

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

LEV. 16:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they offered before the LORD, and died;

2 And the LORD said unto Moses, **Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the vail before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat.**

3 Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place: with a young bullock for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering.

4 He shall put on the holy linen coat, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired: these are holy garments; therefore shall he wash his flesh in water, and so put them on.

5 And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.

6 And Aaron shall offer his bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make an atonement for himself, and for his house.

7 And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

8 And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat.

9 And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the LORD's lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering.

10 But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness.

11 And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself:

12 And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail:

13 And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not:

14 And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times.

15 Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat:

16 And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness.

NOTES

The Day of Atonement

Lesson Text: Leviticus 16:1-16

Related Scriptures: Leviticus 23:26-32; Numbers 29:7-11;
Romans 3:21-26; Hebrews 10:4-22; Isaiah 53:4-10

TIME: 1445 B.C.

PLACE: Mount Sinai

GOLDEN TEXT—"Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place . . . that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat" (Leviticus 16:2).

Lesson Exposition

PREPARING TO OFFER THE SACRIFICE—Lev. 16:1-10

Aftermath of the death of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 16:1-2). In last week's lesson, we learned that even the priests were subject to punishment if they violated the commands of God. Being anointed as priests did not mean that they were no longer guilty of sin. Nadab and Abihu went beyond what God had ordained as proper service, and it cost them their lives. Immediately following this, God instituted the Day of Atonement.

Verse 1 establishes the timeline for the Day of Atonement, with the deaths of Nadab and Abihu being the occasion. God demonstrated His holiness by judging them immediately for their unwillingness to submit to His instructions. He also showed grace to the community by continually making Himself available to them. However, they had to understand that He is holy and could not be approached in a lackadaisical manner any way they pleased. God is never to be worshipped cavalierly.

God's command to Aaron not to come into the holy place inside the veil

whenever he so chose has led some to suggest that Nadab and Abihu may have attempted to enter that area. This place, also known as the Holy of Holies, was not to be entered by anyone except the high priest—and then only according to very specific instructions.

In order to prevent tragedy from happening again, God instructed Aaron to stay out of this holy place where the ark of the covenant rested with its cover known as the "mercy seat." The reason this room was so sacred was not because of the items that were in it but rather because the presence of God resided there. God Himself was present in a cloud above the mercy seat, or place of atonement.

No mortal sinner was able to enter into the presence of a holy God and survive. Aaron would suffer the same fate of his two sons if he entered the Holy of Holies on his own terms.

Holy garments (Lev. 16:3-4). Up to this point, all priestly activities had taken place outside the Holy of Holies. The time had come, however, for God to establish one day a year for Aaron, the high priest, to enter the Most

Holy Place, and there to offer a yearly atonement for the sins of the nation (cf. Lev. 16:29-34; Heb. 9:7).

The Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, was important because it was what all the other sacrifices that took place continually in the outer court hinged on. The sacrifices that took place throughout the year were of no value if the sins of the people were not atoned for. The Day of Atonement took place once a year, but it was essential for the people to commune with God and to be forgiven.

On this one day yearly, Aaron was to meet with the Lord in the Most Holy Place, according to God's very stringent instructions. Aaron first had to bring with him into the tabernacle court a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. The sin offering was to cleanse him and his family from their sins (Lev. 16:6); the burnt offering was an act of consecration (cf. vs. 24).

Aaron also had to wear specific articles of clothing on that day. It appears that contrary to the beautiful garments he wore when performing his high priestly duties among the people, he was to wear very humble garments when coming before God on this day. He wore a holy linen coat, or tunic, over a linen undergarment. He tied a linen sash around his waist and wore a linen turban on his head.

Before putting these garments on, Aaron had to wash himself completely. This was traditionally done by immersion. When serving in the outer court or at the altar, the high priest only had to wash his hands and feet with water that came from the holy basin (cf. Ex. 30:18-21). Entering the presence of God in the inner room, however, meant that he had to wash his entire body before putting on the holy, linen garments.

Sacrifices for atonement (Lev. 16:5-6). After washing himself and dressing in the holy garments, Aaron was to bring two male goats from the

people for a sin offering as well as a ram for a burnt offering. These would be offered on behalf of the people. Before proceeding with these offerings, however, Aaron first had to offer "his bullock of the sin offering" to "make an atonement for himself, and for his house" (vs. 6; cf. vs. 3).

Here is an important distinction between the priestly ministries of Aaron and Jesus. Although serving as the high priest, Aaron still committed sin. Before he could offer sacrifices that would atone for the sin of the people, he first had to offer a sacrifice to atone for his own sin.

On the other hand, Christ, our Great High Priest, did not offer a sacrifice for Himself but gave Himself as a sacrifice for all people. The sacrifices Aaron made had to be made repeatedly, but the sacrifice of Jesus was made only once and permanently atones for the sins of all who believe in Him. Since Jesus is without sin, He did not have to offer a sacrifice for Himself.

Casting lots (Lev. 16:7-8). After sacrificing the bull, Aaron was then to cast lots in order to determine the purpose for each of the two goats.

The two goats were to be brought before the Lord at the entrance of the tabernacle. This shows that the goats belonged to the Lord and were to be used for His purposes. One of the goats would be presented before the Lord as an atoning sacrifice, while the other would be designated the scape-goat.

The purpose of the goats (Lev. 16:9-10). The goat determined by lot to be the Lord's was to be used as a sacrifice for a sin offering on behalf of the people.

Sacrificing a goat to atone for the sins of the people was not sufficient in and of itself to deal with the nation's sin. Sin also had to be banished from the community, which is why the second goat,

the scapegoat, was necessary.

The scapegoat was to be presented alive to the Lord and then sent away into the wilderness, symbolically taking with it the sins of the people (cf. Lev. 16:20-22).

OFFERING THE SACRIFICE— Lev. 16:11-16

Sacrificing the bull (Lev. 16:11). The ritual summarized in verses 6-10 is now explained in greater detail. It began with Aaron's sacrifice of the bull for the atonement of his own sins as well as those of his family.

Burning incense before the Lord (Lev. 16:12-13). After sacrificing the bull, Aaron then took a censer full of burning coals from the fire of the Lord, which was found at the altar of burnt offering in the tabernacle courtyard.

The censer was taken before the Lord in the Most Holy Place, where it provided a cloud that covered the mercy seat on the ark. The resulting mist served as protection for Aaron, guarding him from directly seeing the presence of God.

The blood of the bull (Lev. 16:14). The mercy seat was the lid that rested on top of the ark of the covenant.

Aaron was to dip his finger in the blood of the bull and sprinkle it seven times on the mercy seat.

Cleansing the Holy Place (Lev. 16:15-16). The next step in the atonement ritual was to sacrifice the goat that had been designated by God as the sin offering for the people. The sacrifice of this goat, like the entire ritual, pointed toward the sacrifice of Jesus. The goat was from the people of Israel, just as Jesus was from Israel. It was chosen by God, just as Jesus was chosen by God. The goat's blood was taken into the Holy of Holies for atonement. Jesus' blood was taken to the most holy place in heaven, securing an eternal atonement for all who believe

in Him (cf. Heb. 9:12).

The blood of the goat was to be sprinkled on and in front of the mercy seat inside the Holy of Holies, just as the blood of the bull had been (Lev. 16:15).

This was to provide atonement not only for the people but also for the Most Holy Place. In addition, the same ritual was to be followed for the entire tabernacle and all its furnishings.

This was necessary due to the "uncleanness of the children of Israel" (vs. 16). Their sins contaminated the tabernacle each time they worshipped there. The blood from the atonement sacrifice provided a cleansing for the entire place of worship.

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

QUESTIONS

1. What occasion prompted God to give instructions for the Day of Atonement?
2. Where in the tabernacle did the presence of God reside?
3. What sacrifices was Aaron to offer to the Lord for himself on the Day of Atonement?
4. What garments was Aaron to wear on this day?
5. What is a key difference between the priesthood of Jesus and the priesthood of Aaron?
6. What animal was to be presented as a sin offering for the people?
7. Why was a second goat needed?
8. What was Aaron to do after sacrificing the bull for himself?
9. How did the sacrifice of the goat in particular point to Jesus?
10. Why did the tabernacle itself have to be cleansed?

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We must continue to serve and respect the Lord, even when we do not understand His ways (Lev. 16:1).
2. Coming to God in prayer is a privilege; we should treat it as such (vs. 2).
3. Believers should prepare their hearts before meeting for weekly worship (vss. 3-4).
4. Everybody is a sinner in need of Jesus' blood sacrifice (vss. 5-11); this should motivate us to preach the gospel.
5. The Lord's holiness is unfathomable, and He deserves our praise (vss. 12-13).
6. Jesus dealt with our sin once and for all on the cross (vss. 14-16), so we do not have to fear God's wrath.

—Megan Hickman.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How can we keep our hearts soft toward the Lord even when He brings suffering and loss into our lives (Lev. 16:1; cf. Heb. 4:16)?
2. In what ways can you prepare your heart to worship the Lord on Sunday (vs. 4)?
3. How would you counsel someone who thinks he needs to become sinless before trusting in Jesus?
4. Why do our sins need to be covered with blood? Why did they need to be covered specifically with the blood of Jesus?
5. Why do leaders and their households need to take special care in practicing righteousness (vs. 11)?

—Megan Hickman.

Golden Text Illuminated

“Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place . . . that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat” (Leviticus 16:2).

For a sinful human being, entering into the holy presence of Yahweh is a life-forfeiting prospect. Because Yahweh is supremely holy and because all humans since the Fall are sinful, you should expect death when you enter His presence except at His sovereign discretion.

To assuage Yahweh's righteous judgment on the Day of Atonement, much sacrificial blood had to be shed.

If this bloodshed seems extreme, then consider this: the entire ceremonial system of sacrifice under the Law was of no lasting effect in atoning for human sins. It was merely a type and shadow of the real atoning sacrifice made once and for all by Jesus Christ (cf. Heb. 10:1-4)!

Within the veil of the holiest place was the ark of the covenant, overlaid with gold. Upon the solid gold lid of the ark were the cherubim, facing each other with outstretched wings that covered the mercy seat, the earthly equivalent of the very throne of Yahweh.

In order for Aaron or any of his successors as high priest to survive an encounter with Yahweh's presence within the holiest place, they had to burn divinely prescribed incense on coals taken from the altar to create a cloud of smoke and incense that would obscure Aaron's vision of the Lord's mercy seat (Lev. 16:12-13).

—John Lody.