



## Daily Verse and Comment

### Leviticus 23:26-32

(26) And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, (27) Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD. (28) And ye shall do no work in that same day: for it is a day of atonement, to make an atonement for you before the LORD your God. (29) For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people. (30) And whatsoever soul it be that doeth any work in that same day, the same soul will I destroy from among his people. (31) Ye shall do no manner of work: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. (32) It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath.

*King James Version*

It should not come as a surprise that the [Day of Atonement](#) is the most unusual holy day of the year. Each holy day has its distinctive traits. As examples, the [Feast of Unleavened Bread](#) has us eating unleavened bread for a week, and Pentecost has the unusual aspect of counting. But for outsiders, Atonement is just plain weird. They think it very strange that we will voluntarily not eat or drink for an entire day.

Of course, in this distinction—which is called "fasting" or "afflicting our souls"—resides a great deal of the day's spiritual instruction. Fasting teaches us to realize just how dependent we are on [God](#). Every day, every hour, every minute, He supplies us with everything we need for life. If He suddenly failed to do so or forgot or stopped caring, how quickly we would die! This day teaches us how frail and needy we are—how much we need God.

When we apply this understanding of how much God supplies to our spiritual life, we come to a stunning realization about how much He provides to us throughout our conversions. It begins with His revealing Himself to us, calling us, forgiving us, and giving us understanding—and so on, all the way to giving us eternal life! He supplies all we need to grow and bear fruit and prepare for His Kingdom.

Recognizing this leads us to feel humble and full of awe of Him, as well as eternally grateful for the things that He has done. It should cause us, as shown in Isaiah 58, to make a proper response, which is to treat others better by sacrificing for them and showing them outgoing concern. If God does so much for us, we should reciprocate by doing good things for others.

Another strange aspect of the Day of Atonement is that it puts [two goats](#) front and center (Leviticus 16). One goat in this [Old Testament](#) ritual is chosen for the Lord, and it is sacrificed, its blood sprinkled by the high priest on the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies, which he enters just this one time each year. The other goat, the *azazel* goat, is left alive, and all the sins of the people are laid on its head. Instead of being slain, it is led into the wilderness and abandoned.

This ritual contains the heart of this holy day's meaning: the need and the means of atonement for [sin](#). Because of that, the possibility of unity with God opens up. Without such atonement, humankind cannot be at one with Him, which is God's ultimate goal.

Many people believe the *azazel* goat represents [Satan](#), and through the Atonement ritual, God shows how He will deal with the problem of Satan and his broadcasts of his rebellious, anti-God attitudes to humanity as "the prince of the power of the air" ([Ephesians 2:2](#)). However, this cannot be correct, as Satan does not—cannot—bear away or remove human sin. That is a job only Christ, the Lord, can do ([Hebrews 9:28](#); [1 Peter 2:24](#); [Isaiah 53:4-6](#); [53:11-12](#)), as [Psalm 103:12](#) makes clear: "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."

Because Jesus Christ's dual roles of paying for sin through His sacrifice and removing sin through complete forgiveness cannot be symbolized in a single ritual, God divides them between the two goats. The Devil and his guilt are

nowhere contemplated in the Atonement ritual because Satan has no place or part in God's unilateral initiative to resolve the burdensome problem of human sin. God and Christ took it upon themselves to do what was necessary to bring about reconciliation with sinful humanity (see [Romans 5:6-11](#)). (For further information on the Atonement ritual, please see "[Who Fulfills the Azazel Goat—Satan or Christ \(Part One\)](#)".)

The Day of Atonement is also an extraordinarily solemn day. Realizing the cost of God's grace, our observance of Atonement should make us feel humble, grieved, needy, and absolutely powerless. Even so, we should also feel a kind of [joy](#) and a great deal of gratitude knowing that God has provided an effective and powerful means of atonement for us through His Son [Jesus Christ](#). Our Savior endured suffering and death for us, so that we could be cleared of sin, have access to the Father, and in time be united with God forever. Without His atoning work, we would have no hope of good and no future.

Atonement contains another oddity, one that has to do with what we do or—more exactly—what we do *not* do on this particular holy day. God instructs us on all the other [holy days](#) not to do any "customary work" (see Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28-29), which is our everyday labor, but for the Day of Atonement, the instruction to do no work on this day is far more emphatic. God even uses a different word for "work" in [Numbers 29:7](#) (*mela'kah*, *Strong's* #4399) to stress that He forbids *any* kind of work on this holy day.

In His instructions about this day in [Leviticus 23:26-32](#), God mentions not doing any work on this day three times. He says to do "no work," "[not] any work," and "no manner of work." This is a day in which we are to be completely at rest. His intention in this regard is so insistent that, once, He threatens to take the life of anyone who works on it: "Any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people." He means it!

In [Leviticus 23:32](#), God calls the Day of Atonement "a [sabbath](#) of solemn rest." In Hebrew, it is literally "a sabbath of sabbaths," which is a superlative construction unique to that language. "Holy of Holies" and "Song of Songs" are similar phrases, doubling the same word to show that the thing in question is the greatest or best of its kind. Thus, the Holy of Holies was the

holiest place of all in the Temple, and the Song of Songs is the most beautiful and best of songs. So the Day of Atonement is the exceptional Sabbath-rest, and as such, of all the Sabbaths of the year, we are to do no work at all.

The reason for this has to do with the fact that it is impossible for us to atone for ourselves. Once we sin, no work on our parts could ever make up for our disobedience and the evils that follow. It took the sacrifice of Christ and the grace of God to make that happen ([Ephesians 2:4-9](#)). We had no part in it whatever, and Atonement reminds us of that each year. Only God's efforts can bring about forgiveness and reconciliation.

God was purposeful in including so many peculiarities in the Day of Atonement. It is intended to be strange for the purpose of capturing our interest. These oddities are supposed to jump out at us, so that we dig deeply for their meanings and receive the full benefit of God's instruction in them.

— Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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**[The Peculiarities of Atonement](#)**

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