

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: November 19, 2017
Lesson Title: "Set Free"
Lesson Passage: Leviticus 16:2-10,29-30

ABOUT THIS LESSON

The first verse of Leviticus 16 links this chapter with the tragic episode that was noted in last week's lesson, the deaths of the two sons of Aaron who had violated the rules of approved priestly procedure when offering burnt sacrifices (*recall Lev. 10:1-3*). Thus, this chapter lays out meticulous rules for priestly conduct as they lead worship ceremonies on the Day of Atonement. Our lesson passage first names the animals needed for the ceremonies, and specifies regulations for priestly dress (16:3-5). Then we have an outline of the ceremonies (16:6-10), and, finally, a discussion of the people's duties (16:29-30).

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

- (1) Describe the primary purpose of the Day of Atonement.
- (2) Explain the meaning of sending the goat to "Azazel."

BEGINNING THE LESSON

*Ask a volunteer to explain the meaning of the word "scapegoat" (a term that usually refers to an innocent party who takes the blame for the mistakes of others). Invite class members to offer examples of "scapegoating." Then, recall one of the classic examples in American folklore, the rumor that "Mrs. O'Leary's cow started the Chicago fire of 1871 by kicking over a lantern." (The Chicago Tribune later admitted to making the story up, but Mrs. O'Leary suffered the accusations for the rest of her life.) **Then relate this to the lesson:** One of the rituals that was always included in Israel's "Day of Atonement" ceremonies was sending a scapegoat into the wilderness, bearing the sins of the people (*read Lev. 16:8-10, then indicate that more will be said about this later*).*

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. *Observe that this lesson has to do with the biblical origin of Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), the most solemn holy day of all Israelite feasts and festivals, a day of seeking forgiveness for sins of the past.*

2. *The continuing superiority of Moses is revealed in Lev. 16:2, where he, not Aaron the high priest, is the recipient of the Lord's instructions. Moses is told to warn Aaron that even he, the high priest, must not enter the holy of holies whenever he likes, because that was the place where God's glory "appeared in a cloud over the mercy seat."*
NOTE: In view of the subsequent instructions concerning the precautions he must take when entering the sanctuary (vv. 3-5), this was taken to mean that the high priest could go into the inner sanctuary only one day in the year, the Day of Atonement.

3. *Review the instructions for the high priest in Lev. 16:3-5:* (1) The prescribed vestments listed in v. 4 (a shirt, shorts, sash and turban all made of linen) were much less flamboyant than the usual high-priestly uniform (described in Exodus 28) which made him look like a king. On the Day of Atonement, in the presence of God, he must look like a slave.

4. *The solemn ceremony is outlined in Lev. 16:6-10:* (1) Aaron offers a bull as a purification offering for himself and the priests (v. 6). (2) Aaron casts lots to decide which goat is to be sacrificed as a purification offering for the people, and which is to be sent into the wilderness (vv. 7-8). (3) The goat for the purification offering is sacrificed (v. 9). (4) The other goat is brought before the Lord and then driven into the wilderness (v. 10). NOTE: Verse 10 says that the "scapegoat" must be "sent to Azazel into the wilderness." Though theories on the subject abound, speculation is useless, because no one knows the meaning of Azazel. But the symbolism of this ceremony is made plain in verses 21-22. After being chosen by lot, the animal is brought before the high priest, who places both hands on the goat's head and confesses all the nation's sins, thus symbolically transferring the sins to the goat, which is then led off into the wilderness "into a region that is cut off" (v. 22). (Possibly, this refers to an area that is separated from the Israelites by a deep canyon.) Suggest that the meaning of this ritual is expressed beautifully in Psalm 103:12, "as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us."

5. *Observe that, up to this point, the account has concentrated almost entirely on what the high priest and his assistants had to do on this holy day. But verses 29-30 emphasize what the people had to do on the Day of Atonement:* (1) "You must afflict yourselves and not do any work" (v. 29, repeated in v. 31) makes it clear that the day of atonement must be a sabbath, a day of solemn rest, when no work is to be done. "Afflict yourselves" probably refers to fasting and prayer. (Refer to Psalm 35:13, "I afflicted myself with fasting, I prayed with my head bowed on my bosom.") (2) "It is a permanent rule," repeated three times in vv. 29, 31, 34) emphasizes how important it was for the people to do their part.

CLOSING THE LESSON

To bring the lesson to a close, refer to the radically different Christian interpretation of the Day of Atonement: Christ on the cross achieved what the high priests of the Old Testament had attempted to do on the Day of Atonement. When he was crucified, the veil of the temple was rent in two (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). This means that, now, all believers have the right to enter into the presence of God (Hebrews 10:19). Now, every believer has the right that once was reserved only for the high priest, the right to enter into the presence of God. He could go in but once a year; we can draw near at any time.

L. Coleman PO Box 2951, Weatherford TX 76086 <luciencoleman@gmail.com>