

# Atonement Time

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[ 0 : 00 ] I thought we would kick off today with a quiz. I'll mention a date and a place and see if you know what it represents. Fourth of July, USA.

Good. First of March, Wales. St. David's Day. St. David's Day. 26th of February, Kuwait.

St. David's Day.

What about this one? 29th of September, 2017, Israel.

Yom Kippur. It's the Day of Atonement. It was the heart of Israel's calendar and life as it is today.

This is the Good Friday of the Old Testament.

[ 1 : 21 ] It is the annual sacrifice for Israel. It became known by the rabbis as just simply as the day. It's the focus of the entire sacrificial system in the center of the book of Leviticus.

And we're going to get to it in a moment. As you're aware of, we are halfway through, or today marks halfway through our six weeks in this strange world of Leviticus.

Leviticus addresses the issue of how it's possible for the infinitely pure, sovereign God to have an intimate relationship with sinful, finite creatures like us.

And the first nine chapters of Leviticus have outlined God's gracious provision of a way to life and fellowship with their maker via a detailed system of sacrifices, as well as priests who mediate between the people and God.

And the climax of the first nine chapters of Leviticus came as we saw last week when the crisis, which is the end of Exodus, is resolved. The crisis being Moses, God's presence is there, but Moses is not allowed into the presence of God.

[ 2 : 29 ] And in chapter 9, verses 22 to 24, two people for the first time since the flood walk into the very presence of God and walk out again unscathed. But then, as we saw last week, a new crisis emerges in the very next moment.

In chapter 10, verses 1 to 3, 1 and 2, immediately, Israel is reminded by the sudden and sobering deaths of Nadab and Abihu, that this new access that they have to God comes with a very significant threat.

And there are two big problems now at the beginning of chapter 10, this new crisis which has emerged. Firstly, the tent of meeting, the dwelling place of God, the God who exists, always exists, the God who is the source of life, has now been polluted with two corpses in His very presence.

And this place of meeting needs to be cleansed because life cannot dwell with death. How can the source of life be in the presence of death?

And the second problem relates to the question of how near can a person approach the presence of God?

[ 3 : 47 ] You see, the deaths of Nadab and Abihu tell us that while the sacrificial system that God has put in place bridges the gap between God and people, between the infinite and then the finite, between the pure and the sinful, God hasn't removed the gap.

The gap's still there. It's been bridged, but the gap is still there. And so the question is, is a personal encounter with God even possible? The good news is that the crisis that arises at the beginning of chapter 10 finds its resolution in chapter 16, which was just read out for us.

The opening verses of Leviticus 16 bring us straight back into the events of the beginning of chapter 10 with the deaths of Nadab and Abihu. And so get this. This is really crucial for you to understand. It takes a while. If you're reading through Leviticus, it takes you a while to get through all the details. The euphoria of the end of chapter 9 is immediately turned to the agony of chapter 10 and the resolution of the crisis of chapter 10 is immediately resolved by God and the day of atonement in chapter 16.

That is, it all happens on the same day. Everything from the end of chapter 9 to the end of chapter 16 all happens on the same day.

[ 5 : 14 ] However, however else you might read the book of Leviticus, it surely is telling us that God really, really desires to be in an intimate relationship with his creatures.

And so if chapters 10 to 16, chapter 10 and then chapter 16 are the bookends, if you like, to this new crisis, then it puts a certain amount of urgency to the strangeness of chapters 11 to 15.

You see, chapters 11 to 15 come within the context of the crisis of chapter 10 is resolution of chapter 16. And what we see as you move into chapter 11 is the strangeness of the world of Leviticus.

Chapter 11 is a series of food laws which distinguish between clean and unclean. They're the two words that characterize chapters 11 to 15. I'll read a few verses so you get a flavor for it.

Chapter 11, verse 1. The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, Say to the Israelites, of all the animals that live on the land, these are the ones you may eat. You may eat any animal that has a divided hoof and that chews the cud.

[ 6 : 30 ] There are some that only chew the cud or only have a divided hoof, but you must not eat them. The camel, though it chews the cud, does not have a divided hoof. It is ceremonially unclean for you.

The hyrax, though it chews the cud, does not have a divided hoof. It is unclean for you. The rabbit, though it chews the cud, but does not have a divided hoof. It is unclean for you. And the pig, though it has a divided hoof, does not chew the cud.

It is unclean for you. You must not eat the meat or touch their carcasses. They are unclean for you. And on it goes and on and on and on. What are the rationale of these laws?

What makes some food clean and others unclean? Are some animals, for instance, more sacred than others? You know, for instance, next time you hoe into your hamburger or your barbecue steak, remember that eating that animal in some parts of our world and in some cultures, in fact, is sacred.

Or is it simply a cultural thing? You know, a former neighbor of mine spent some time working in a third world country as a vet. He went to a restaurant one day and ordered the thing that he recognized, which was duck.

[ 7 : 43 ] And they brought the duck out. And he said to the waiter, I ordered the duck. And the waiter said, yes, we know. He said, but this is not duck. And he says, yes, it is. And my friend said, no, it's not the duck.

He said, I happen to know that ducks don't have shoulder blades. And there's a shoulder blade in my meal. And the waiter goes off to the chef, comes back and says, well, as it turns out, we've run out of duck.

So being a Westerner in this third world country, the chef thought he'd go up the menu rather than down the menu and give you a delicacy.

You've been served cat. And my friend said, I don't eat cat. It might be a delicacy to you, but it's not to me.

And so that's what's going on. It's a cultural thing where some things are regarded as delicacy and other things are not. Or is it just simply that some things are just purely disgusting and you shouldn't eat?

[ 8 : 44 ] I was out fishing with a mate one day. Not a lot was happening, which generally happens when I go fishing. And my friend said to me, I'll give you \$10 if you eat this earthworm, which was what we're using for bait.

He said, I'll give you \$10 for that. And so I got my bottle of Coke and I washed off the dirt, gave it a bit of spit to give it some lubrication, and went straight down until it got to here.

And then it was okay up until the point when you can feel an earthworm moving inside your chest cavity. And so I guggled down the rest of the Coke.

So is it just a case of, frankly, it's just disgusting. You should not eat this sort of stuff. Now, let's have a look here. What's going on here?

We need to understand these laws within the context of chapters 10 and 16. By the way, that's not the worst thing I've eaten. In verse 2, it says, of all the animals that live on the land.

[ 9 : 45 ] Verse 9, it says, all the creatures living in the waters of the sea. Verse 13 is about the birds of the air. These are all part of God's good creation. When these animals are being presented,

they're being presented as God's creation.

And so, therefore, it's difficult to conclude that there's something intrinsically wrong with a pig. I have problems with pigs, but there's nothing intrinsically wrong with a pig or disgusting about a camel.

It's more what these animals represent to the Israelites. God has given these animals as an educational tool.

So let me try to illustrate this in a trivial kind of way. You're a middle-aged man, which I am, and you're reading a men's fashion magazine in the doctor's surgery.

And one article in the fashion magazine is titled, Clean and Unclean Trousers. So, and the article says this, Trousers that are loose-fitting, covering the ankles, but have a very high hem, are unclean for you.

[11:16] Trousers that sit below the waist skinny fit and reveal the ankles are regarded as unclean for middle-aged men. Trousers worn with white socks are regarded as unclean for you.

And anything to do with lycra bike shorts is utterly detestable in your sight. Now, there's nothing intrinsically wrong with any pair of trousers in themselves, but to wear the unclean ones might result in some form of expulsion from middle-aged fashion groups of people.

That is, you may be cut off socially or professionally. You go to a job interview and they immediately assess you on the cut of your suit and go, Well, that guy's unclean.

Now, that's my trivial attempt to get to the point of the clean and unclean distinction. It's what they represent which is the danger. And we see that in verses 24 to 28.

They represent the danger of becoming unclean and cut off. You'll make yourselves unclean by these. Whoever touches their carcasses will be unclean till evening.

[12:34] Whoever picks up one of their carcasses must wash their clothes and they'll be unclean till evening. Every animal that does not have a divided hoof or that does not chew the cud is unclean for you. Whoever touches the carcass of any of them will be unclean.

Of all the animals that walk on all fours, those that walk on their paws are unclean for you. Whoever touches their carcasses will be unclean till evening. Anyone who picks up their carcasses must wash their clothes and they'll be unclean till evening.

These animals are unclean for you. And so the prohibition here is that you'll become unclean. And we sit here in Chatswood in 2017 and wonder, What is so detestable about becoming unclean until evening?

Why would they consider it so dangerous? And the danger in all of this for the Israelites is that if you are unclean, you cannot approach the tabernacle.

You can't go to where God is. And He is the source of life. Becoming unclean cuts you off from life.

[13:48] To become unclean is to carry the symbolism of death. And if you look at verse 29 and onwards, you'll notice eight animals that go about the ground that gives us a clue as to why being unclean is so detestable.

These are not animals that are in danger of eating. You know, they're not tempted to eat these things. These animals are animals that get into your kitchen. They die. They touch something which is normally clean and make it unclean.

And see the symbolism that's going on here in this chapter? The verb to crawl on one's belly, which is there at the end of Leviticus 11, only occurs in one other place in the Bible apart from here.

It's in the Garden of Eden when God curses the serpent for deceiving Adam and Eve and leading him into sin. It says, from here on in you will crawl on your belly. You see, what God's doing here with these laws is calling His people to be on guard.

Don't turn your backs on me in the way that Adam and Eve once did when they ate of food that I said they should not eat, lest they would surely die.

[15:13] And they ignored God. It's a piece of fruit. It doesn't matter. They ignored God. They ate of what God told them not to eat.

And they were excluded from paradise. They went from the source of life to death. They did in fact die. And it's a death that is hung over into the human race from that moment on.

We are all dead in our transgressions and sin. See, these laws are held out as a warning to Israel not to turn their backs on God in the way that Adam and Eve did, to become unclean is to become a walking advertisement of Adam and Eve's fate when they lost the presence of God.

The contrast between life and death is at the heart of all these clean and unclean laws in chapters 11 to 15. And the nearer one gets to God, the nearer one gets to abundant life.

That is, that's the process of becoming clean. The more unclean someone becomes, the more they move towards death. And that's the very purpose that becomes clear for us at the end of the chapter, verses 44 to 45.

[16:29] I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourself and be holy because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves along the ground. I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God.

Therefore be holy because I am holy. You see, the journey from rescue out of Egypt right through to Leviticus is one of increasing closeness and intimacy to God.

The goal is to be holy as God is holy. As they would sit down and they would eat their evening meal, they would be reminded to not turn their backs against God as Adam and Eve did and as Nadab and Abihu just did.

They would be reminded to look at all the words of God, all of his commands, to embrace them, to do them and to enjoy life and joy and freedom.

That's the projection that heads here, that sees its climax into Leviticus 16. The climax of all these laws of clean and unclean come in chapter 16, the Day of Atonement.

[17:52] The Day of Atonement is the annual spring cleaning for Israel. Every other sacrifice of Israel has its basis in this Day of Atonement.

Without this sacrifice, all the other daily sacrifices, which we saw in the first bit of Leviticus, would not work. The Day of Atonement was, if you like, the annual subscription to an exclusive country club.

Once you pay the huge amount of money, you and your family can enjoy the restaurants and the facilities and stuff like that. You still have to pay for a round of golf.

You still have to pay for the beer at the bar. You still have to pay for something to be used at the gym. But it only makes sense. You can own, they will only allow you to part for your money in the country club as long as the annual subscriptions pay.

The Day of Atonement was the annual subscription fee. It was the annual cleansing that meant the rest of the sacrificial system would work for one more year.

[18:59] It was essential for life. See the importance of it? Verse 1, the Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the Lord.

And 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 of the ark, or else he will die.

See the instructions for this annual spring cleaning are prefaced by a solemn warning that links this day back to the sins of Nadab and Abihu, who were fired by God from their role as priests on that very same day.

There was no one holier in the land than Aaron, but even for him an enormous amount of care was needed in approaching God.

It was to be exactly as the Lord prescribed it. The day's ritual involved two pairs of offerings, one for Aaron, one for extended family of priests, one for the nation, one for the cleansing of the tabernacle area.

[20:25] Bloods of bulls and goats were sacrificed and mixed. You might be wondering when we get to this point, Sam read it through and also in the early chapters of Leviticus, as to why all this blood and gore?

Why does God need blood? And the answer is he doesn't. He doesn't need blood. All these sacrifices were not to satisfy some kind of blood lust that God has.

You know, he's not one of those people, you see a massive accident, he pulls up just to walk at it. Not one of those kind of issues there. The blood symbolizes what sin does to us.

Leviticus 17 verse 11 gives us an explanation of why the blood. It says, For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you, that is, given it the life of blood of an animal, to you, to atone for yourselves on the altar, it is blood that makes atonement for one's life.

You see, all the clean and unclean laws of chapters 11 to 15 that deal with childbirth, periods, bodily discharge, are all to do with the threat of death because of the loss of lifeblood.

[ 21 : 48 ] That's what they're all about. The central focus of this ceremony, the high point of its tension and drama, is as the high priest enters into the Holy of Holies with the blood because it represents death.

It represents death. This is the most special place of the tabernacle, the Holy of Holies. This is where God says His presence will dwell.

This is most likely the place that Nadab and Abihu attempted to sneak behind the curtain and have a look, get a glimpse of God, and God fired them immediately.

The unclean cannot be in the presence of the infinitely holy. And so here is Aaron all alone. He had to enter the presence of God in the right way at the right time.

One atonement for all the people. If not, he too would be fired. So imagine there you're an Israelite on that day. You're camped on the Sinai Peninsula. The whole nation is gathered around.

[ 22 : 57 ] It's like an amphitheater. Imagine that. The day, you know, tent of meeting, they're all camped around the outside of the tent of meeting. They're all looking in on this day. And they're watching one solitary figure, one guy, go about all the tasks, making all the sacrifices, dressed up, amazingly, not in his ornamental priestly robes.

They're being taken off and laid to one side. When he goes in to represent the people to God, he puts on the clothing of a slave. And then the moment comes for him to enter the Holy of Holies. Right into the very existence, the very place where God dwells. He disappears out of sight behind the curtain. And the question on your mind as an Israelite watching all this is, will he come out? Will he come out? Or will he die in the presence of God? Will he survive this encounter with God? And the hope of the nation hangs on this moment.

For the high priest to die would mean the tabernacle is unclean, and the people would remain unclean. That means that they would be cut off from the source of life, and they would walk in death. So there must have been overwhelming relief as you get to verse 18, and it says, then he shall come out.

[ 24 : 25 ] When the high priest came out, that was the moment that the nation knew that the sacrifice had been accepted by God. And we get to go for another year.

We're clean. Our sins are dealt with. God is pleased. Sin is atoned for. The relationship continues. That's the first big thing that happens on the day of atonement.

The second big thing is verse 20. The scapegoat. When Aaron had finished making atonement for the most holy place, attend a meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat.

He used 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 wilderness, into the care of someone appointed for the task.

The goat will carry on itself all the sins to a remote place and the man shall release it in the wilderness. What happened to Aaron and with Aaron behind the curtain, in the tabernacle, in the Holy of Holies, is hidden from the eyes of the people.

[ 25 : 37 ] The scapegoat is entirely public. Notice the identification that takes here. One goat has the sins of the whole nation laid on it.

A single figure for the sake of the whole nation. For the sake of many. The goat is then led away from God's people into the symbolic nothingness of uncleanness, of expulsion as far away as possible from the presence of God.

It is literally to a land of cutting off from which it's meant to never return. It is a brilliant illustration of what happens for Israel.

Their sin will be never seen again. Psalm 103 verse 2 is a commentary on this. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

The goat symbolically carries the sins of the nation away to a place as far away as you could possibly conceive. And at the end of the day of atonement, there was great rejoicing in the nation.

[ 26 : 52 ] God has resolved the issue of the uncleanness and the failure of Nadab and Abihu and made access into his presence a possibility.

And yet, in amongst all this rejoicing, there's a little bit that just takes the edge off it. And the little bit's a big bit. Verse 34, Access to God was incomplete and it was limited.

One priest, once a year, in great danger. And what if you woke up one morning, the day after the Day of Atonement, and to hear the pathetic bleeding of this scapegoat, this stupid goat has made its way back into the camp.

What does that mean for my sin? What does that mean for my guilt? The stupid goat's return. And as you read through the Old Testament, Israel suffers the fate of the threat that stood behind becoming unclean until evening.

God sends them into exile for their continual disobedience. He removes them from his new paradise. They're kicked out of Canaan. The tabernacle which became the temple is destroyed. [ 28 : 15 ] It's obliterated. They just could not be holy. And yet, at the same time, these laws didn't fail. These laws were like a scaffolding on a building.

Over Christmas, just down the road here, Chastain Public School had scaffolding on the front of its building along the Pacific Highway. In fact, it still has got some there. And you couldn't see what was going on behind it, but you knew that work was going on there.

In one sense, scaffolding here is prophesying that one day something greater is going to be revealed. There's something that lies behind all this which will be revealed, and it will be infinitely better than scaffolding.

And the writer of the Hebrews is looking back to the day atonement when he writes in chapter 10, verse 19, therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus.

What does that mean? It means the scaffolding has fallen away, and what's been revealed is Jesus. We get to do what the ancient Hebrew on the hillside could never imagine possible.

[ 29 : 41 ] To come into the very presence of God through Jesus and not die, but in fact be welcomed. On the very first Easter, Jesus is on the cross shedding his lifeblood for humanity.

And just before he dies, he cries out, it is finished. And in that moment, the cameraman pans across to the temple in Jerusalem.

And in that moment, in the temple of Jerusalem, the curtain that separates the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple is torn from top to bottom.

Its access is now there. This curtain, which is 20 metres high, is as thick as my hand, which has a big no entry sign written all over it.

It's the curtain that separated the presence of an infinitely holy God from a sinful people. And God himself, from the top to bottom, has ripped it, opened it up.

[ 30 : 51 ] Access to him is now through the blood of Jesus. Jesus lived a perfect life. He died an atoning death for us. He became unclean by taking our sin upon himself and was cast out of the presence of God.

He descended into the place of the dead, in the place of hell. His disciples at that moment thought it was all over as they saw the tomb get closed over. They thought it was done. They went and hid themselves in a room locked away.

And then our great high priest appears for all to see. God is pleased. He has done it.

Jesus, it is finished. Jesus, it is finished. as he triumphantly comes back to life. And he has made us clean.

He's made it possible for us to dwell in the presence of the creator of heaven and earth. And Romans 8, chapter 1, sorry, Romans 8, verse 1 says that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

[ 31 : 53 ] If you're in Christ Jesus, do not let the evil one throw your sin and your failure into your face. Do not let people remind you that you don't stack up to be in the presence of God in a relationship with God.

Don't let your own conscience condemn you to say, I can't, I'm not worthy. Hebrews 10, 22 is what we are to do when our conscience convicts us.

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with full assurance that faith brings. Having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from the guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

The death of Jesus on the cross has atoned for your sin it has cleansed your conscience. In the West, we atone for our sins through guilt.

Eastern, this is general statements, Eastern cultures tend to atone for guilt, tend to atone for sin through shame. So in the West, we feel guilty, atone for sin.

[ 33 : 01 ] In the East, you feel shame, atone for sin. That's how Western society works. You want to get a lesser conviction in court?

