casually. We come with awe, gratitude, and the desire to live differently — because his holiness now lives *in us* through the Holy Spirit.

- When you feel weighed down by guilt — remember: your sins have been carried away.
- When you wonder if God could ever accept you — remember: Jesus' blood makes you clean.
- When you think holiness is out of reach — remember: the Holy Spirit now lives in you.

You're not standing at the edge of the canyon anymore. The bridge has been built — and it's a cross.

Let us pray

Holy God, Thank you that you made a way for us to come near. Thank you for Jesus, our perfect High Priest and sacrifice, who tore down the curtain and carried our sins away. Help us never to take your holiness lightly, but to live each day in awe, gratitude, and joy — knowing that we are forgiven and free. Make us holy as you are holy. In Jesus' name, Amen.