

# Understanding God in the Old Testament

## A God of a New Covenant

### Leviticus 16-17

Turn with me this morning to the book of Leviticus - we will be looking specifically at chapters 16-17 and will see how the God that we serve is a God of a new Covenant. We have up to this point seen in Leviticus how God is a God who wants us to pursue a life of holiness (it is a pursuit and not an accomplishment) and how God is a God who wants us to be representatives or priests to our world. We are to offer prayers, rejoice, praise and our lives as sacrifices of ministry to our God.

We saw how the Old Testament priest offered sacrifices all day long and yet the great High Priest of Jesus Christ offered himself once and for all time, and then sat at the right hand of the father because his work was done. The priest was a minister to God and you and I are to live our lives as ministry not only to those around us but as ministering to God.

You and I today have this great privilege of ministering to our God through the way that we live. **Many times we focus so much of our time and effort on ministering to other people and we fail to connect that everything that we do is ministry to God.** Do everything as if you are doing for him. Even Jesus said it in **Matthew 25:40**:

*40 "And the King will say, 'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters,\* you were doing it to me!'"*

Instead of seeing our witnessing, or serving, or whatever else we do that has any religious connection as merely religious activity, we need to see it as ministering to the heart of our God. I pray that it becomes the motivating factor in doing all that we do with excellence and effort and not just do it because it needs to be done. You are a priest who is to represent the people of this world to God, and who is to minister to God bringing glory and honor to his name.

We then find in chapter 16 the instructions given by God for the day of atonement. This was the greatest day of the year for the Israelites because it was the day that Aaron would offer a sacrifice for the sins of Israel. The term atonement means "to cover". It was at this time that Aaron would offer two goats to the Lord.

The first goat he would sacrifice and sprinkle the blood of the animal on the atonement cover and front of the Ark of the Covenant. We know that according to **Hebrews 9:22**:

*For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.*

This was the payment for the sins of the people. Yet we read in Leviticus that a second goat was given. Upon it the Priest would confess the sins and rebellion of the people and he would then send it out into the wilderness. This is where we get the term scapegoat. In

the Hebrew it means “the goat of removal or separation” - One goat for forgiveness and the second for the separation of sin. **God’s goal has always been to bring forgiveness and relief of guilt so that we could come into his presence with freedom and relief.** **Psalm 103:12** tells us:

*12 He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.*

Although the Old Testament shows us God’s desires and character we do read that mankind was in such a bad state that it required an even greater sacrifice – that of Jesus Christ. **Hebrews 10:4-10** tells us:

*4 For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. 5 That is why, when Christ\* came into the world, he said to God, “You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings. But you have given me a body to offer. 6 You were not pleased with burnt offerings or other offerings for sin. 7 Then I said, ‘Look, I have come to do your will, O God— as is written about me in the Scriptures.’”\**  
*8 First, Christ said, “You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings or burnt offerings or other offerings for sin, nor were you pleased with them” (though they are required by the law of Moses). 9 Then he said, “Look, I have come to do your will.” He cancels the first covenant in order to put the second into effect. 10 For God’s will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time.*

Under the old testament (covenant or agreement) it was about keeping rules and regulations, offering animal sacrifices as payment for sin, trying to be acceptable or reformed by adherence to a list of expectations. Under the New Testament, we have a new agreement which still involves a blood sacrifice yet one founded on a perfect sacrifice. **Hebrews 7:18-21** tells us:

*18 Yes, the old requirement about the priesthood was set aside because it was weak and useless. 19 For the law never made anything perfect. But now we have confidence in a better hope, through which we draw near to God. 20 This new system was established with a solemn oath. Aaron’s descendants became priests without such an oath, 21 but there was an oath regarding Jesus. For God said to him, “The Lord has taken an oath and will not break his vow: ‘You are a priest forever.’”*

The new agreement is about Jesus Christ, not about legalism, formula’s or any other type of external motivation. **The law was about external reform, but the new covenant between us and God is about internal transformation.** In a book I am currently reading called, “The God-ward Gaze” the write pens these words.

The indwelling Christ will transform us from the inside. And yet so often we get the process backwards. Legalistic religion would reform us from the outside, stressing that we can change simply by behaving in certain ways. The effect of

legalism is always the same. Jesus said we may clean up well on the outside, but on the inside we can still be full of filth.

**The power of Christianity is not in any form of religion, it is still in the blood of Jesus Christ.** In **Leviticus 17** we read about the blood and in verse **11-12** it tells us:

*11 for the life of the body is in its blood. I have given you the blood on the altar to purify you, making you right with the Lord.\* It is the blood, given in exchange for a life, that makes purification possible.*

However, in the New Covenant, it is the blood of Christ, his life given in exchange for our sin penalty, that makes us pure and righteous. Why am talking about the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant?

Instead of simply relying upon the work of Jesus Christ as our covering and release of guilt, many within the Christian church have reverted back to the ideas of the law and legalism and continue to earn God's favor, earn his blessing, and follow rules of engagement in order to get closer to God.

We live in a time when many within the church cannot celebrate the freedom and liberty of God because the church has squelched it with expectations. The time of purification by external behavior has come to an end, and the new era of simply embracing the kindness of God and his grace and mercy is to become our motivating factor.

Now I am not saying that we should all throw out our Bibles and disregard God's word, but the Old Testament simply shows us the purity of God, his patience with us, and his character that interacts with mankind and ultimately results in his great gift of grace through Jesus Christ. **God wants to change us from the inside out by the working of his Holy Spirit, by the revelation of his love and gift of his son, and by the transforming truth of his Word.**

You and I are no longer bound by works or fear, and the new covenant doesn't limit the accessibility of God. **Hebrews 4:16** tells us:

*16 So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.*

Legalism states that you can only come into the presence of God by doing something, while the good news is about receiving something from him so that you can be with him. All of this is made possible because of the living powerful blood of Jesus Christ that was exchanged for all of our sin.

That is why when someone simply states that Jesus was a great teacher, a great prophet, that his truths transform us, and that his accomplishment for us was anything but the blood that he shed on the cross, they have embraced nothing that has brought salvation or hope into their lives. Yes, God's truth does change us but it begins with an atoning

sacrifice, with a covering, with a washing, and then a separation. We cannot walk in freedom until we have been relieved from our sinful condition. **Romans 11:6** tells us:

*6 And since it is through God's kindness, then it is not by their good works. For in that case, God's grace would not be what it really is—free and undeserved.*

The good news is the grace of God through his Son Jesus Christ. It isn't about what I should and should not be doing. **The Good new is the “good news” of God's love and grace, and not the “should news” about conditions.** It is about Jesus Christ crucified, buried, risen again and sitting at the right hand of the father on our behalf. **Romans 2:4-6** tells us:

*4 But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, 5 that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) 6 For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus.*

Only because of Jesus our new life is given and a place in heaven is already sealed for us. Only because of a new covenant, still requiring a sacrifice, but a pure and adequate sacrifice for mankind's sin, that is enough to satisfy God's wrath. The old covenant came with work and striving, and the new covenant simply asks us to receive the blood of Jesus as our payment for our sinful nature.

I understand that in our culture today, the idea of being washed in the blood or a human sacrifice for our sin isn't well received, in fact it can be misunderstood. But they need to know why Jesus is so different from the rest of the beliefs, and why his work on the cross wasn't simply about death but a payment for our shortcomings. I was reading through an old hymnal this morning and I can across a hymn titled “Blessed be the fountain.”

Blessed be the fountain of blood, to a world of sinners revealed  
Blessed be the dear Son of God, Only by His stripes we are healed  
Tho' I've wandered far from His fold, bringing to my heart pain and woe  
Wash me in the blood of the Lamb, And I shall be whiter than snow

Thorny was the crown that He wore, and the cross His body overcame  
Grievous were the sorrows he bore, but he suffered thus not in vain  
May I to that fountain be led, made to cleanse my sins here below  
Wash me in the blood that He shed and I shall be whiter than snow

Father, I have wandered from Thee, Often has my heart gone astray  
Crimson do my sins seem to me, water cannot wash them away  
Jesus, the fountain of Thine, leaning on Thy promise, I go  
Cleanse me by Thy washing divine, and I shall be whiter than snow

Church, being a Christian is about rejoicing in the work of Jesus and not about doing and working all that we can to get on his good list. **Galatians 2:11-12** tells us:

*11 So it is clear that no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."\**

*12 This way of faith is very different from the way of law, which says, "It is through obeying the law that a person has life."\**

I want us all to feel the freedom of living our lives, motivated by love for God, to worship him everyday through our lives, and not fear making mistakes or not doing enough, or always trying to meet his expectations. Come to God completely released from your sin with boldness that calls him your Father and not a judge. To develop a relationship of intimacy and closeness, where you can share everything we want, all of your fears, all of your struggles, all of your worries, all of your pains. Then allow him to speak to you as a loving father who wants to see you develop and grow and not simply destroyed.

We serve a God of a new covenant. Even though the Old Testament speaks of the old covenant of works, it still shows us the God has always intended for man to have access to him. The old covenant was simply a taste of the new covenant that far exceeded the expectations of God and allows you and I to stand before him righteous and holy, just as God is holy. To fulfill the words of **Leviticus 19:2**:

*You must be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.*

This is only possible with the blood of Jesus. Walk in grace, walk in mercy, walk in the power of the work of Jesus Christ. Let's pray!