

# Lessons from and Old Goat

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## I. Introduction

- A. Have you ever wondered, “*Why is the Easter Bunny a bunny?*”
1. Actually the answer to that question gets a bit complicated
    - a. First, rabbits are were an ancient symbol of fertility and of spring
    - b. Second, European hares raise their young in a depression called a “form.”
      - 1) The form looks basically identical to the lapwing bird’s nest
      - 2) So eggs were found in hare’s form— the basis of Germanic myth
    - c. Third, coloring eggs became ancient springtime practice.
  2. Christians began celebrating a festival to the resurrection of Jesus
    - a. What they couldn’t decide on **when** the festival was to be held.
    - b. When a date was finally standardized, it was at the festival of Eostre
      - 1) Eostre was a Germanic goddess; her name was borrowed for Easter
      - 2) Many traditions associated with spring where also incorporated
  3. So by the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Germany, the Oschter Haws (Easter Hare) appears
    - a. Rabbit would bring colored eggs to children (in their cap or bonnet)
    - b. And the practice was brought to our country by German immigrants
- B. Easter traditions are fun; our Denbigh Easter Egg Hunt is on of those traditions
1. The children find the eggs and the parents eat all the candy. Traditions.
    - a. Some Christians can get concerned by the origin of some of the traditions.
    - b. Paul sees our focus as more important than tradition (**Rom 14:5-6a**)
  2. Our Easter is traditional and optional—the resurrection of Jesus is neither
    - a. Paul saw the resurrection as central to Christian faith (**1 Cor 15:17-19**)  
<sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.  
<sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. <sup>19</sup> If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.
    - b. At the center of the Christian faith is a cross and an empty tomb
    - c. This is not a traditional story that developed over time in history
  3. This is a message from God; this is the way to come back to God.
- C. I want us to focus on another festival today—Yom Kippur, Day of Atoement

## II. The Day of Atonement: Then (Leviticus 16)

- A. Look at Leviticus 16 as we briefly survey the details of Yom Kippur
1. Every detail was to emphasize that something about sin, holiness and God
    - a. High Priest bathed his entire body, not just his hands and feet
    - b. He wore simple white linen garments, not ornamented priestly robe.
  2. High Priest couldn't offer atonement for people until his sins are forgiven
    - a. A bull for his own sin offering was slaughtered as sacrifice (Lev 16:11)
    - b. He take its blood into the Most Holy Place to sprinkle on Mercy Seat
      - 1) This was the only time he was allowed into Most Holy Place
      - 2) This represented the presence of God, and he went there with blood
  3. Even with the blood of a sacrifice, he could not just enter (Lev 16:12-13)
    - a. A cloud of burning incense shrouded from view the ark of God
    - b. Three times in this chapter, a reference is made to priests dying
      - 1) The chapter begins referring to deaths of Nadab and Abihu (16:1)
      - 2) There is a warning about not entering Most Holy Place (16:2).
      - 3) Here the cloud conceals the ark so High Priest won't die (16:13).
- B. Here the day becomes a tale of two goats (**Reading:** Leviticus 16:15-22)
1. Lots were cast and the choice is made between the sacrifice and scapegoat
    - a. Later tradition, crimson wool was tied to scapegoat & thread to sacrifice.
    - b. The sacrificial goat was killed and its blood brought before the Lord.
      - 1) Once again blood is sprinkled on the cloud-shrouded Mercy Seat.
      - 2) Then blood of bull/goat was mixed and sprinkled on altar outside.
    - c. Notice that the blood of the goat cleansed the Tabernacle itself (16:20).
      - 1) That which symbolized the presence of God had been defiled by sin.
      - 2) It was the blood of the sacrifice that made atonement for that sin.
  2. Priest then laid his bloody hands on the head of the second goat.
    - a. The sins of the people were confessed and transferred to scapegoat.
    - b. The scapegoat was then led away and released into the desert.
      - 1) The sins of Israel were ceremonially carried away by scapegoat.
      - 2) Atonement for sin came through two goats—sacrifice and scapegoat

- C. The ritual of the Day of Atonement tells us something about God and sin.
1. **First**, it reminds us of the separation that is created by our sin
    - a. Tabernacle represented God presence, but it also showed this separation
    - b. Only the High Priest could come before God—and only in cloud incense
    - c. That which represented atonement also showed the distance sin caused.
  2. **Second**, the ritual also reminds us that our sin is very costly.
    - a. By the end of the day, the priests white robe was stained a deep crimson
    - b. Because of the sin of the guilty required the death of the innocent
    - c. Atonement was no neat and proper ceremony; it was grisly and bloody
  3. **Finally**, the ritual also reminds us that sin is a problem that we can't fix
    - a. We cannot deal with our sin problem and survive—wages of sin is death
    - b. Day of Atonement teaches us that we need sacrifice to take away our sin.
    - c. It also teaches that we need a scapegoat to carry our guilt far from us.

### III. Day of Atonement: Today

- A. The pomp and circumstance of the OT ritual must have been impressive
1. One ancient worshipper describes the appearance of High Priest—
 

*There the priest's appearance makes one awestruck and dumbfounded. A man would think he had come out of this world into another. I emphatically assert that every man who comes near the spectacle of what I have described will experience astonishment and amazement beyond words, his very being transformed by the hallowed arrangement on every single detail.*

    - a. High Priest was the representative of God; people felt that connection
    - b. This ritual certainly painted a striking picture, but it was only a picture
  2. Writer of Hebrews argues that this ritual only points to reality (**Heb 10:1-4**)
    - a. That it had to be repeated showed it was temporary and impermanent
    - b. That annual date on calendar reminded the Jews of their sins
      - 1) Ultimately, the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin.
      - 2) Bulls and goats were placeholders that point to what takes away sin
  3. The reality of Day of Atonement is found in Jesus Christ (**Heb 9:11-14**)
    - a. Jesus was the perfect High Priest, one who had no sin of His own
    - b. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice that made a forever atonement for sin
    - c. Jesus was the scapegoat who took our sins and carried them away
  4. At the center of Christianity is this message of a cross and empty tomb

- B. I think Special days like Easter or Christmas can help us focus in special ways
1. People are thinking more about Jesus today; that has to be a good thing
    - a. Last night TV was broadcasting “*Ten Commandments*” and “*The Robe*”
    - b. One of food channels had show on Easter recipes— that all good
    - c. Not good is if a special “*holy day*” makes other days less special or holy
      - 1) Mother’s Day is good if it reminds us to honor Mom in a special way
      - 2) What if Mother’s Day is the only time that we see Mom as special?
  2. What if Easter is the only time we think about the resurrection?
    - a. What if Christmas is the only time we see the reality of Christ’s coming
    - b. What if “*Good Friday*” is the only time we think about the cross?
    - c. What if Sunday during communion is the only time we think of cross?
  3. The point of the resurrection in the NT is the daily life to which it calls us
    - a. Old self was crucified so our new self can live in Him (**Rom 6:6,8**)
    - b. We are crucified with Christ and now we live through Him (**Gal 2:20**)
    - c. Like Jesus, we are crucified and live by God’s power (**2 Cor 13:4**)
- C. The Lord’s Supper is a weekly participation in power of the cross in our lives
1. This a simple ritual when compared to Yom Kippur (aren’t we grateful)
  2. It points **back** to the same reality to which Yom Kippur pointed **forward**
  3. It points to **blood of a sacrifice**; it points to **scapegoat** that carry away sin

#### **IV. Conclusion: Closing Comments on the Day**

- A. Closing comments and instructions for the rest of the day.
1. If you have a spiritual need or would like prayer—see one of our elders
  2. If you need to make this story yours story by accepting Jesus in baptism...
- B. We want to end with one more OT ritual-- first-fruits offering
1. The very first and best of the harvest was to offered to God (**Exo 23:16**)
    - a. This was to worship God and over to Him thanksgiving
    - b. But it was also to secure God’s blessing on the full harvest to come
  2. Paul calls Jesus “*firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*” (**1 Cor 15:20**)
  3. Jesus was raised; that guarantee that we will rise too. We will rise up!