

Stories From The Stable

Christmas Series

Leviticus 16

Written By

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From Luke 2, verse 8 we deduce an animal stable served as the birthing room for Jesus, the Christ: “*And she gave birth to her first-born son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*” The manger is the trigger word alerting us to the fact Christ’s birth occurred in a stable of all places. Knowing God’s absolute providence down to the smallest of details, it leaves us this asking a question this Christmas season: “Which animals were there?” Secondly, we a follow up question is this, “Why were these animals there, theologically speaking?”

We’ve already encountered the reason why a donkey might have been there. Our analysis from Numbers 22 through 24 introduced us to a special donkey who carried a Gentile soothsayer God used to give us some amazing and precise messianic prophesies. And don’t downplay the significance of messianic prophesies either for collectively they mathematically validate that Jesus was, in fact, the messianic God-man. Marvin Bittinger, the bestseller of over 12 million books on math, once crunched the sixty-plus messianic prophesies to determine the odds of one man fulfilling a paltry nine of them. His factual, by the numbers conclusion? I’ll let him tell you,

“Take a domed football stadium of average size and empty it of everything (stands, seats, lockers, et al.), then proceed to fill all remaining space with grains of white sand—whit, except for one grain you’ve marked by coloring it red. What

would be the odds of your selecting the same grain out of that whole stadium four times in succession? The answer is 1 in 10 to the 76th power.”¹

Makes a thinking person ask, “What would be the odds of Christ accidentally fulfilling 60 prophecies?” The answer is predictable. It would NEVER happen. All of this leaves thinking people with one conclusion: Jesus was the divine Messiah. I can’t wait to ask you what you are going to do with this incontrovertible evidence. Will you believe in Him this Christmas now that you have rock solid reasons to?

In addition to the messianic prophetic power wedded to the donkey story from Israel’s



formative days, I think we’d be safe to assume a goat, yes, a goat must have been in the stable that night. Why? Because of the place a goat played in the spiritual and theological history of Israel. Where do we bump into the significance of this wiry haired, hyper, somewhat funny looking, I’ll-eat-anything creature? Before we talk about that, first let me say we’re probably not talking about an American/Western version of a goat. No, we’re probably talking about a Nubian Ibex, which is classified in this middle eastern area as a

goat. Other goats probably existed in Israel; however, there is a good chance this was the goat of the stable because of its existence near the Bethlehem area. I’ve seen and photographed many of them while in Israel. They *are* cute (not cuddly because you can’t get near them), nimble (because of their cloven hooves they can walk on the steepest slopes), and everywhere in the Judean wilderness area near the Dead Sea.

Now, back to where they crop up in Israel’s spiritual and theological history. When God established a special holy day so the entire nation could secure forgiveness and cleansing from sin, He, the high and holy One (Genesis 14:18; Exodus 3:5; Psalm 22:3; 50:14; 71:22; 91:1; Isaiah 1:4), graciously gave them, through Moses’ leadership, the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur. As we shall see in our analysis of Leviticus 16, the animal at the heart of this memorable and important day was, you guessed it, none other than the goat.

Realizing the goat did, in fact, play a significant spiritual role in Israel’s divinely ordained worship system makes us want to ask a simple, yet potentially profound, question concerning the presence of a little goat in the stable with baby Jesus.

Who Did The Little Goat See? (Leviticus 16)

The question is definitively answered as we work our way systematically through the verses explaining how God wanted this special spiritual day to function in order to secure divine

¹Norman Geisler and Patty Tunnicliffe, *Reasons For Belief* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2013), 149.

cleansing from sin. The question also finds insightful answers this Christmas as we take our textual findings and relate them to redemptive work baby Jesus grew up to fulfill. Believe me, we could spend several weeks pouring over the powerful teaching of this passage, but that would defeat our purpose for considering **STORIES FROM THE STABLE**. Hence, we will have to limit our answers to who the little goat saw in the stable that special, holy night.

The Goat Saw The One Who Followed Protocol (Leviticus 16:1-2)

Why did God institute the Day of Atonement in the first place? The opening verses give us the historical background to the question:

¹ Now the Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they had approached the presence of the Lord and died. ² The Lord said to Moses: “Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at any time into the holy place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, or he will die; for I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.

Aaron’s two priestly sons were vaporized by God back in Leviticus chapter 10 for daring to bring unapproved fire to be used in Israel’s sacrificial system. As young progressives and creatives, they erroneously thought they could make the incense for the Holy Place by combining the materials with what Scripture calls “unauthorized fire” (NIV), “strange fire” (NKJV), or “profane fire” (NAS, Leviticus 10:1). It’s quite possible they brought their own fire instead of using the fire created by God when the sacrificial altar was instituted (Leviticus 9:24). Quite obviously they willfully chose to disobey God and summarily threw archaic, restrictive spiritual protocol to the wind. They erroneously thought any old approach to God will do, and they He would most certainly enjoy and accept the sincerity of their worship. Again, they thinking was, excuse the pun, dead wrong.

Yes, they dared to approach the holy presence of God without being obedient to God’s rules and regulations for approach. It cost them their lives as God made an example out of them. Not wanting further priests to be taken out for thinking they could come into His presence any old way, God, therefore, established Yom Kippur to make sure their sins were covered so they could come near to Him.

Jesus, conversely, is pictured in the New Testament as the High Priest who lived a perfect life of obedience to the will of the Father. He *never* deviated from God’s law, but came to fulfill the smallest facet of it (Matthew 5:18). He fulfilled the prophetic law which called for His sacrifice, too, on the cross, as Paul reminds us, “And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). Jesus’ life definitively demonstrated that following the Father’s protocol for divine approach matters greatly, and that approach starts with being obedient to what God says you must do to secure that approach.

This is who the little goat looked laying quietly in the straw. He saw the One who would pave the way into the Father’s presence by following the Father’s will to the letter. What else did the little goat see?

The Goat Saw The High Priest Who Needed No Cleansing From Sin (Leviticus 16:3-6, 11-14)

Verses 1 through 10 give us the general overview of the Day of Atonement, while verses 11 through 34 give us the specific sequential details of how the High Priest was supposed to lead and guide on this *Shabbat Shabbaton* (Sabbath of Sabbaths), or the holiest of all the rest of the days in the national calendar. As we work our way quickly through these verses, keep your eye on the fact that God wanted mankind to have access into His holy presence; however, the High Priest, who represented all the people, had to take necessary precautions to make sure his own sin was covered before he ventured behind the veil into the Holy of Holies. Additionally, the High Priest was forbidden to just waltz into God's presence any time he chose. No. Only one prescribed day existed on the holy calendar on which God permitted one man to come near unto Him, but that man first had to have his sin covered by the appropriate sacrifices. No deviation or creativity was permitted, no matter how sincere the High Priest might have been in his heart.

³ “Aaron shall enter the holy place with this: with a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. ⁴ “He shall put on the holy linen tunic, and the linen undergarments shall be next to his body, and he shall be girded with the linen sash and attired with the linen turban (these are holy garments). Then he shall bathe his body in water and put them on . . . ⁶ “Then Aaron shall offer the bull for the sin offering which is for himself, that he may make atonement for himself and for his household.

Circle the phrase “make atonement,” *wakipper* (וְכִפֶּר). This formula appears fourteen times in this passage (Leviticus 16:6, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18, 24, 27, 32, 33, 34); therefore, we must surmise it is highly significant, and it is. The presence of the waw (the Hebrew conjunction “and,” wherein the “w” is pronounced like our letter “v”) functioning as introducing a purpose clause heightens the formula's intrinsic importance. What does this word mean? The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew lexicon gives us the etymological answer:

† כִּפֶּר vb.Pi etc. denom. cover over (fig.), pacify, make propitiation;—Pi Pf. כִּפֶּר Ex 30:10 + 31 times; 2 ms. sf. כִּפֶּרְתָּהּ Ez 43:20; 3 mpl. יִכְפְּרוּ Ez 43:26; 2 mpl. כִּפֶּרְתֶּם Ez 45:20; Impf. יִכְפֹּר Ex 30:10 + 10 times; כִּפֶּר? Lv 7:7 Nu 5:8; sf. יִכְפְּרֶנָּה? Pr 16:14; 1 s. אֶכְפֹּר 2 S 21:3; אֶכְפֶּרָה Gn 32:21 Ex 32:30, etc.; Imv. כִּפֶּר Dt 21:8 + 4 times; Inf. כִּפֵּר Ex 30:15 + 28 times; sfs. כִּפְּרִי Ez 16:63; כִּפְּרֶךָ Ex 29:36; כִּפְּרָה Is 47:11;— 1. cover over, pacify, propitiate; אֶכְפֶּרָה פָּנָיו בְּמִנְחָה Gn 32:21 *let me cover over his face by the present* (so that de does not see the offence, i.e. *pacify him*; E; RS. ^{2d ed.}, ³⁸¹ ‘wipe clean the face,’ blackened by displeasure, as the Arabs says ‘whiten the face’); וְתִפֹּל עָלֶיךָ הָוֶה לֹא תוֹכְלִי כִפְּרָה Is 47:11 *and disaster will fall upon thee, thou*

wilt not be able to propitiate it (by payment of a כִּפָּר, see Is 43:3); pacify the wrath of a king Pr 16:14 (e.g. by a gift). 2. cover over, atone for sin, without sacrifice: a. man as subj., בְּמָה אֶכַּפֵּר 2 S 21:3, with what shall I cover over (viz. the bloodguiltiness of the house of Saul, says David. The answer is by a death penalty of seven sons of the guilty house); בְּעֵד הַטֹּאתֵיכֶם Ex 32:30 on behalf of your sins (JE; Moses, by intercession); c. עַל of persons Nu 17:11, 12 (P; by incense), 25:13 (P when Phinehas slays the ringleaders). b. with God as subj., c. acc. pers., cover, i.e. treat as covered, view propitiously, Yahweh's land Dt 32:43 (song); לְ pers. Dt 21:8 (bloodguiltiness flows away in the stream), Ez 16:63; בְּעֵד of person 2 Ch 30:18; c. acc. of the sin ψ 65:4; 78:38, prob. also Dn 9:24 (|| הָתָם הַטֹּאת; עַל of sin, ψ 79:9 Je 18:23 (|| מַחֲהָ)). It is conceived that God in his sovereignty may himself provide an atonement or covering for men and their sins which could not be provided by men.²

God's anger and aversion to sin in His creatures must be appeased and the sin must be covered in order for said creature, man, to gain entrance into His holy presence. According to God, the only way these could occur was for mankind, especially the High Priest on this holy day, to offer the divinely prescribed blood sacrifices of a bull and ram. Again, no other substitute could or would suffice. No deviation and creativity was permitted. No other sincere means for attempting to gain access would be divinely accepted. The High Priest had to secure cleansing from his sin based on God's command if cleansing for others would be secured.

Verses 11 through 14 give us more precise details of how the High Priest functioned as he gained spiritual cleansing per God's prescribed path.

¹¹ "Then Aaron shall offer the bull of the sin offering which is for himself and make atonement for himself and for his household, and he shall slaughter the bull of the sin offering which is for himself. ¹² "He shall take a firepan full of coals of fire from upon the altar before the LORD and two handfuls of finely ground sweet incense, and bring it inside the veil. ¹³ "He shall put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the ark of the testimony, otherwise he will die. ¹⁴ "Moreover, he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; also in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.

Note well: Aaron couldn't enter the Holy of Holies, the most sacred place of the Tabernacle, until he had first secured spiritual cleansing from his sin by God's prescribed sacrifices. And even once inside, he had to be careful approaching God. The incense urn he carried basically

² Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 497–498.

created a smoke screen so he wouldn't accidentally look upon the presence of God who dwelt above the mercy seat.

I think we in the West have forgotten just how holy God is, how much He detests sin and reacts against it, and what a privilege it is to come before Him individually today because of our faith in the person and work of Jesus. As we read in Hebrews, "*Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need*" (Hebrews 4:16). Do you know how amazing this verse is? We, because of Christ being our Savior, can come confidently before God's holy throne to commune and speak with Him any time we want, not just once a year. All of this is made possible by the baby in the manger who grew up to be the God-man, who died for our sin, who rose again, and who was, unlike Aaron and all other Israelite priests, *utterly sinless*. The verse prior to Hebrews 4, verse 16, gives us this flash of insight: "*For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin*" (Hebrews 4:15). This is the One the little goat saw that cold, brisk morning in the stable. He saw the ultimate eternal (as opposed to the temporal High Priesthood of Aaronic priests) High Priest (after the order of Melchizedek; Hebrews 7:10) who did not need to cleanse Himself of sin prior to participating in the rites of the Day of Atonement.

This is who the little goat rested her eyes upon. In the flickering light she saw the sinless, divine, eternal High Priest who would forever, through His redemptive work, provide complete access for saints into the Holy of Holies of the Father. He needed no sacrifices for He epitomized holiness in thought, actions, and attitude at all times. Are you thankful this Christmas for a High Priest of this stature?

A third thing the little goat saw is written upon the parchment of verses 7 through 9, and verses 15 through 22.

The Goat Saw The Final Goat Who Provide Eternal Cleansing (Leviticus 16:7-9, 15-22)

As stated earlier, verses 7 through 9 gave us the summary of the sacrificial animals offered for the cleaning of the people's sins.

⁷ He shall take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the doorway of the tent of meeting. ⁸ Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat. ⁹ Then Aaron shall offer the goat on which the lot for the LORD fell, and make it a sin offering.

God, of course, sovereignly controlled the selection of the lots, causing them to fall upon the goats of His divine choice. As we see in verse 8, one goat was sacrificed for the sins of the people, while the other became a scapegoat. The details of how this part of the Day of Atonement service played out are recorded in verses 15 through 22.

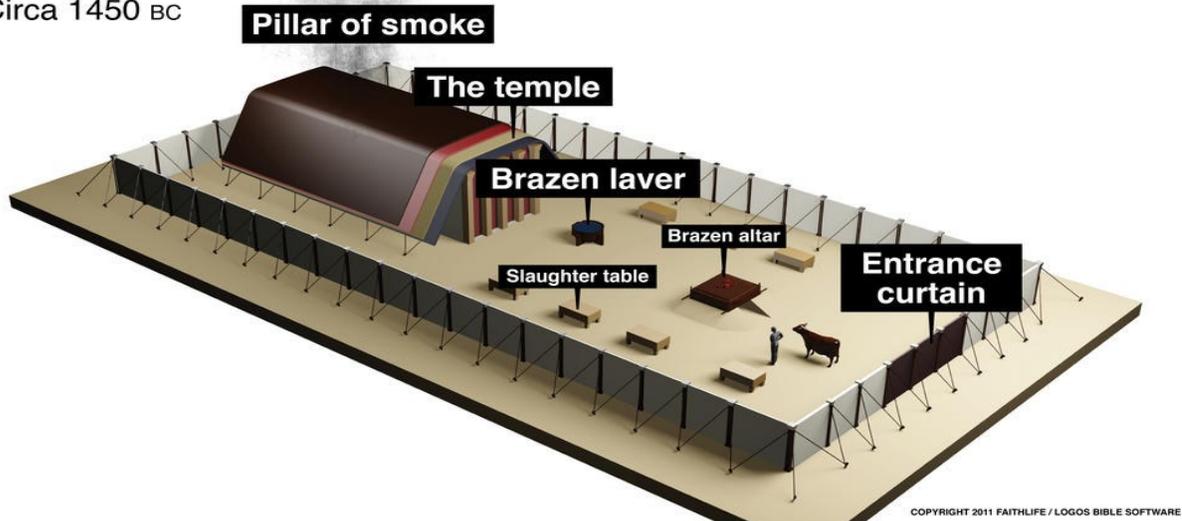
¹⁵ "Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. ¹⁶ He

shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel and because of their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and thus he shall do for the tent of meeting which abides with them in the midst of their impurities. ¹⁷ When he goes in to make atonement in the holy place, no one shall be in the tent of meeting until he comes out, that he may make atonement for himself and for his household and for all the assembly of Israel.

The first goat was sacrificed, per God's command, to cover and cleanse the sin of the people. Once the little animal was killed, the High Priest could, then, head back into the Holy of Holies a second time to sprinkle its sacrificial blood on the Mercy Seat, which was located on top of the Ark of the Covenant, and which was also located between the two winged cherubim angels. And just like when he entered the Holy of Holies with his prescribed sacrificial blood, the High Priest sprinkled the blood of the goat on the eastern side of the Mercy Seat facing him, while also sprinkling some seven times at the front of the Mercy Seat. This, of course, denoted that the cleansing and covering for sin was perfect, for God's number of perfection is seven.

The Tabernacle

Circa 1450 BC



Note well that one of the High Priest's goals was to secure cleansing for the Holy Place, where the other priests served every day. The idea here is their sin was brought into the Holy Place as they served, thereby contaminating the surroundings. Amazing, isn't it, those who possess a low view of sin. Sin is seen by God as a toxic contaminate, polluting everything around it. And the only way it can be cleansed, or neutralized, is by the prescribed sacrificed offered by the High Priest who carefully observes the prescribed actions dictated by God. Again, no deviation or modification was tolerated by God.

After securing cleansing for the Holy Place, Moses tells us what happened next:

¹⁸ "Then 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 of the blood of the goat and

put it on the horns of the altar on all sides. ¹⁹ “With his finger he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it seven times and cleanse it, and from the impurities of the sons of Israel consecrate it.

From these verses, we learn sin had contaminated the very altar as priests and people worshipped in this holy area. Hence, the need for sacrificial cleansing to restore these places for proper worship of the living God. Once the sacrificial blood of the little goat secured divine cleansing of the holy altar, then the High Priest moved to finalize securing cleansing for the people:

²⁰ “When he finishes atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall offer the live goat. ²¹ “Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send *it* away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who *stands* in readiness. ²² “The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a solitary land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness.

The verses drip with the concept of substitutionary atonement. By placing his priestly hands on the head of the prescribed goat sacrifice and confessing Israel’s sins upon the animal, their sin was transferred, by God’s permission, from them to the goat. With that, the little goat was carried by a pre-selected person into the wilderness where it was released. What was the purpose of this facet of the sacrificial process? To illustrate that Israel’s sins had been carried far away.

All of this, of course, points typologically to Jesus, the Christ, who would not only be the perfect, sinless, eternal High Priest for the ultimate Day of Atonement, but the perfect, sinless, eternal goat sacrifice of all goat sacrifices ever offered on You Kippur. The author of Hebrews brings all these loose threads together at various junctures of his inspired and intriguing book:

⁶ Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship, ⁷ but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. ⁸ The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, ⁹ which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, ¹⁰ since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation. ¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; ¹² and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing

of the flesh,¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9).

This is the One the little goat beheld in the dancing candlelight of that simple stall in Bethlehem. He saw the goat who would be the final Day of Atonement sacrifice to cleanse people internally and externally from their sin when they come to Him in faith. He saw the High Priest who went not into an earthly, spiritually stained Tabernacle for Yom Kippur, but who actually traveled to the ultimate Holy of Holies in the presence of the Father to secure cleansing and passage for us forever.

All of this is why I think there was a little goat in the stable that holy night. It had to be there because the Messiah had been born to fulfill every facet of the Day of Atonement. He came to be the High Priest who would open up the way to God's presence for us. He came to be our sacrificial goat who would provide coverage and cleansing for our sin, not just for a year, but for all time when we come to Him in faith.

I think the question this Christmas is simple: How will you respond to the person and work of Jesus, the Christ. Will you turn to Him in faith, or will you continue to hold on to your false, but sincere, belief that God will permit many ways to gain access into His presence? Ophrah, last time I checked, still thinks that way:

I believe that there are many paths to God. Or, many paths to the light. I certainly don't believe there is only one way. There couldn't possibly be just one way [to God] . . . There couldn't possibly be with the millions of people in the world . . . Does God care about your heart, or does God care about if you call his Son Jesus?³

If this is your thinking, you might want to reconsider it in light of Leviticus 16. It matters greatly to God how sinners gain access into His presence, and there is definitely a very narrowly defined prescribed path called the sacrifice of God's own choosing to cover and cleanse sinners from sin. That sacrifice and the High Priest who offered it is Jesus, and He is the only One who can save you. Will you come to Him? He has been waiting for you.

³ Norman Geisler and Patty Tunnicliffe, *Reasons For Belief* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2013), 195.