

Leviticus

Lesson 12

Most of the content of the Book of Leviticus was new to the Israelites camped at Mount Sinai. We spoke of that fact often while studying the LORD's required offering in chapters 1 through 7. It was new as well to the Jews concerning the laws of clean and unclean food, childbirth, leprosy, the discharges of man and woman, and it is new as we come to the all-important Day of Atonement. The first mention of this day in the Bible comes in this chapter.

XI. The Law Concerning the Day of Atonement

A. The Time of the Giving of the Law for the Day of Atonement

1. The Prohibition of Entry into the Holy of Holies

In this book's order, the LORD gave the essential instructions for Jewish life's required offerings, but extremely important for the priests' ordination. The LORD explained the offerings and then directed that the erection of the Tabernacle inside the Tent of Meeting. Upon completion, Moses consecrated it and proceeded with the ordination of the priests. All happened on the first day of the ordination ceremony. According to Exodus 40:17, the Tabernacle erection, consecration, and the ordination of the priest occurred on the first day or the first month of the second year after leaving Egypt – Nisan 1, 1465 BC. At the end of the first-day observance, the priests entered the Tabernacle for seven days. On the eighth day, Nisan 8, 1465 BC, the priests exited the Tabernacle for the ceremony of the day to complete the process. Later that day, two of Aaron's sons were killed by the LORD when they brought fire from the wrong source into the Tabernacle, defiling the sacred hall. The LORD notes this topic in His address to Moses as the LORD puts a prohibition of entry into the Holy of Holies by the priest. Chapter 16, verse 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. 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.”* (16:1-2).

Evidently, Aaron's two sons' sin was more extensive than just taking strange fire in their firepans to the Altar of Incense in the Holy Place. The two may have entered the Holy of Holies behind the Tabernacle's veil at the same time. With verse 2, the LORD puts an end to anyone entering the Holy of Holies except the High Priest. The next time the High Priest can enter the Holy of Holies is six months away. In the following passage, we will discover that the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies only one day per year, the Day of Atonement. Aaron was the High Priest at the time, but this instruction stands for all High Priests into Israel's future.

2. The Permission of Entry into the Holy of Holies

a) The Preparation for the Day of Atonement

For three hundred and fifty-four days out of every year, the Lord prohibits everyone, including the High Priest, from entering the Holy of Holies. However, He grants permission to enter into the Holy of Holies to only the High Priest on one day of the year, provided the successful and proper preparation for the Day of Atonement. Verse 3. *“Aaron shall enter the holy place with this: with a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. 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. He shall take from the congregation of the sons of Israel two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering.”* (16:3-5).

In preparation for the Day of Atonement, Aaron was to select two animals for his two offerings. He also took three animals from the nation as an offering for the people. The High Priest's requirement was always to be a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. The nation's

required animal selection was still to be a bull for the sin offering and a ram for the burnt offering. The nation's choice of animals needed was always two male goats for the sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. This prescription was never to change. Once the priest entered the holy Tabernacle complex, the LORD required that he bathe and put on his priestly garb.

b) The Instruction for the Day of Atonement

When the priest arrived at the complex, the LORD had specific instructions for the Day of Atonement. Verse 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. He shall take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the doorway of the tent of meeting. Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat. Then Aaron shall offer the goat on which the lot for the LORD fell, and make it a sin offering. But the goat on which the lot for the scapegoat fell shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make atonement upon it, to send it into the wilderness as the scapegoat."* (16:6-10).

In preparation for the day's ceremony, the LORD's instruction directed Aaron to offer the bull for the sin offering immediately and then cast lots between the two goats. One goat will become the people's sin offering; one is released alive, laden with the nation's guilt, but completely atoned before the LORD.

3. The Program of Entry into the Holy of Holies

a) The Offering for Aaron and His Family

(1) The Bull of the Sin Offering

With the timing and instructions for the Day of Atonement settled, the LORD provides the program or the High Priest's entry into the Holy of Holies. After bathing and dressing in the priesthood's holy garments, the offering for Aaron and his family comes first. As noted already, the first offering is the bull of the sin offering. Verse 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."* (16:11).

The details of this sin-offering were not recorded in this passage — no need to do so. The LORD covered those details in chapter 4. The slain animal's blood was sprinkled in front of the veil and rubbed on the Altar of Incense's horns. While inside the Tabernacle, with the bowl of blood in his hand, the priest had a task to do. But before completing the task with the blood, the next order of business was the smoke of the incense.

(2) The Smoke of the Incense

The High Priest did not have to gather the supplies for this step of the ceremony. The utensils and incense were stored in the Holy Place. This step was the important smoke of the incense before the LORD. Verse 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. 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."* (16:12-13).

Every day, at regular intervals, the priests supplied a firepan with fresh coals and incense for the Altar of Incense in front of the veil. Aaron knew how to do this. However, on the Day of Atonement, the firepan with incense was prepared to take behind the veil into the Holy of Holies where the LORD resided in the cloud above the Mercy Seat on top of the Ark of the Covenant. Aaron could not have performed this step in the ceremony with firepans without remembering the deadly results with the firepans and his two sons that died. Their deaths would be ever in his mind. With this step, if Aaron missteps, the penalty of the LORD is the same fate as his sons. For the sons, their presentation was in front of the veil; for Aaron on the Day of Atonement, his

presentation was behind the veil. The firepan with the incense was Aaron's ticket to give him safe passage to enter behind the veil.

(3) The Blood of the Bull

Once behind the veil with the firepan and the bowl of bull's blood in hand, the program's next step required the blood's sprinkling precisely on the Mercy Seat. Verse 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.*" (16:14).

I have always assumed that the Mercy Seat front was one of the long sides of the rectangle case. As such, I have always thought that the front side faced the veil in front of it that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. But my assumptions could not be correct according to this verse. Here is the reasoning. If the front of the Mercy Seat faced the veil, it would be facing east. How could Aaron sprinkle blood on the east side of the Mercy Seat and the front of the Mercy seat if both were the same? Therefore, my conclusion from this passage front of the Mercy Seat faced either north or south, and the end of the Mercy seat faced the veil to the east.

Having completed the presentation with the incense and the bull's blood, Aaron was to turn and leave the Holy of Holies for the next step in the ceremony.

b) The Offering for the People

(1) The Goat of the Sin Offering

At the north side of the Brazen Altar, the selected goat for the people's offering was slain as a sin offering outside the Tabernacle. Verses 15a. *"Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people..."* (16:15a). It is a sin offering, too, as described in chapter 4.

(2) The Blood of the Goat

The priest caught the goat offering's blood, took that blood behind the veil, and sprinkled it on the Mercy Seat just like he did with the bull's blood. Verse 15b. *"... 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."* (16:15b).

We might make a note at this point. Aaron is to do everything with the bull and goat sin offerings. He cannot be in two places at once. To this point, he has caught the blood of the animals for the sprinkling, but he has not processed the fat portions as required to present to the LORD. That part of these offerings will come later in the ceremony.

c) The Atonement of the Holy Place

When Aaron sprinkles the bull's blood and goat blood on the Mercy Seat, all the defilement found within the people of Israelite camp will be forgiven, and the Holy Place will be atoned. Verse 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."* (16:16).

Surrounded by sin, the Tent of Meeting, which held the Tabernacle, was atoned.

d) The Restriction of the Holy Place

But for the atonement to occur on that special day, the whole Tent of Meeting was restricted. Verse 17a. *"When he goes in to make atonement in the holy place, no one shall be in the tent of meeting until he comes out..."* (16:17a)

The only one allowed in the Tent of Meeting was the High Priest. The first celebration in the wilderness and the celebrations for the next thirty-nine years would be Aaron, alone with the LORD, behind the veil.

e) The Atonement for the People

We come to a solemn thought. By the faithfulness of one man, the High Priest, he, his family, and all the Nation of Israel found the favor of the LORD. We call it the atonement of the people. Verse 17b. “*... that he may make atonement for himself and for his household and for all the assembly of Israel.*” (16:17b).

The ceremony was the job of the High Priest and no one else. But the ceremony was not over.

f) The Atonement for the Brazen Altar

The Tent of Meeting was atoned, but what about the Brazen Altar. Verse 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. 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.*” (16:18-19).

Not all of the blood of the bull and goat was used on the Mercy Seat. Leaving the Mercy Seat from behind the veil, the priest marched to the Brazen Altar and sprinkled the blood on it seven times too.

g) The Man with the Scapegoat Departs

Then we come to the next point in the order of worship on the Day of Atonement. A man will take the goat selected to live out to the wilderness and let it go free. Verse 20. “*When he finishes atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall offer the live goat. 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. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a solitary land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness.*” (16:20-22).

Picture, if you will, the goat. Two goats were led into the place by Aaron. Lots were cast, and one goat was to die; one goat was to live. The goat to die was dead; his blood had been sprinkled in front of the veil, on the Mercy Seat, and the Brazen Altar. Aaron approached the living goat that had watched it all. I have often wondered what a goat thinks when he sees another goat die. I wonder what that live goat thought when Aaron took him by the head, just as he took the head of his dead fellow friend. But instead of a knife to the throat, he received a talking.

What he heard, none of it was his fault. He had not been to the local school of counseling a day in his life. He did not know all the coping skills needed to deal with such a mess of sin and shame in human life. He was a goat. He spoke goat. He did not speak human. I dare say he did not understand a word that old Aaron said. Yet, all the sin of all the Nation of Israel’s people was placed on that goat on that day – a burden too heavy to be carried by any human alone. But a solitary goat was selected for the task of bearing that load far away from the camp, into the wilderness. Oh, he would not do it alone, to begin with; a man would help direct him to the wilderness. But in the wilderness, the man would let him go, alone, with no one to protect this lone goat. One solitary goat, released in a solitary grove, to give a solitary grace to a solitary group. A group of sinful Israelites was saved by the hand of the LORD from Egypt’s land with an assurance of a Promised Land.

h) The Bathing of the High Priest

Aaron, the High Priest, watches as the man leads the goat out of the Tabernacle complex. Just outside the front curtain to the fence surrounding the complex, Aaron cannot see the man and goat any longer. Through one of the tribal areas, the man leads the goat. The people watch. They look at

the goat; the goat looks at the people. They know about the goat. The goat knows nothing about them. The goat knows nothing about the ceremony or the reason he is such a big part. But a significant role he is playing! The people watch as the goat passes by bearing all their sins. Aaron is not done. He is dirty. Verse 23. *“Then Aaron shall come into the tent of meeting and take off the linen garments which he put on when he went into the holy place, and shall leave them there. He shall bathe his body with water in a holy place and put on his clothes …”* (16:23).

In the wilderness and the Promised Land, the priests' holy garments were kept in the Tabernacle's front room. It was there that Aaron would take them off and go outside to the Basin of water to bathe. Once clean, he returned to the Tabernacle's front room and put his holy garment on again.

i) The Ram of the Burnt Offering

Dressed anew, Aaron exited the Tent of Meeting and took the two rams in his hands. Verse 24. *“...and come forth and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people and make atonement for himself and for the people.”* (16:24).

In the beginning instructions for the Day of Atonement, we found that two rams were selected to prepare the ceremony. One was for Aaron and his family; the other was for the people of Israel's nation. Both rams were for burnt offerings. At this point in the ceremony, each was offered by Aaron. Aaron slew the rams on the north side of the Brazen Altar. He sprinkled their blood seven times at the altar. The remaining blood was poured at the base of the altar. The entrail and legs were washed. The entrails symbolized a cleansing of the old sinful life; the legs symbolized the new way of walking in life's newness. The cleaned parts were placed on the altar. The rest of the ram's bodies were placed on the altar, except the hides. The hides belonged to Aaron.

j) The Fat of the Sin Offerings

Now comes the fat of the bull and goat offerings. Verse 25. *“Then he shall offer up in smoke the fat of the sin offering on the altar.”* (16:25).

For a reminder, the blood of the bull and goat was caught by Aaron and used to sprinkle in the Mercy Seat, the veil, and the Brazen Altar. The meat had not been processed. It was time for that in the ceremony. Aaron extracted the kidneys, loins, and liver considered the “fat” and placed them on the Brazen Altar. The rest of this bull and goat's bodies were held shortly for another part in the ceremony.

k) The Man with the Scapegoat Returns

Outside the camp, the man had released the scapegoat and returned. But before coming into the camp, that man had to bathe. Verse 26. *“The one who released the goat as the scapegoat shall wash his clothes and bathe his body with water; then afterward he shall come into the camp.”* (16:26).

Only after bathing could the man enter the boundaries of the tribal areas of the camp again.

l) The Bull and Goat of the Sin Offering Burned

Aaron was waiting for the man who released the scapegoat to return. He and another job for the man. It involved the bodies of the bull and goat sin offerings being burned. Verse 27. *“But the bull of the sin offering and the goat of the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall be taken outside the camp, and they shall burn their hides, their flesh, and their refuse in the fire. Then the one who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body with water, then afterward he shall come into the camp.”* (16:27-28).

The only thing left to do for the Day of Atonement was to burn the entire bodies, including the hides, but excluding the fat, outside the camp. The man who led the scapegoat to the

wilderness bathed and returned to the camp was tasked with burning the bodies. Once again, the man was required to wash before returning to the camp.

B. The Day of the Day of Atonement

We mentioned the date of the day of the Day of Atonement at the beginning of this section. The only reason we could do that is that I read and studied ahead before I started this commentary. Finally, we come to the LORD's text, and we hear Him speak. Verse 29, "*This shall be a permanent statute for you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month...*" (16:29).

The date is set. It cannot be changed. It is the 10th day of the 7th month of every year. Years late in Jewish, like the seventh month, will be given the name Tishri. The 10th of Tishri is always the Day of Atonement.

1. A Statute for Cessation

The law of the Day of Atonement imposed a statute for cessation on that day. Verse 30. "*...you shall humble your souls and not do any work, whether the native, or the alien who sojourns among you; for it is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; you will be clean from all your sins before the LORD. It is to be a sabbath of solemn rest for you, that you may humble your souls; it is a permanent statute.*" (16:30-31).

The cessation of all work was required of all Jews and anyone living with the Jews. It is a sabbath of solemn rest. The Hebrew word for "sabbath" means the *day of rest* or *cease to do*. We often think that the word "sabbath" means *seventh*, but it does not. Be that as it may, it will come to be associated hand in glove with the seventh day at the Ten Commandments' giving. In Genesis 2:2, the Hebrew word *shebii* is used. It is the ordinal number for seven. In Exodus 20:8, the text says, "Remember the sabbath day" The Hebrew word for *sabbath* is *bassabbat*. It means a *day of rest*. But the Exodus passage ties the sabbath to the six-day of work. Therefore, for the Nation of Israel, the seventh day becomes the *day of rest* perpetually.

With the Day of Atonement, regardless of the day of the week that Tishri 10th occurs, that day must be celebrated as a *day of rest from all labors* for all persons within Jewish camps, villages, cities, and tribal areas.

2. A Statute for Succession

Aaron was the first High Priest, but he was eighty-four years of age by this time in the story. He would not live forever – the LORD would not let him. Therefore, the LORD included in this law the statute for succession. Verse 32. "*So the priest who is anointed and ordained to serve as priest in his father's place shall make atonement: he shall thus put on the linen garments, the holy garments, and make atonement for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar. He shall also make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly.*" (16:32-33).

You might ask, why did the LORD not include the Temple that Israel would construct in Jerusalem in this statute? Surely the LORD knew about the Temple. After all, the LORD is all-knowing. Of course, the LORD knew about that place called Jerusalem and the Temple that Solomon would build. The city that would someday be called Jerusalem was still the Jebusite Citadel, and Israel would not take it until King David's seventh year. Then, Solomon would not start building the Temple for thirty-seven years after David takes the city. Solomon will start the Temple four-hundred and eighty years after the Exodus (1 Kings 6:1). All the Israelites needed to know at this time was concerning the Tabernacle that the camp had just completed building.

3. A Statute for Expiation

The LORD's final statement in this law states the statute for expiation. Verse 34. "*Now you shall have this as a permanent statute, to make atonement for the sons of Israel for all their sins once every year. And just as the LORD had commanded Moses, so he did.*" (16:34).

“And just as the LORD had commanded Moses, so he did.” What did Moses do? This instruction returns to the beginning of the law in 16:2, which says, *“The LORD said to Moses: ‘Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at any time into the holy place inside the veil....’* So Moses told Aaron this complete law six months before it was time to observe it. However, the law had to be communicated immediately to Aaron. His life and the lives of all his descendants would be on the line if Moses failed to warn them of the statute of expiation, that is, the penalty they would face if they did not obey the law and only enter the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, Tishri the 10th. And, *“so he did.”*