

International Bible Lessons Commentary

Leviticus 16:11-19

New Revised Standard Version

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, February 21, 2016

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The [**International Bible Lesson**](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, February 21, 2016**, is from **Leviticus 16:11-19**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [**International Bible Lessons Commentary**](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. If you are a Bible student or teacher, you can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [**International Bible Lesson Forum**](#).

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Leviticus 16:11-19

(Leviticus 16:11) Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house; he shall slaughter the bull as a sin offering for himself.

Six months after the celebration of Passover, in the seventh month, called Tishri, the Israelites celebrated the Day of Atonement. The High Priest, beginning with Aaron, would make a sin offering for himself and the other priests before making a sin offering for the people. Through the sin offerings of the High Priest, he could atone for their sins and they could become “at one” again with the Most Holy God, the LORD. Since the priests knew and taught the law of God, their sins were most serious. Because of their position of authority spiritually and politically, by their sins they could mislead millions of people; so that may be one reason God required a bull for the priests’ sacrifice instead of a goat: a bull would be more valuable and a greater sacrifice. Similarly, there can be no greater sacrifice than the death of Jesus Christ for our sins, which shows our value to God and the seriousness of our sins and rebellion against God.

(Leviticus 16:12) He shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of crushed sweet incense, and he shall bring it inside the curtain

Behind the curtain was the Holy of Holies, which was so holy that the High Priest could only enter in on the Day of Atonement for the forgiveness of sins and the removal of guilt of all the Israelites through very specific sacrifices. He would burn the incense and create a cloud of smoke between himself and the Most Holy God, the LORD, lest he look upon God on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant and die.

(Leviticus 16:13) and put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the covenant, or he will die.

Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and only the High Priest could make atonement for the sins of the Israelites, as well as his own sins through specific sacrifices. The Israelites and priests outside the tabernacle knew from the Law of Moses what the High Priest must do for their sins to be forgiven and their guilt removed. In faith, they had to trust that the High Priest did rightly what they could not see, and in faith they had to trust in God to forgive them for all their sins. In faith, we trust in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins.

(Leviticus 16:14) He shall take some of the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat he shall sprinkle the blood with his finger seven times.

Seven is the number of perfection. The Day of Atonement is in the seventh month and the high priest is to sprinkle blood with his finger seven times. God required a perfect sacrifice in a perfect time performed in a perfect way to forgive sins and remove guilt. The sacrifices on the Day of Atonement pointed toward the coming of God's Son, Jesus Christ, who would himself as High Priest and Sacrifice be the One who would finally forgive the sins and remove the guilt from all (both Jews and Gentiles) who would put their faith in Him.

(Leviticus 16:15) He shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the curtain, and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it upon the mercy seat and before the mercy seat.

Goat's blood was required for the forgiveness of the people, and the procedure was the same whether the High Priest was using the blood of a bull for the priests or the blood of a goat for the people. The necessity of the death and the shed blood of a bull or goat illustrates the fact that sinners can do nothing to atone for their sins or remove their guilt before our Most Holy God. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins, which shows how serious our sins are to God, to others, and to ourselves: "In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22). Our sins always result in suffering and death, and eventually brought about the suffering and death of God's only Son: "God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished" Romans 3:25).

(Leviticus 16:16) Thus he shall make atonement for the sanctuary, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel, and because of their transgressions, all their sins; and so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which remains with them in the midst of their uncleannesses.

The sins of the Israelites contaminated not only themselves, but also their place of worship and where they lived. The sacrifice of the goat would cleanse their lives from the pollution of sin, and even their rebellion against God could be forgiven (“whatever their sins have been”), but only through the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement. Only the death of Jesus Christ can lead to God’s forgiveness of our rebellion against God and cleanse us from our unrighteousness “whatever our sins have been”—if we will believe in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for us.

(Leviticus 16:17) No one shall be in the tent of meeting from the time he enters to make atonement in the sanctuary until he comes out and has made atonement for himself and for his house and for all the assembly of Israel.

No one was to assist or accompany the High Priest (Aaron represented the High Priest as the first High Priest). If the High Priest did not act properly, he could not come out of the Holy of Holies: he would die in the presence of God. When he came out, priests and people would know that by his sacrifices he had made atonement for everyone. No one assisted or accompanied Jesus to the cross to die with Him as a sacrifice for our sins. Jesus did not need to make atonement for himself, because Jesus never sinned. After Jesus died, He was buried, but when Jesus rose again from the dead and came out of the tomb His disciples learned from Him that His atonement for their sins and ours was accepted by the Most Holy God.

(Leviticus 16:18) Then he shall go out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement on its behalf, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and of the blood of the goat, and put it on each of the horns of the altar.

The horns on the altar help secure the sacrifice on the altar, and some think these horns represent the power of God. The sins of priests and people had some effect on the altar, because priests and people did not always offer their sacrifices throughout the year with holiness of heart, loyalty, and love to God; therefore, the altar, priests, and people all needed cleansing.

(Leviticus 16:19) He shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it and hallow it from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel.

The specified sacrifices confirm a sacred method that God required for the forgiveness of sins. The method does not include using a large amount of blood, as though more blood is more effective than less blood. Only a drop on the finger of the High Priest is needed (sprinkled seven times), because among other things the blood illustrates that

death is the result of sin: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). There is no magic in the blood. People do not need to wonder if enough blood was shed or applied for the forgiveness of their sins. As a consequence of our sins, Jesus Christ had to shed His blood and die. The fact that the Son of God had to die and shed His blood so God could lovingly, justly, and mercifully forgive us, remove our guilt, cleanse us from our sins, and consecrate us for His holy purposes is more important than the amount of blood Jesus shed (one drop of His sacred blood was more than enough), but Jesus began to shed His blood when He was flogged and a crown to thorns was pressed upon His head before they crucified Him.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. In what month did the Israelites celebrate the Passover? In what month did the Israelites celebrate the Day of Atonement?
2. What did the High Priest sacrifice for his sins and the sins of the priests? What did the High Priest sacrifice for the sins of the people?
3. Why did the priest burn incense in the Holy of Holies?
4. How did the priests and people know that the High Priest had done what was needed for the forgiveness of their sins?
5. How do we know that Jesus’ death on the cross was an acceptable sacrifice to God for the forgiveness of our sins, our cleansing from sins, and the removal of our guilt?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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