

The Naked Bible Podcast 2.0

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“Leviticus 16”

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With

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Leviticus 16

This episode focuses on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) ritual. Unlike many popular commentaries teach, this important Old Testament ritual was about “resetting” the tabernacle/temple sanctuary, its priesthood, and the Israelite people to the state of ritual purity (holiness) evident when the entire Levitical system and the Tabernacle was originally sanctified in Leviticus 8. The episode reviews the nature of “atonement” language discussed in earlier episodes, the matter of the goat “for Azazel,” and the conceptual meaning of the “mercy seat.”

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 76, Leviticus 16. I'm your layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, how are you doing this week?

MSH: Very good, very good.

TS: Did you have a good Thanksgiving?

MSH: We did. We had a couple of families over and some little kids. All my kids were there but they're not little anymore so yeah, we had a good time.

TS: Did you do the traditional turkey and stuffing and all that?

MSH: Yup, even the green bean casserole thing so it was real traditional.

TS: Do you actually help cook?

MSH: I don't cook. I probably did dishes half a dozen times. Our dishwasher decided it was going to break. That was great.

TS: Did you watch football?

MSH: Yeah, unfortunately I watched the Packers lay an egg. What can I say?

TS: Well, I won't rub it in too much because Romo broke his collarbone, so I can't say too much

MSH: Maybe the Packers and Cowboys could play each other the rest of the way. They might each win a couple of games.

TS: Well, no, because the refs will just say Dez didn't catch any balls and the Packers will just win. Well Mike, we decided to include Leviticus 15 back in the past episode so I was wondering if you could just summarize Leviticus 15 for us real quick and I had a particular question on why does Leviticus specify for men, semen?

MSH: Going back to the episode, the reason we sort of folded Leviticus 15 back into that episode because I actually talked quite a bit about what was going on in chapter 15 in conjunction with the earlier episode, which covered 12 to 14, but now we're going to relabel it 12 through 15. And going back to the seminal discharges, we talked about how the loss of life-giving fluids, that which God has given to us to create life and he is the source of life. So the diminishment of that that I think is the logic behind the status of impurity there, to remind people that they are lesser. They're not fit for sacred space because of this power, if you will, this ability given by the life giver has been diminished.

So that gets folded into it and we mention real briefly in that last episode in a prescientific culture, the equivalent of that for the female, for a woman was also considered to be part of the procreative process, part of how children were conceived. And so that's part of the logic, too. But you have other discharges as well that would be viewed as abnormalities especially when it comes to the female side. And if you'll notice back in Leviticus 15, the same kind of language for that was associated with menstruation, so there the issue is blood, the loss of blood, that sort of thing. So people can pick up a little bit of that if they go back to Chapter 15 and give that a listen. But we dipped into it so many times in the previous episode that I really can't spend a whole episode on chapter 15 without it being quite repetitive, so hence, we're moving onto Chapter 16.

Well, let's jump in here to 16. In many ways this is the episode that people have been sort of looking for because Leviticus 16 is another one of these chapters that if you're familiar with anything in Leviticus, it's probably this chapter. We had the dietary laws. Most people are familiar with those but this one probably trumps even those because it's the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, which is still practiced in some form in Judaism today. And the biblical form of it was altered even in biblical times because of the loss of the temple so we're more familiar with this because it is still current actually. So just generally, the general rationale as we go through Leviticus 16, and we'll basically go through most of the chapter, the chapter is concerned with the removal and, not just the removal, but the destruction of impurity. So a couple of things to note in that regard, and as you listen to this you need to be focused on impurity because we take this language, Day of Atonement, and because of the New Testament or because of the way we've been taught about the Old Testament, probably both, we look at this terminology and associate it with forgiveness of sins, and that kind of thing.

That is not the way it's cast in Leviticus 16 even though in the absence of the temple in later Judaism, that sort of became the focus because you don't have a temple. So you can't really talk about impurity, cleansing the sanctuary because you'll notice as we go through Leviticus 16 that the blood of the sacrificed goat and the "sin offerings", which hearkening back to Leviticus 4 are actually purification offerings or decontamination offerings. The blood of those sacrifices is used to purify the sanctuary, the tabernacle, holy place. It is not applied to people. It's not applied to humans. So right away you have a disconnect with the New Testament conception of atonement and Jesus and whatnot. So let's try to keep impurity in our minds as we go through the chapter here. And second thought, the goat for Azazel, if that's an unfamiliar phrase to listeners, I'll catch you up when we hit that point in the passage. But the goat for Azazel, often translated scapegoat rather unfortunately and I would say inaccurately, gets driven into the wilderness, so this is also a ritual of riddance, getting rid of something. So you have removal of impurity.

You have destruction of impurity in the sense that it is cast out of the community. Impurity is cast out of the community, which is another way of saying it's driven away from sacred space. So the emphasis is on protecting sacred space and really, you can summarize Leviticus 16 with a very modern term and that is Leviticus 16 is essentially a reset button. You're hitting reset because it takes the sanctuary, it takes the holy instruments, the vessels associated with service in the sanctuary and the holy place, and even the people, it restores, and that includes the priesthood obviously, but it restores everything and everyone to that state at which everything and everyone was back in Leviticus 8 when the tabernacle and the priesthood and

everything was sanctified for the first time so that it could be used to accomplish what needed to be accomplished in the ritual system of sacrifices and offerings.

So it's essentially a reset button. That might be helpful to think of it that way, so resetting the whole system so that we can sort of start over now once a year and everything that was in a state of impurity is now taken care of and we're set to go again. Now in regard to a few more thoughts before we actually jump into the first verse here, in regard to the removal of impurity and the sacred space idea, the rationale also in part helps us to understand what's going on in the mind of the Israelite in the sense that if we don't do this, if we don't hit the reset button, if we don't make absolutely sure at least once a year that everything is restored to the way it could be, that nothing has been omitted by our own ignorance or our own oversight, here's a ceremony that gives us the opportunity to just start over again.

If we don't do this, there's a threat that God could withdraw from the sanctuary because it's defiled, because something is being perpetually overlooked and that means the alienation of God's presence from the community. So the picture is the sanctuary is under constant threat of impurity both from the priesthood and the people who functioned in it had jobs to do there, anyone who happened to be rendered impure due to some oversight on their own part, some negligence because ritual impurities were considered contagious. There were certain things we've talked about already in Leviticus that if you overlooked your need to be restored to ritual purity and you interacted with someone else then they became impure and so on-and-so on and so on -and-so on. So the reset button was really important. I want to share a quote from Levine lastly before we jump into this. I mentioned a few minutes ago that this is still current, which is why it's familiar. It had to be modified in the absence of a temple but I came across a quote from Levine that I think is interesting and you get something to just store away in our heads as we jump into the first verse. He writes this,

“The ancient view of Yom Kippur is somewhat different from that which came to predominate in later Judaism. So the biblical view is a little bit different than what happens later on in Judaism especially in the centuries following instruction of the second Temple of Jerusalem in 70 CE or 70 A.D. Atonement for the sins of the people eventually replaced the purification of the sanctuary as the central theme of Yom Kippur. **[MSH: and that was pragmatic, and this is me talking. it was pragmatic because we don't have a temple so we can't talk about purifying the sacred space anymore. So this day was observed because all that's left is the people. The emphasis of the ceremony of the day, whatever ceremonial acts are enacted by rabbis on this day, the focus became the people, the purification people, the atonement for the sins of the people. That is not how it's described in Leviticus 16 because the blood is never applied to people. It's only applied to the sanctuary as we'll see in verse 30. We're back to Levine now]** In verse 30, and I'll paraphrase for the sake of time, there was a sense that while we're purifying the sanctuary that the people were also reset as well, so this idea that was current in later Judaism is sort of resident and present in Leviticus 16, that's sort of a little seed thought. The kernel of it is present in Leviticus 16 but the emphasis in Leviticus 16 is very obviously the sanctuary itself. So in the absence of a sanctuary, this is really the only

part of the chapter that can really get meaningful attention in later Judaism. So you only actually have, and Levine points this out in his commentary in relation to this quote. There's only a couple times when the blood generally of any sacrifice is applied to the people, to the congregation as opposed to the high priest, the thumb and the earlobe because the high priest represents the people. There's only a couple of times when blood of a sacrifice is actually applied corporately to the people in a sacrificial act and that's Exodus 19, which is before God comes as a theophany, theophanic appearance there at Mount Sinai before the covenant ceremony to embrace the law that God is about to give. When all that was enacted, there's a ceremony that involves blood being put upon the people at large, and then in Exodus 24 when the Sinai covenant is actually enacted.

MSH: These are only places you see this sort of thing happening corporately. It does not happen in Leviticus 16. But yet, the idea that the people are sort of subsumed within the reset button is actually there. So let's jump into Leviticus 16. We'll start with the first few verses, and I'm reading from the ESV We've seen this passage before so I won't say too much about it.

The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died, ² and the LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat. ³ But in this way Aaron shall come into the Holy Place

MSH: Then we get the instructions for the Day of Atonement. So, note the phrase that references back to death the sons of Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, which is Leviticus 10. We spent a whole episode on that. This language here we said connects or at least informs us to help understand what likely happened in Leviticus 10, that they had penetrated inside the holy place to the point of the veil and only the high priest was supposed to do that. So that was apparently, it had a lot to do with why they were struck down and so God says in this chapter hey, tell Aaron, he says to Moses, tell Aaron you're brother, he's not allowed in here just anytime, into the holy place inside the veil.

You just not allowed to do this. Only once a year so now verse 3. Let me describe to you, God says, the way Aaron should enter this place, and of course, when. So that sort of the leadoff. Notice as well in verse 2, it's kind of an interesting phrase. God says, 'for I will appear in the cloud over the Mercy seat.' The word appear here is *raah* in Hebrew and it is the same term used for visible appearance elsewhere when we have like the word of the Lord or Yahweh appearing in human form. For instance, this is the word in Genesis 12:7 when the word of the Lord comes to Abram, Yahweh comes to Abram. The parallel is Chapter 15, 17:1, 18:1 (that's when Yahweh shows up with two Angels appearing as men and they have a meal). This is the same term there. It's also used of the Malach Adonia, the Malach Yahweh, the Angel of Yahweh, and Exodus 3, the burning bush incident.

We have Judges 6 with Gideon, Judges 13 with Sampson's parents, and so it is very possible here that what you have here is that on this one day of the year, Aaron the high priest

would go, or whoever was the high priest when they were doing this, inside the veil and see God in human form on the mercy seat with his feet resting on the Ark. The Ark is referred to as the footstool in other passages. So apparently Aaron or the high priest, whoever was the high priest, this is the time of year they might actually see a theophany. They might actually see a visible appearance of the God of Israel in this place on this occasion because he appears in the cloud. It doesn't say he appears as the cloud. God says I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat. Just a little side note there for people who've read the Unseen Realm. I don't get into that in the book, that's the specific passage, but there you go. We have another instance of this kind of vocabulary here in Leviticus 16. So starting again in verse 3,

³ But in this way Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with a bull from the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. ⁴ He shall put on the holy linen coat and shall have the linen undergarment on his body, and he shall tie the linen sash around his waist, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water and then put them on. ⁵ And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.

MSH: Now just a few observations here. The main figure in the ritual is obviously the high priest so that the rightness or the efficacy of the ritual, doing it correctly and not violating, not having a problem like you had in Leviticus 10 with Nadab and Abihu. All that depended on the high priest. He has to bathe. He has to wear a lot of linen, linen coat, linen turban, linen sash. Now, if you go back to Leviticus 8 and back in Exodus in the later chapters 28-29 around there, that's when we get a description of the normal clothing, the normal vestments of the high priest which had lots of gold and jewels, lots of costly fabrics that were dyed different colors. Here, it's much simpler. It's just linens, it's just linens here. For this ritual then, the high priest wears something a lot more simple, sort of stripped down.

A lot of the fanciness, if you will, is taken away from the high priest as he is about to enter into the Most Holy place and perform what needs to be done on this particular day, the Day of Atonement. So the implication is that these linen garments, doesn't really give the color but they're undyed so something very plain. But the implication is that these linen garments are prepared for this occasion specifically. Simple unadorned intercessor is the role of the high priest. He's stripped of all signs of status just as simple as you can get. So the high priest is the key person. He apparently goes to a specific location within the tent of meeting complex to take off his normal garments and change into the simple ones.

That's based on verse 23 which is after the ritual we get the comment that Aaron shall come into the tent of meeting and shall take off the linen garments they put on when he went to the holy place and shall leave them there. Apparently he gets redressed in his normal garb for when he's on sacred space. So it's just stripped of all signs of status. Aaron also has to provide a bull for the sin or the purification, the decontamination offering, his own bull apparently from his own herd because in verse five we get a reference to taking from the congregation two male goats for a sin offering and one ram and that line is not back here in verse three. So apparently, this is something that Aaron the high priest, whoever was the high priest, has to take from his own herd for his own sin offering. That makes sense. The community would provide two male goats and then a ram for their offerings.

The two goats, one of them, the reason why you have both goats referred to as a sin offering, a purification or decontamination offering, even though only one of them will end up being sacrificed. The reason for that is that the lots have not been cast yet over these two. So since we don't know yet which ones going to be the actual sin offering, they're both referred to that way. We don't know which one's going to be for the Lord, which one was to be for Azazel. We'll get Azazel in a moment. At this point either could be the sin offering so that's why we have the language here. The burnt offering, after the ritual's done, the burnt offering, if you remember back to our discussion of burnt offerings, this was visiting God's house to sort of establish a relationship with him. Once the sanctuary has been decontaminated, then the role of the burnt offering is there to reestablish, reset a direct relationship with the God of Israel, that now Israel is accepted into My presence. They've been decontaminated so sure, come on over. Come on over to Yahweh's house and that sort of thing. So Leviticus 16:6, just continue on here.

⁶“Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. ⁷ Then he shall take the two goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting. ⁸ And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel. ⁹ And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and use it as a sin offering, ¹⁰ but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it,

MSH: And I would say a better way to translate that is to make expiation with it, or to make a purging with it. The whole notion of the sin offering is decontamination, purification but in the instance of this live goat, the idea, falling back to atonement, has to do with the person or in this case its representative for the whole congregation, for them to be purged of any sort of flaw or contaminate or if there's anything amiss that's marring the relationship between us and God, well, those things, those issues, those sins, those problems, whatever you want to call it, those impurities will at the end of verse 10 to be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel. So this takes us into two issues here we need to discuss. Going back to Leviticus 4, the whole language of atonement, if you remember from that episode, the Hebrew *kapper*, with two 'p's there, *kapper*, really comes from the Akkadian verb *kuppuru*, which means to wipe off or burnish or cleanse or purge, that kind of thing.

Now in cultic terms and ritual terms this meant that expiation was conceived of as a cleansing or wiping away of impurity, getting rid of contamination. Now we really need to be more specific here. The point of that language, that verb in Akkadian and, hence, in Hebrew, is not that *kapper*, the Hebrew *kapper*, refers to the action of wiping. Rather, it's more abstract. The term really refers to the fact that the person, in this case the whole people, have been purged or purified in the sense that God looks upon what's being done in the ritual according to his command and he responds in such a way to indicate that, well, now that you've done this, you're acceptable to me. You have been purged from anything that would mar our relationship. You are now fit for sacred space. So the point of the verb is not the wiping action, not any activity but rather the point is the result that you have been made acceptable now. You've been purged from impurity.

Even more specifically in the context of Leviticus 16, which is where we're camping here today, the goat for Azazel, the one that's not sacrificed, purges the people from impurity by removing the impurity out of the camp away from sacred space and into the wilderness which is the domain of Azazel. This harkens back to the whole concept of cosmic geography, turf that is foreign to Yahweh's domain, Yahweh's presence, and in fact, hostile to Yahweh's presence, and Yahweh's domain. This is where you put impurities. You drive them out. You remove them from sacred space to protect the sanctity of not only the tabernacle and its vessels and the place upon which it rests, but also the people. This is a reset button for the nation in this ritual. Now along with that, we can't understand this goat, which is never sacrificed, this goat, which is sent out into the wilderness because that's where Azazel is. This is not an offering to Azazel because there's no ritual killing here.

Rather the goat is just a vehicle for the removal of impurity so that you send impurity to where it belongs, to the realm in which it belongs and that realm is where Yahweh is not. Yahweh is not associated with impurity. He is not associated with flaws and imperfections of any kind. His turf, his domain and his people are holy. They are sanctified, and so impurity must be removed. So it's not like an offering like Azazel is appeased or anything like that. Actually, Azazel, I shouldn't probably be so crude picas but I was going to say just a load of you know what, CRAP. That's what is happening here. We don't want impurities here. You're impure by definition because you're not Yahweh. So you take him.

This is where they belong, that kind of thing. It's not an appeasement. It's basically dumping what you don't want in the place where it belongs. Now a lot of translations don't read Azazel here. They have scapegoat and I discussed this in a fair amount of detail in the Unseen Realm. For those who have the book, it's specifically pages 176 and 177. I'm going to read a few short excerpts from that for those who don't understand what the world is this crazy man talking about Azazel here. My Bible doesn't say anything like that. Well, here's essentially why. So this is from Unseen Realm. I wrote,

The word "Azazel" in the Hebrew text can be translated "the goat that goes away." This is the justification for the common "scapegoat" translation in some English versions. The scapegoat, so the translator has it, symbolically carries the sins of the people away from the camp of Israel into the wilderness. Seems simple enough. However, "Azazel" is really a proper name. In Lev 16:8 one goat is "*for* Yahweh," while the other goat is "*for* Azazel." Since Yahweh is a proper name and the goats are described in the same way, Hebrew parallelism informs us that Azazel is also a proper name. What needs resolution is what it means.

MSH: So the issue is the five consonants. You keep them together it's a proper name. You separate them then you have goat that goes away. Now the whole goat that goes away idea, this is just me talking. I'm not quoting anything here from the book. This whole idea could work if it wasn't for verse 26 and frankly, it could work if you've sort of just wanted to close your eyes at cosmic geography and other things in the Unseen Realm, too. But let's just focus on verse 26. Verse 26 throws a wrench into the goat that goes away because if you translate Azazel that way in verse 26, here's what you get.

The verse would say literally, He who lets the goat go to the goat that goes away. Now how does that make any sense, He who lets the goat go to the goat that goes away? It's much clearer if you translate he lets the goat go to Azazel, honoring the parallelism earlier in the chapter of Yahweh and Azazel. So it's clear from verse 26 and the phrases for Azazel and for Yahweh that a proper name is needed here because it just turns verse 26 into gibberish if you're reading, if you're accounting for all the Hebrew in the actual text. It just turns it into gibberish if you opt for the scapegoat idea. Translations cheat here and there all the time but we try not to cheat. Back to Unseen Realm, I made this comment.

“Azazel is regarded as the name of a demon in the Dead Sea Scrolls and other ancient Jewish books. In fact, in one scroll (4Q 180, 1:8) Azazel is the leader of the angels that sinned in Genesis 6:1–4.

MSH: That's Jewish tradition. We don't have anything biblical to establish that but it shows you what they were thinking. This is a hostile entity. It's just a bad guy, a demonic figure. The same description appears in 1 Enoch. Azazel shows up in Enoch as the name of a leader of the angels that sinned, the Watchers, in Genesis 6. This is sort of, I don't want to go too far back into this but if you read the book and you sort of have an understanding of where demons come from. In all of Jewish tradition, Jewish theology the origin of demons is intimately tied to the fallout of what happens in Genesis 6:1-4 with the Nephilim as well. So it is very understandable why you'd have certain Dead Sea Scrolls that link Azazel, a demonic figure that now is sort of roaming the earth because that's what the demons do according to Enoch, when they're disembodied. Demons are the result of killing a Nephilim.

So a disembodied spirit of a Nephilim, but that's what the demons are. It's very natural to sort of identify one of these with the whole incident back in Genesis 6, and that's what's happening in 4 Q180. And that's not the only place either, but in that text you specifically have Azazel mentioned. What it tells us, and there's nothing really biblical that you can piece together to get that whole thought trajectory other than the origin of demons. I would argue that that does have hooks back into the biblical text, where demons come from. But as far as the more specific details here, we may not have that but it shows what people are thinking. It shows that people are looking back at Azazel. Jews are looking at this term in Leviticus 8 and they're thinking entity. They're thinking demon. They're not thinking scapegoat in the way that some of our English translations handle it. They're thinking something much different and I think properly so. So let's go back to Leviticus 16 here. The purification of the sanctuary happens in verse 11, so like what happens with all the goats and everything. Well verse 11 picks up and says,

¹¹ “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. ¹² 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 ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵“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. ¹⁶Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses. ¹⁷No one may be in the tent of meeting from the time he enters to make atonement in the Holy Place until he comes out and has made atonement for himself and for his house and for all the assembly of Israel. ¹⁸Then he shall go out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and some of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar all around. ¹⁹And he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it and consecrate it from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel.

MSH: That’s 11-19. A few observations here, we’re not told who helps Aaron but he had to have assistance for some of these functions because you can’t be killing the bull and holding the sensor and doing the incense thing all at the same time. So apparently there’s somebody with him, helping him out but he is the one that is responsible for all of the ritual acts here to be done properly. Then that other person as indicated here, the other person is going to have to either leave or maybe some of this is prepared beforehand and Aaron puts it on a table. We don't know. He’s only got two arms so there's an issue there or at least something we don’t often think about. But any assistance he had or any procedural thing he did to help himself out isn't really mentioned here.

Mercy seat, I should say a few things about. This is a common translation, reading the ESV, this is not a good translation although it's a traditional one. The reason it gets translated mercy seat is that we have here a noun *kapporeth* formed from the lemma related to the verb *kapper*. So *kapper* and *kapporeth* have the *kaph* and the double P, K and two P's. One's a noun, one's a verb so the verb for atonement *kapper*; this is sort of a noun equivalent in Hebrew, *kapporeth*. And so since the verb gets this atonement language associated with it so the noun is referred to as the mercy seat because this is the result of the atonement. God is showing mercy and that is an abstracted interpretive translation.

More literally, if atonement, the verb *kapper*, means to purge then *kapporeth* should be the place of purging. In other words, we would really focus on the location not the result because calling it the mercy seat is sort of reading the theological result into the lemma. That's why it's not a great translation. There are other reasons, too. Let me just quote you something from Nahum Sarna’s commentary on Exodus when the Ark is being built with the lid. He says here,

“Mercy seat is in the English versions. This is based on the Septuagint and Vulgate translations which mean instrument of propitiation, getting it from this lemma relationship. It follows the usual sense of the Hebrew stem KPR, to atone or make expiation and this understanding would appear to be strengthened by the instruction in Leviticus 16:15 and 16 that at this spot in the holy of holiest, the high priest is to perform expiatory rights on the Day of Atonement. **[MSH: What**

I'm saying is is the focus should be on the location, not on the theological result as far as the translation goes. But Sarna makes another comment here. He says,] Nevertheless, mercy seat is not a satisfactory translation of *kapporeth* since the aspect of mercy is an interpretation and is not inherent in the word. **[MSH: That's just what I was saying. The translation a cover, some transitions will have covering or cover for *kapporeth* instead of mercy seat. He says, Sarna says,]** The translation a cover rests on a supposed primary meaning to cover for the Hebrew *kapper*, which is not the case. *Kapper* comes from Akkadian *kuppuru*, which is about purging. It's not about covering anything. It's about purging. So, these are English options that really are not satisfactory.”

MSH: Now think about it. Just think about what this object is. The *kapporeth* is the lid of the Ark. It is actually God's seat thrown since the ark is elsewhere described as God's footstool, for instance, 1 Chronicles 28:2, Psalm 99:5, Psalm 132:7. I'll just read one or two of these. Psalm 99:5 says,

Exalt the LORD our God;
worship at his footstool!
Holy is he!

MSH: 1 Chronicles 28:2,

² Then King David rose to his feet and said: “Hear me, my brothers and my people. I had it in my heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD and for the footstool of our God, and I made preparations for building.

MSH: Again, the Ark associated with this idea of being a footstool, Lamentations 2:1 another instance. So the lid goes over the Ark, the *kapporeth*, which is placed atop the *aron*, that's the Hebrew word for Ark, is actually God's seat thrown and the Ark is his footstool. So the imagery is that God is sitting on this golden slab, this is solid gold, also atop of which are fixed two cherubim. So it's a cherubim throne. The lid, the *kapporeth*, is a cherubim throne. The Ark is underneath where God's feet rest. That's the imagery. Sarna comments a little bit on the cherubim. He says,

“At either end of the *kapporeth* a cherub was hammered out. The two cherubim faced each other with their heads bent slightly downward. Their fully outstretched wings returned upward sheltering the main body of the lid and the Ark below. Verse 22 as well as Numbers 7:8-9 make clear that the divine voice was thought to issue from the space above the lid and between the two cherubim. **[MSH: And if we take the theophanic language that began this chapter, Leviticus 16:2, where God says I will appear in the cloud, then you've actually could have a visible form of an enthroned deity, the enthroned Yahweh at the *kapporeth* because it was his seat throne. Going back to Sarna, Sarna says,]** This makes clear again that the *kapporeth* with its cherubim would support the

invisible throne of God. It explains a frequently employed epithet of God as the one who “is enthroned between the cherubim.” [MSH: Various verses use that language, 1 Samuel 4:4, 2 Samuel 6:2, so-and-so forth.] The imagery of the footstool of the throne evokes the conception of God as King.

MSH: We don't often think of Leviticus 16 as a throne room scene but that's what it is. It's God as King enthroned on the cherubim. Those of you who followed my blog, and even the paleobabble blog, when I talk about the throne iconography, and in Unseen Realm throne iconography, very clear examples of this was a familiar idea because cherubim, just as *kapper* comes from Akkadian *kupporuru*, cherub, *kerub*, comes from an Akkadian term as well and it refers to a throne guardian. It is just throne imagery left and right but we often don't think about that when we're reading through Leviticus 16 because we have translations like mercy seat. That doesn't really conjure up any sort of throne imagery at all, and frankly neither does lid, neither does cover, neither does place of purging if you wanted to take *kappor* and be very literal with it. I actually think a really good translation here would be throne, seat throne, or something like that because conceptually that's what it is.

Now that wouldn't be a good translation in terms of literalism, things that are wrapped up in the lemma, but it captures the point of the description that's going on here and elsewhere. We can talk about translation philosophy at some other point. So in verse 13, we have the phrase that this is how you approach it. You put the incense up there. You got God sitting on his seat throne right here. You do it this way with the incense cloud. You got to get that going first, burning, because you don't want the high priest to die in verse 13. And then we get into, in verses 16, 18,19, what happens with the blood. The blood is brought into the holy of holies and it's sprinkled on the throne seat. It's applied thereafter to the horns of the altar and the language is, He shall make atonement for the holy place. He shall make atonement for the altar. In other words, he shall purge the lid of the Ark, the throne seat. He shall purge the altar. He shall purge the holy place.

Thus shall you purge, decontaminate the holy place and its objects. This is not about forgiveness of moral wrongs because frankly, objects don't commit sins. It's talking about decontamination and purging of impurity. Verse 19 adds you cleanse it, you consecrate it from the uncleanness of the people of Israel. In other words, this is where impurity is going to arise, from the people, either the people who administer or conduct business inside of the holy place according to God's command. They're going to have contact with the masses so to speak, and one of them might be unclean. There's this constant threat of impurity and uncleanness, ritual impurity being brought into sacred space. And so that's why once a year, we just sort of got to take care of business here in a reset kind of way. Bring everything back to its original state. If we go to verse 20, that's not all.

²⁰“And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. ²¹ And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins.

MSH: Here's where you pick up the idea of moral problem, moral impurity. But this is the goat that isn't sacrificed. This is the goat for Azazel. It's not the goat for Yahweh. The goat for Yahweh is dedicated to purging and protecting sacred space and sacred objects from impurity.

²⁰“And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. ²¹ And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. ²² The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.

MSH: So sin is expunged. It is driven from sacred space. It is driven from the presence of God. Now back to the Unseen Realm, I'll quote another little selection here.

Recall that in intertestamental Judaism, the offending sons of God from Genesis 6 were believed to have been imprisoned in a pit or abyss in the netherworld. Azazel's realm was somewhere out in the desert, outside the confines of holy ground. It was a place associated with supernatural evil. The Old Testament itself does not state that Azazel was a demon. Scholars have, however, connected the name to Mot, the god of death. The identification of the term with a demon may also derive from cosmic geography and an association of the wilderness with the forces of chaos, which are hostile to God. This would make sense on several levels, as the desert would not only be a place forbidding to life but, as ground outside the camp of Israel and Yahweh, the source of life, would have a clear association with chaos. Leviticus 17:7 suggests that Israelites saw the desert as spiritually sinister: “So they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to goat demons, after whom they whore”. We are not told why they did this, but the placement of this problem in proximity to the ritual goat to Azazel suggests a conceptual connection. Jews of later periods certainly made such connections.

MSH: In other words, they were scared. They were scared of the outside world, the wilderness realm because it was a place associated with death, with Mot, with the underworld, with hostile spiritual forces, all this stuff. So apparently Leviticus 17:7 alludes to the fact that some Israelites were freaked out and they're sacrificing to keep the bad guys at bay. And so Leviticus says you're not going to do this anymore. This is not something that we do now. Once a year were going to send our sins on the goat that remains alive to Azazel, get rid of them, send them where they belong, that sort of thing. But it just tells you how they were thinking about sacred space devoted to Yahweh and to them. They're in communion with Yahweh and then basically everything else, especially the wilderness.

It just had these negative sinister associations attached to it. And you see wilderness imagery in lots of passages in the Old Testament, especially associated with this idea. You get it in the New Testament. Where does Jesus encounter the devil? Where else would you encounter him, in the wilderness, in the desert? That's normal that kind of thinking, that kind of theology,

that kind of cosmic geography is present in the New Testament as well. Now I have a note here in the Unseen Realm after the paragraph of Leviticus 17:7. It alludes to a JB Lightfoot noting that the Jewish practice later on in Jewish history about the goat for Azazel was to push the goat over a cliff to ensure that it never found its way back to holy ground. If you want to read that, look it up on Unseen Realm. This is kind of interesting that they took it that far. They were scared that the goat would find its way back and bring impurities back and who knows what else with it. So they would drive it over a cliff. Lastly here, we're five more verses in Leviticus 16 and then we'll wrap up. In verse 29, I'm not going to read the whole rest of the chapter but these five verses here we will.

²⁹“And it shall be a statute to you forever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you. ³⁰For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins. ³¹It is a Sabbath of solemn rest to you, and you shall afflict yourselves; it is a statute forever. ³²And the priest who is anointed and consecrated as priest in his father's place shall make atonement, wearing the holy linen garments. ³³He shall make atonement for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. ³⁴And this shall be a statute forever for you, that atonement may be made for the people of Israel once in the year because of all their sins.” And Aaron did as the LORD commanded Moses.

MSH: Everything, every person, every object, the entirety of sacred space is restored back to the condition that it was initially put in when all of it originated, when the whole system was set up, that very first day back in Leviticus 8 when the tabernacle and everything was sanctified so that now it could be used, now we can do it what needs to be done here. That's the purpose of Leviticus 16. And just some points for us, I think trying to summarize the things I've said a few minutes ago, I think it's really helpful to think of Leviticus 16 in light of the imagery of God as King. And he is the one who actually, it's not the high priest, He is the one who actually brings about the purging and the atonement by providing and accepting the ritual. The matter of purity has to be brought directly to his throne for his decision. That is where the ritual application of the blood begins. And it is the throne. It is the seat throne of God. It's not just a lid. It's not just a cover.

Mercy seat misses the point. Throne, I think throne is the best way to process what in the Israelite mind was happening here. The priest is stripped of all forms of status. He has to go in representing the people to the very throne of the King who he hopes will accept the ritual acts so that everything can be restored to a pristine spiritual condition as it was when it all started. I just think the imagery is helpful. Secondly, the result is that people are reset, purged. The blood is never applied to them. They are purged by virtue of the fact that God the king accepts the sacrifice, in other words, it's the grace of God. The blood is never applied to them. They are never sanctified by blood in the ritual. The holy space, the sacred space is sanctified and then their sins are carried away but God has to accept the point of the application of the blood and then even the sending of the way of the goat to Azazel.

It's up to God. It's up to God to do this, to accept that you've done this in good faith. You've been obedient. You tried to honor me for who I am. You have given me my proper place. You're obeying me because you believe I'm the God of gods and so on so forth. And God's good with that. We're all good for another year, at least you're supposed to be, enacting these rituals whenever impurity comes up but we're good. We're reset. We're back to the beginning again. Thirdly, the goat for Yahweh is the blood issue. The goat for Azazel is the removal of impurity. Both goats factor into the representation of how the New Testament describes salvation. In other words, when the New Testament talks about salvation, we are both made fit for God's presence, that's the purging part and our impurities, our sins as it were, are removed. That's the other goat, the living goat part.

So both sides of this ritual coin are sort of merged in the way the New Testament talks about salvation. So I think those three thoughts, trying to see the throne room of God here in this ritual I think is a good way for us to process it and use this chapter to help us think about the enthroned Christ and what happens on the cross, especially the way the New Testament, think of the irony, but especially the way the New Testament talks about the cross as enthronement. When Jesus was offered as a sacrifice to sin, he winds up, because he does that, at the right hand of God, enthroned at the right hand of God, all this enthronement talk that is associated with the crucifixion. I think that creates a good conceptual link back to Leviticus 16 that we can appreciate and process.