

# The Day of Atonement



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Leviticus 16, Lev. 23:27–32, Deut. 19:16–21, Matt. 18:23–35, Isa. 6:1–6.*

**Memory Text:** “Who is a God like Thee, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love. He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities underfoot. Yes, Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea” (*Micah 7:18, 19, NASB*).

The Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, as revealed in Leviticus 16, is the most solemn Old Testament ritual. It is deliberately placed in the heart of the book of Leviticus, which is itself at the center of the Five Books of Moses, in order to help to illustrate the “most holy” character of this ritual. Also referred to as the Sabbath of Sabbaths (*Lev. 16:31*), the day calls for the cessation of all work, which is unique for an Israelite yearly festival. This fact places the day squarely within the concept of the Sabbath—it is a time to rest in what God, as Creator and Redeemer, has done (and will do) for us.

This week we will study what happened on the Day of Atonement in the earthly sanctuary, specifically the rituals with the two goats, which helps us to better understand deeper truths regarding salvation and the final disposition of sin.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 9.*

## The Yearly Cleansing

**Read** Leviticus 16:16, 30. What is purged on the Day of Atonement?

---

Throughout the year, all kinds of sins and ritual impurities were transferred to the sanctuary. With the Day of Atonement comes the time for their removal. There are three main parts to the Day of Atonement:

1. *The purification offering for the priest.* The high priest slaughtered a bull for his sins, making sure that he (the priest) would be clean when entering the sanctuary so that he could perform the ritual to cleanse it.

2. *The purification offering of the goat “for the LORD” (Lev. 16:8, NKJV).* During the year, the purification offerings “brought” all the sins of the Israelites into the sanctuary. The Day of Atonement was the time to remove these sins from the sanctuary; this process was done through the blood of the goat “for the LORD.”

3. *The elimination ritual with the live goat for Azazel.* God wanted to get the sins of His people away from the sanctuary and the camp. Therefore, another live goat was sent out into the desert.

**Read** Leviticus 16:15. What happened to this goat, and what did it symbolize?

---

Because there was neither confession of sin nor laying on of hands involved with the goat for the Lord, its blood was not a carrier of sin. Thus, it did not defile; but rather, it cleansed. The effect is clearly described in verses 16 and 20. The high priest made atonement with the blood of the Lord’s goat, cleansing the entire sanctuary. The same procedure also effected the purification of the people so that, when the sanctuary was cleansed from all the people’s sins, the people themselves were cleansed too. In this sense the Day of Atonement was unique, for only on this day were both the sanctuary and the people cleansed.

The Day of Atonement was the second stage of a two-phase atonement. In the first phase, during the year, the Israelites were forgiven. Their sins were not blotted out but were entrusted to God Himself, who promised to deal with them. The second phase did not have much to do with forgiveness; the people were already forgiven. In fact, the verb *forgive* does not occur at all in Leviticus 16 or in Leviticus 23:27–32. What this shows us is that the entire plan of salvation deals with more than just the forgiveness of our sins, a point that makes even more sense when understood in the wider context of the great controversy.

## Beyond Forgiveness

**Read** Leviticus 16:32–34. What was the main task of the high priest on the Day of Atonement?

---



---



---

The primary function of the high priest was to mediate between God and humankind. Regarding the sanctuary, he administered the system and performed various rituals of sacrifices and offerings (*Heb. 8:3*). His task on the Day of Atonement was enormous. He performed almost every ritual, except for leading the goat for Azazel into the wilderness, though he gave the command to send the goat away.

On the Day of Atonement, the “great” priest, as he was also called, became a living example of Christ. Just as the attention of God’s people was focused on the high priest, Jesus is the exclusive center of our attention. As the activities of the high priest on earth brought cleansing to the people, Jesus’ work in the heavenly sanctuary does the same for us (*Rom. 8:34, 1 John 1:9*). Just as the only hope of the people on the Day of Atonement was in the high priest, our only hope is in Christ.

“The blood of Christ, while it was to release the repentant sinner from the condemnation of the law, was not to cancel the sin; it would stand on record in the sanctuary until the final atonement; so in the type the blood of the sin offering removed the sin from the penitent, but it rested in the sanctuary until the Day of Atonement.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 357.

According to Leviticus 16:16–20, the high priest had to enter the Most Holy Place and purge it from the ritual impurities, transgressions, and sins. He then transferred all the iniquities, all the transgressions, and all the sins of Israel onto the live goat and sent them away, through the goat, into the desert. Thus, all the moral faults of Israel were gone. This achieved the unique goal of the Day of Atonement: a moral purification that went beyond forgiveness. There was no new forgiveness necessary on this day. God had already forgiven their sins.

**As we struggle with all our God-given strength to put away all sin, how can we learn to lean totally on Christ’s merits as our only hope of salvation?**

---



---

## Azazel

**Read** Leviticus 16:20–22. What happened to the live goat?

---



---



---

The ritual with the live goat was not an offering. After the lot decided which of the two goats was to be for Yahweh and which one was for Azazel (often translated as “scapegoat”), only the goat for Yahweh is referred to as a purification offering (*vss. 9, 15*). By contrast, the goat for Azazel is called the “live goat.” It was never slain, probably to avoid any idea that the ritual constituted a sacrifice. The live goat came into play *only after* the high priest had finished the atonement of the entire sanctuary (*vs. 20*). This point cannot be overemphasized: the ensuing ritual with the live goat had nothing to do with the actual cleansing of the sanctuary or of the people. They already had been cleansed.

Who or what is Azazel? Early Jewish interpreters identified Azazel as the original angelic sinner and the primary author of evil, even as the leader of evil angels. We know him, of course, as a symbol of Lucifer himself.

The ritual with the live goat was a rite of elimination that accomplished the final disposal of sin. Sin would be brought upon the one responsible for it in the first place and then carried away from the people forever. “Atonement” was made upon it in a punitive sense (*Lev. 16:10*), as the goat carried the ultimate responsibility for sin.

Does Satan then play a role in our salvation, as some falsely charge we teach? Of course not. Satan never, in any way, bears sin for us as a substitute. Jesus alone has done that, and it is blasphemy to think that Satan had any part in our redemption.

The ritual with the live goat finds a parallel in the law of the malicious witness (*Deut. 19:16–21*). The accuser and the accused stand before the Lord, represented by the priests and judges. An investigation is held; and, if the accuser is found to be a malicious witness, he shall receive the punishment he intended for the innocent (for example, vicious Haman who put up gallows for loyal Mordecai).

**Thank God again for His merciful forgiveness and the fact that He will remember our sin no more (*Jer. 31:34*). How can we learn not to remember our sins once they are forgiven? Why is it so important for us to do this?**

## On the Day of Atonement

“Thus in the ministration of the tabernacle, and of the temple that afterward took its place, the people were taught each day the great truths relative to Christ’s death and ministration, and once each year their minds were carried forward to the closing events of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, the final purification of the universe from sin and sinners.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 358.

**Read** Leviticus 16:29–31 and 23:27–32. What did God expect the Israelites to do on Yom Kippur? How do these principles apply to us today, living as we are in the “antitypical Day of Atonement”?

---



---



---



---



---

If someone in ancient Israel did not follow these instructions, he was to be cut off and destroyed (*Lev. 23:29, 30*). The Day of Atonement was truly about nothing less than life and death. It demanded the believer’s complete loyalty to God.

Imagine that someone had confessed his sins during the first phase of atonement during the year; that is, the daily sacrifices, but then did not take the Day of Atonement seriously. By his disregard of what God had planned to demonstrate on this day, such a person proved himself to be disloyal to God.

What this means is that a person who professes faith in God can still lose salvation. As Seventh-day Adventists, we do not believe in once-saved-always-saved, because the Bible does not teach it. We are secure in Christ just as long as we live in faith and surrender to Him, claiming His power for victory when tempted and His forgiveness when we fall.

**Read** Matthew 18:23–35. What lesson should we take away from this powerful parable?

---



---

## Isaiah's Personal Yom Kippur

In Isaiah 6:1, Isaiah sees the heavenly King sitting on a throne in the temple, “high and exalted.” The vision is a judgment scene that presents God as coming for judgment (*Isa. 5:16*). Isaiah beholds the true King, identified in the Gospel of John as Jesus Christ (*John 12:41*).

Even though Isaiah was God's prophet and he called others to repentance, he understood that in God's presence he was doomed. Confronted with God's holiness and glory, Isaiah perceived his own sinfulness and also the uncleanness of his people. Holiness and sin are incompatible. Like Isaiah, we all need to come to the conclusion that we cannot pass through the divine judgment on our own. Our only hope is to have a Substitute.

**What** parallels to the Day of Atonement appear in Isaiah 6:1–6?

---



---



---



---

The combination of a temple filled with smoke, an altar, judgment, and atonement for sin and uncleanness recalls strongly the Day of Atonement. Isaiah experienced his own “personal Day of Atonement,” as it were.

Functioning like a priest, a seraph (literally “burning one”) took a burning coal from the altar, presupposing some kind of offering, to purge the prophet's sin. This is an apt image for the cleansing from sin that is possible through the sacrifice of Jesus and His priestly ministry of mediation. Isaiah recognized this as a cleansing ritual, and he kept still as the coal touched his lips. Thereby his “iniquity is taken away” and his “sin is forgiven” (*Isa. 6:7, NASB*). The passive voice in verse 7 shows that forgiveness is granted by the One sitting on the throne. The Judge is also the Savior.

God's work of cleansing brings us from “Woe is me” to “Here am I, send me.” In other words, understanding the heavenly work on the Day of Atonement leads to a readiness for proclamation because a true understanding leads to assurance and surety. This is because we know that in judgment we have a Substitute, Jesus Christ, whose righteousness alone (symbolized by the blood) will enable us to stand without fear of condemnation (*Rom. 8:1*). Gratitude motivates mission. Acquitted sinners are God's best ambassadors (*2 Cor. 5:18–20*) because they know what God has delivered them from.

**Further Study:** “Now the event takes place foreshadowed in the last solemn service of the Day of Atonement. When the ministrations in the holy of holies had been completed, and the sins of Israel had been removed from the sanctuary by virtue of the blood of the sin offering, then the scapegoat was presented alive before the Lord; and in the presence of the congregation the high priest confessed over him ‘all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat.’ Leviticus 16:21. In like manner, when the work of atonement in the heavenly sanctuary has been completed, then in the presence of God and heavenly angels and the hosts of the redeemed the sins of God’s people will be placed upon Satan; he will be declared guilty of all the evil which he has caused them to commit.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 657, 658.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why would any understanding of the plan of salvation be incomplete if it leaves out or minimizes the work of Christ as our High Priest? What does the sanctuary teach us about just how central the work of intercession in the sanctuary is to the plan of salvation? The bulk of an entire New Testament book, Hebrews, is dedicated to the work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. In view of this, just how important is that work?
- 2 Someone once wrote that the work of Christ, from His death to His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, is simply part of “God’s orderly method” of dealing with the sin problem in a way that will help to answer all questions regarding His justice, fairness, and love. Dwell on the implications of that thought, especially in light of the great controversy and what it teaches us about the grand issues involved in the sordid tragedy of sin.
- 3 Many Seventh-day Adventists were taught about the Day of Atonement in a way that has left them without assurance of salvation. Such a view comes from a false understanding of the purpose of the Day of Atonement. Think about the word *atonement*. What does it mean? How is atonement achieved? Who does the work of atonement? How is it accomplished? How should these answers help us to understand why the Day of Atonement is actually good news?

## A Child Shall Lead

From infancy, Joelito's mother taught him to love and serve Jesus. When she led small-group meetings, Joelito watched her and learned from her. When he was eight years old, he asked to be baptized and to lead others to Jesus.

When Joelito was ten, the government of Peru passed a law requiring children to attend school on Sabbath. His teacher allowed him to skip classes and make up work on Mondays. But when the time came for national exams, the teacher couldn't help him. "If you don't take the exam," she said sadly, "you'll fail." Joelito prayed that God would intervene, and in faith he spent the Sabbath worshipping God.

On Monday Joelito learned that the exam hadn't been given on Saturday because the classroom key had been lost. Joel thanked God for making it possible for him to keep the Sabbath and still take the exam.

Joelito told his friends how God had answered his prayers. He invited them to church and offered to study the Bible with them, just as he had learned from his mother. When the church held children's programs, Joelito invited his friends to attend. If they couldn't attend, he offered to visit their homes and study the children's Bible course with them. The mother of one of the children asked Joelito to study the Bible with her. "I wasn't nervous," Joelito says. "I had watched my mother give many Bible studies."

Joelito's church is small, and everyone takes part. When Joelito was 12, he began taking turns preaching and working as the stewardship leader.

During the summer vacation, young people throughout the country take part in a program called Mission Caleb. They go to a specific town to do community service, visit door to door, and give Bible studies. Joelito wanted to go, but he was told that he was too young. So, he stayed home and helped a group of Mission Caleb volunteers that had come to his town to do similar work.



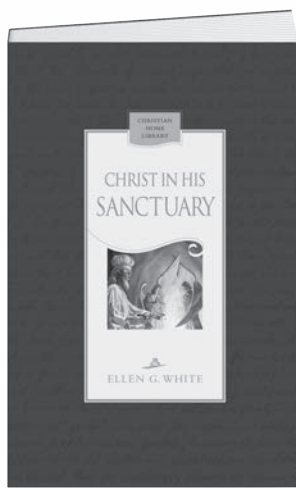
Joelito continues to work hand in hand with God, visiting people, giving them Bible studies, and working in the church. "I don't go with my mom to give Bible studies anymore," he says. "I'm too busy giving my own Bible studies." Joelito preaches in his church once a month, and he loves it.

Part of your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering recently helped to build a small church in Joelito's town. Thank you for sharing so that others can hear God's message of love.

JOELITO TAPIA, 15, shares his faith in Trujillo, Peru.



# CHRIST IN HIS SANCTUARY



**US\$14.99** (Hardcover)

ISBN 10: 0-8163-2341-0

This is a compilation of Ellen White's writings on the sanctuary doctrine.

"I know that the sanctuary question stands in righteousness and truth, just as we have held it for so many years" (*Gospel Workers*, p. 303). Read this book and realize for yourself that we have not followed cunningly devised fables.

 Pacific Press®

©2013 Pacific Press® Publishing Association  
Please contact your ABC for pricing in Canada.  
25590531

## Three ways to order:

<b>1</b> Local	Adventist Book Center®
<b>2</b> Call	1-800-765-6955
<b>3</b> Shop	<a href="http://AdventistBookCenter.com">AdventistBookCenter.com</a>

# HEARING IS ONE THING, BUT SEEING IS ALTOGETHER DIFFERENT.

With the Adventist Mission DVD, you see how lives are changed. You see how the church works around the world. You see how your mission offerings make a real difference, every single day.

A free Adventist Mission DVD from the world church headquarters is sent to your church each quarter. To see these inspiring stories, ask your pastor or Sabbath School leader to show them at your church. Or see them for yourself at [www.AdventistMission.org](http://www.AdventistMission.org).

Thank you for helping tell the world about Jesus through your mission offerings.

