

## Atonement

05/04/25

In 1965, the Dodgers played against the Minnesota Twins in the World Series. The Dodgers wanted to start their best pitcher at the time - Sandy Koufax. That year, Koufax won 26 games during the regular season with 27 complete games. He had 8 shutouts and 382 strikeouts in 335 innings. These are stats we'll probably never see again in baseball. So, it would make sense to have Koufax start the first game of the World Series. The problem was Koufax was a Jew and he would not start the first game because it was on the Jewish holiday – Yom Kippur. Koufax refused to pitch because he wanted to give honor to this special day for the Jews. Koufax would still pitch in three games and the Dodgers would win the World Series in seven games. However, Koufax made the news in a big way for refusing to pitch in the first game. Why was Yom Kippur so important to him?

Yom Kippur is also called “Day of Atonement”. This is usually observed in late September or early October. Some fast on this day or some take part in a feast. It's supposed to be a day set to confess one's sins and be in prayer. Different sects of the Jewish religion treat Yom Kippur differently. It is looked about as a very holy day and is one of the more important holidays observed by the Jewish people. For us to better understand this “Day of Atonement” we can look into the Old Testament, which gives us the first “Day of Atonement” and what was required.

Let's turn to Leviticus 16: 6 – 15 where we read this from Moses, “<sup>6</sup>“Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house.<sup>7</sup> Then he shall take the two goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting.<sup>8</sup> And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>9</sup> And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and use it as a sin offering,<sup>10</sup> but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive

before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.

<sup>11</sup> “Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. He shall kill the bull as a sin offering for himself. <sup>12</sup> And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil <sup>13</sup> and put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die. <sup>14</sup> And he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat on the east side, and in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.

<sup>15</sup> “Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. (ESV – Biblegateway.com)

God had appointed Aaron, Moses’ brother, as high priest in Israel. The Temple had not been built yet, so this ceremony was done in a tabernacle. This ceremony was done once a year and the priests had to follow God’s direction to the letter or death would result. Two of Aaron’s sons, priests as well, died for not following the directions of God in the Tabernacle. So, this ceremony was not to be taken lightly. So, we see in verse 6 and in verses 11 – 14 that Aaron was to offer a bull for his own sin before he could proceed dealing with the people’s sin. This bull offering would make atonement for Aaron and his household. So, let’s look at the term “atonement”. This is a very important term for the followers of Jesus Christ just as it was for Israel during the days of Moses and Aaron. The Hebrew term for “atonement” used here is “kaphar” and it means to cover, to cancel, cleanse, disannul, forgive, be merciful, pardon, to purge away, reconcile (AMG Study Bible). Another definition we can use is this: the bringing together into harmony of those who have been separated, enemies (NI Bible Dictionary). The first question we can ask here is why the sacrifice? Why do we need an atonement? For God to have a relationship with a man or woman, sin has to be removed. Rev. Charles Spurgeon made this statement in a sermon, “There is no access to God



except by sacrifice; there never was, and there never can be, any way to God for sinful man except by sacrifice (Spurgeon, 373)". Old Testament sacrifice was needed because of the God we serve. He is ALL Holy and ALL Righteous. Sin blocks our relationship with the Lord. Isaiah the prophet tells Israel this in Isaiah 59: 1-3, "Listen! The Lord is not too weak to save you, and he is not becoming deaf. He can hear you when you call. But there is a problem – your sins have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore. Your hands are the hands of murderers, and your fingers are filthy with sin. Your mouth is full of lies and your lips are tainted with corruption. (NLT)" Isaiah only tells what God tells him to say. The sins of Israel had cut them off from God. God cannot allow sin to be ok because then He can't be a true holy God. When we water down sin, we have cheapened the character of God and that is sin itself. God has to turn away from sin like He did when Jesus carried our sin on the cross. This is why Jesus cried out to His Father and asked why He had forsaken Him. It was because of our sin that Jesus bore on the cross. We can't take sin lightly because God doesn't. Let's go back to Aaron. His sin had to be cleansed away by the blood of the bull before he could start on the atonement for the sins of the people. We read that two goats had to be chosen. One goat as a sin offering and another as atonement and this goat would be called a scapegoat. The goat would carry the sins of the people out away from the people even though the goat was innocent. We have to understand this was only a temporary procedure till God would allow His Son Jesus to take the place of the bull and goats. The people during the animal sacrifice period would continue to sin and every year, the same sacrifice procedure would have to take place. Something better would have to replace this old and temporary practice and that would be Jesus.

The Hebrews' writer wrote about this change in Hebrews 9: 11-15 where we read this, "<sup>11</sup> But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come,<sup>[a]</sup> then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) <sup>12</sup> he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. <sup>13</sup> For if the blood of goats and bulls,

and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify<sup>[b]</sup> for the purification of the flesh, <sup>14</sup> how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our<sup>[c]</sup> conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

<sup>15</sup> Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.<sup>[d]</sup>

The bull and goats in Leviticus became the atonement for the sin of the priests and the people. Now, Jesus has replaced them. Jesus is now the bridge of harmony between us and God the Father. Jesus is now our atonement before God. Let's remember the Hebrew meaning of atonement - to cover, to cancel, cleanse, disannul, forgive, be merciful, pardon, to purge away, reconcile. When we allow Jesus into our heart and mind, our past sins is covered by the blood of Jesus which disannuls (cancel completely) our sin and we are forgiven in the sight of God. Jesus was without blemish because He was the Son of God – sinless.

Now, Jesus does way more than bulls and goats as a sacrifice for our sin. In verse 14, we read that Jesus will purify our conscience from the dead works to serve the living God. The sacrifice of the bulls and goats could not do this. Trying to obey law or doing good works to earn your salvation will not save you from hell. Jesus is the only one who can be our atonement for our sins. In fact, Jesus will purify our conscience. This is huge. Our heart and mind is part of our conscience. The mind provides the framework for understanding and reasoning about moral choices while the heart provides the emotional and intuitive guidance. This was not done during the sacrifice event that Aaron was doing in Leviticus. When we allow Jesus into our heart and mind, we become anew which includes our conscious – our heart and mind. It's new because the sin is removed and the Spirit moves in.

Verse 14 also tells us that Jesus' blood purifies us through the eternal Spirit. The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. This same Spirit purifies our conscience which is our heart and mind and makes it presentable before a holy and righteous God through Jesus. Jesus, through His Spirit, has become the bull



that Aaron needed for his sins to be forgiven before he could do the work for the people of Israel. Jesus became the goat that took all the sins of the people and carried it into the wilderness. Jesus became the goat that was killed so that its blood would wash the people clean so they could stand before their God. This is what Jesus has done for us.

We are truly blessed compared to those in the days of Aaron and Moses. Sandy Koufax would not pitch in the first game of the World Series to celebrate an old ritual from the Old Testament days. How much more should we honor the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ for becoming our atonement before our Holy Father? Now we can enjoy His Spirit living within us. We don't have to wait for Easter to give thanks. Let's give thanks today for Jesus being our atonement for our sins before God. Are you thankful today?

*New International Bible Dictionary.* Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1987.

*NLT Life Application Study Bible.* Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, 1996

Spurgeon, Charles. *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia vol.1.* Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, 1984

*The Hebrew – Greek Key Study Bible.* AMG Publishers: Chattanooga, 1984