

The Day of Atonement: Cleansing the Priests, People, and Place

Leviticus 16

I. Previously on Leviticus...

- A. A sacrifice accepted.
Heb 9:24 And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.
- B. But then we have disaster:
Lev 10:2² And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed [Nadab and Abihu], and they died before the Lord.
- C. So, the priests, who will represent the people before God, must discern between the holy and profane and the clean and the unclean (Leviticus 10:10, Lev. 11-15)
- D. And cleansing / atonement must occur (this word appears 15 times in Lev. 16)

II. The Setting (16:1-2)

III. Introduction to the Day of Atonement Worship Service (16:3-10)

- A. Basic requirements of the ceremony (3-5)
- B. Outline of the Ceremony (6-10)
 - 1. Purification sacrifices
 - 2. Scapegoat
 - 3. Ascension/burnt offerings.

IV. Cleansing the Priest, People and Place: The sin offerings (16:11-19)

- A. Purification of Aaron and priests (11-13)
- B. Purification of the people (15a)
- C. Purification of the place (14-19)
- D. What is the main purpose? (16)

V. Removing sin/guilt from the people: The scapegoat (16:20-22, see 7-8)

VI. The Cleansed People and Priests Draw Near to God: Burnt offerings (16:23-28)

VII. "Save the Date": The recurring need for cleansing/sacrifice (16:29-34)

VIII. Conclusion – The Center of the Pentateuch and Gospel (Heb 9-10)

A. Leviticus 16 is at the center of the Old Covenant

1. Leviticus is at the center of the Pentateuch¹

Genesis: Separation from the nations/blessings/land/descendants

Exodus: Israel's desert journeys

Leviticus: Sacrifices/clean/holy

Numbers: Israel's desert journeys

Deuteronomy: Separation from the nations/blessings/land/descendants

2. Leviticus 16 is the center of Leviticus and thus the Pentateuch

1-7 – Sacrifices – Approaching God

8-10 Institution of Priesthood

11-15 Clean/Unclean in daily life

16 Day of Atonement

17-20 Holy/Profane in daily life

21-22 Legislation of the priesthood

23-27 Festivals – Sacred Time & Sacrifices

3. Why is it at the center and what do we learn?
 - a. When God's place was among unclean people (sin and the resulting death), purification was needed as well as forgiveness.
 - b. This could only come through a sacrifice that was without blemish and the bearing away of sin.
 - c. Even the most set apart, holy man in Israel (the high priest) could not approach God's presence without atonement. And he had to do it each year (it was never the final word).

B. Jesus' atonement is what this pointed to and is the center of the New Covenant (Heb 9-10)

1. The tabernacle and the Old Covenant (Heb 9:1-3, 6-8, see esp. v. 8)
2. Jesus fulfills this, and supersedes it (Heb 9:11-14, 21-26)
3. Application: Draw near to God with full assurance (Heb. 10:19-22)
4. Wenham writes

"Christ on the cross achieved what the high priests of the Old Covenant had attempted to do on the day of atonement. The effectiveness of his atonement was demonstrated by the veil of the temple being rent in two (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). For Hebrews, the tearing of the veil corresponds to the tearing of Christ's flesh. Now all believers have the right to enter into the presence of God (Heb. 10:19ff.)."²

¹ See Morales *Who Shall Ascend* p 23-24

² Wenham, Gordon J. 1979. [*The Book of Leviticus*](#). The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.