

The Book of Leviticus

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Section Outline

- I. Sacrificial System (Leviticus 1–7)**
- II. Ministry of the Priesthood (Leviticus 8–10)**
- III. Laws of Purification (Leviticus 11–15)**
- IV. Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16)**
 - A.** Historical Introduction (verses 1-2)
 - B.** The High Priest's Preparations (verses 3-10)
 - C.** The High Priest's Ceremonial Observances (verses 11-28)
 - D.** Miscellaneous Instructions for the Congregation (verses 29-34)

Introductory Comments

- ▶ Modern Judaism refers to this day as *Yom Kippur*. In Scripture the day is named only at Leviticus 23:27, 28 and 25:9. In those three occurrences it is called *Yom Hakkippurim* (literally, “Day of Atonements”).
- ▶ God gave instruction concerning this day at the conclusion of His instructions regarding purifications (Leviticus 11–15; see especially 15:31).
- ▶ This religious festival is “the climax and crown of Israel’s theology of sanctification.” – James Luther Mays, *The Book of Leviticus, The Book of Numbers*, Layman’s Bible Commentary (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977), 52.

1. Historical Introduction (16:1-2)

- The historical setting revelation concerning the Day of Atonement is God’s judgment of Nadab and Abihu (10:1-20). Emphasis is thus placed on the

necessity of atoning for the priests' own sins. Without mediators, sinful Israelites could not approach God's presence and the Presence of God could not continue to reside in Israel's midst.

2. The High Priest's Preparations (16:3-10)

- ❑ The high priest (Aaron) was the central human figure in the Day of Atonement. Being a sinner, like all Israelites, he needed a sin offering also.
- ❑ Aaron did not wear his high priestly garment with bells (v. 4). Scripture says nothing about a rope around the high priest in case he dies in the Holy of Holies.

3. The High Priest's Ceremonial Observances (16:11-28)

3.1. The Sin Offering for the High Priest and His Household (vv. 11-14)

- ❑ The priesthood provided access to God and forgiveness of sins.
- ❑ The household of the high priest was included because the office was inherited. The high priest and, obviously, his descendants were all sinners.
- ❑ In part, the incense acted in place of the veil that the high priest had passed through in order to sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat (v. 13).
 - ✓ Compare Hebrews 9:3-4.
- ❑ There was still no direct access to God for the individual Israelite.
 - ✓ See Hebrews 9:8.

3.2. The Sin Offering for the People and the Sanctuary (vv. 15-19)

- ❑ In spite of Israel's sinfulness, God yet remained in the midst of His chosen people (especially v. 16b).

3.3. The Ritual of the "Scapegoat" (vv. 20-22)

- ❑ The "scapegoat" was symbolic of the removal of sin from the presence of God's glory (partially visible in the Holy of Holies) in the midst of His people.
 - ✓ See Psalm 103:12.
 - ✓ See Micah 7:19.



- ❑ The “scapegoat” (Tyndale’s translation of *‘Azazel*) is not mentioned again in the Old Testament or in the New (especially Hebrews 8–10). It was a sin offering as well as the other goat (Lev 16:5).
 - ✓ Some interpreters see an allusion to this goat in Isaiah 53:6 and Hebrews 13:12.
 - ✓ *‘Azazel* is most likely a reference to the wilderness to which the goat was banished. There are also good arguments for taking the Hebrew term as meaning “removal.”

3.4. The Purifications and Burnt Offerings Concluding the Ceremony of the Day of Atonement (vv. 23-28)

- ❑ The burnt offerings reminded the priests and people of God’s sovereign authority over them.
- ❑ All praise belongs to the LORD for His provision of this day by which He re-emphasized both His mercy and His holiness.

4. Miscellaneous Instructions for the Congregation (16:29-34)

4.1. The Sabbath Fast by the Congregation of Israel (vv. 29-31)

- ❑ This fast is the only fasting prescribed by the Law of Moses.
- ❑ The full purpose of the day was to be found in the humbling of the entire person to God.
- ❑ It was to be a time in which the significance of the day dominated the thought life of every Israelite.
- ❑ Each Israelite was to meditate without interruption (by work or by meals) on the holiness of his God and on his own sinfulness — and also on the significance of God’s presence in the midst of the nation.
- ❑ Compare Colossians 2:23.

4.2. The High Priest’s Ministry of Atonement (vv. 32-34)

- ❑ The final section of Leviticus 16 reemphasizes the centrality of the high priest in the observance of the Day of Atonement.



- ❑ Again, also, the insufficiency of the many details of sacrifice and purity is highlighted.

Additional Comments:

- ◆ The Day of Atonement will not be observed in the Millennial Kingdom if Ezekiel 45:18-25 is a representation of all the important observances in that same month.
 - ✓ This could be an indication that there will be no need for such an observance since there will be direct access to God in that day (unlike the time of the Mosaic system of the Tabernacle and Temple).
 - ✓ See Hebrews 9:8.
- ◆ The Day of Atonement was the central observance of the levitical system.
 - ✓ It emphasized, more than any other observance, the holiness of God and the sinfulness of His people.
 - ✓ It emphasized the lack of direct access to God by anyone at any time under the Mosaic legislation.
 - ✓ Therefore, the Day of Atonement is the point of comparison with regard to the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ in Hebrews 8–10. The chief point of the Epistle to the Hebrews (see 8:1) is in direct contrast to the chief point of the Mosaic Law (see 9:8).
- ◆ The instruction regarding the Day of Atonement “prepares for the coming material on holy living. It may be said that the moral and spiritual energy for the people to fulfill the laws in chaps. 17–26 comes out of their finding complete expiation on the Day of Atonement. The ritual for the Day of Atonement thus appropriately stands before the laws on holy living.” – John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, Publisher, 1992), 217.

