

BIBLE BRIEFING

LEVITICUS

Chapter 16

“Un-Happy Yom Kippur”

Introduction

The rabbis referred to it with the simple word *Yoma*, “The Day.”

It’s the Day of Atonement. It is the only day of mourning and fasting which God gave His people. It is listed with the feasts; but it was a fast. On this day you didn’t say, “*Happy Yom Kippur*” or “*Merry Yom Kippur*” because that was not the way the day was celebrated. It was the day to afflict the soul because of sin. It was mourning for sin.

The word for “atonement” is the Hebrew *כִּפּוּר*, which means “to cover.” It’s used sixteen times in this chapter. God did not remove sins in the Old Testament; He covered them until Christ came and removed them.

On the first day of the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar, trumpets were blown to announce the beginning of a new year (Rosh Hashanah). The tenth day of the seventh month was the Day of Atonement. It was followed by the Feast of Tabernacles, which started on the fifteenth day and lasted a week.

It was a new year, a new beginning; the people needed to have their sins covered and start afresh.

Leviticus 16:1 Now the LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they offered *profane fire* before the LORD, and died;

Leviticus 16:2 and the LORD said to Moses: “Tell Aaron your brother not to come at *just any time* into the Holy *Place* inside the veil, before the mercy seat which *is* on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat.

The instructions and restrictions of this day grew out the rebellion and disobedience of Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, when they intruded into the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle, and were immediately put to death by the direct judgment of God (Chapter 10).

I think the priests were afraid! The same fate awaited any of them who would approach God unprepared.

How could you, how should you, approach God in the holy of holies? The preparations on the Day of Atonement answered their concerns.

The Preparation of the Priest:

Leviticus 16:3 “Thus Aaron shall come into the Holy *Place*: with *the blood of a young bull* as a sin offering, and *of a ram* as a burnt offering.

Leviticus 16:4 He shall put the holy linen tunic and the linen trousers on his body; he shall be girded with a linen sash, and with the linen turban he shall be attired. These *are* holy garments. Therefore he shall wash his body in water, and put them on.

The unique and significant feature about this day was that the high priest alone performed the ritual. He had no assistance whatsoever. It was all his work, from the menial tasks to the high priestly offices. All the other priests retired from the tabernacle. He alone entered, for the work of atonement was his.

This is important to see because he pictured Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was alone with the sins of the world.

The high priest laid aside his garments of glory and beauty. He left them in the Holy Place, where he would return and put them on again. He became attired in the same linen garb as the other priests. He washed himself and put on the linen garments only. He must be unadorned but pure.

This is a beautiful foreshadowing of Christ, our High Priest, who laid aside His glory and took upon Himself human flesh to die on the cross:

John 1:1, 14, 18 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared Him.

Our LORD did not lay aside His deity, but He put aside His glory when He came down to this earth and became a man:

Philippians 2:5-8 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Leviticus 16:5 And he shall take from the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats as a sin offering, and one ram as a burnt offering.
Leviticus 16:6 "Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering, which *is* for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his house.


Aaron offered a sin offering for himself and his family and maybe included the entire tribe of Levi.

This phase of the great Day of Atonement finds no counterpart in the life and work of Christ. He had no sin. He was without sin. He did not die for Himself. He was made sin for us. He never made an offering for Himself. The offering of turtledoves which was brought to the temple when He was a baby was for the cleansing of Mary, His mother. It was to remind her that she was a sinner. There is no record of a sacrifice or an offering for Jesus. But Aaron had to make an offering for himself first, and then he could make an offering for the people.

Leviticus 16:7 He shall take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.
Leviticus 16:8 Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat.

The two goats were to be as alike as possible.

Leviticus 16:9 And Aaron shall bring the goat on which the LORD's lot fell, and offer it as a sin offering.
Leviticus 16:10 But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make atonement upon it, *and* to let it go as the scapegoat into the wilderness.

The goat sent into the wilderness was called the scapegoat. The Hebrew word is . There has been some confusion as to its meaning. Two views are most likely:

1. The word may perhaps signify 'removal' or 'dismissal.' The goat for 'removal' bears away all the sins of Israel, symbolically laid

- upon him. They are taken completely away from the presence of God and the camp. The first goat symbolized the means of their atonement – the substitution of an innocent victim. The second goat symbolized the effect of the sacrifice – the sins were gone.
2. The Jews have other elaborate traditions about *Azazel*, saying he is a demonic being. In support of that idea is the structure of the sentence in verse eight where one goat is for the Lord and the other is (literally) for *Azazel*. Scripture in general lends some support to the idea that demons somehow inhabit waste places and deserts.

If *Azazel* is a demon... Why send him the goat laden with sins? As an analogy: Because of sin, mankind is in the power of Satan; he is the “prince of this world.” He is represented as the accuser of mankind, called in the Revelation “the accuser of the brethren,” only overcome by the blood of the Lamb. To Satan, represented by *Azazel*, is the goat laden with sins sent – full with the forgiven sins of God’s people, forgiven them by the blood of the sacrificed substitute. It all serves as an announcement to the enemy of our souls that his power over God’s people is gone because their sins have been covered by the atoning blood.

The Preparation of the Place:

Leviticus 16:11 “And Aaron shall bring the bull of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his house, and shall kill the bull as the sin offering which *is* for himself.

Leviticus 16:12 Then he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, with his hands full of sweet incense beaten fine, and bring *it* inside the veil.

Leviticus 16:13 And 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 Testimony, lest he die.

Leviticus 16:14 He shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle *it* with his finger on the mercy seat on the east *side*; and before the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.

The exact order of events is a little hard to follow. First the high priest took off his glorious garments, bathed, and dressed in the ordinary garments. He presented two goats before the door of the Tabernacle and cast lots. Then he killed a bull as a sin offering for himself and his family. Next he took a censer of burning coals with his hands full

of sweet incense and carried them into the Holy of Holies. There he poured the incense over the live coals, causing a cloud of incense to cover the mercy seat. He went out, returned to the altar, and returned to the Holy of Holies with blood which he sprinkled on top of the mercy seat seven times. He killed the goat chosen for the sin offering and sprinkled its blood on the mercy seat. As we will see in subsequent verses, he went out from the Holy of Holies sprinkling blood to make atonement for the Tabernacle itself. Then he laid his bloody hands on the other goat, confessed the sins of the people, and a chosen man led the scapegoat away.

Before anything was done to the goats, Aaron had to enter the Holy of Holies with the blood of the bullock for himself and for his house. So it is not exactly accurate to say that the high priest went in only one time. He went in only one day of the year, but he went in and out several times on that day.

According to Jewish tradition, it was on the Day of Atonement that the high priest - and only the high priest - could pronounce the name of God, the sacred **YHWH**. When he entered the Holy Place with the blood of the goat set apart to the LORD, he would utter the name. He was the only one, and that was the only time, when the name could be uttered, and the high priest was to pass on the exact pronunciation of the name of God to his successor with his dying breath.

The idea of sprinkling blood on the mercy seat is that God was above the mercy seat, and as He looked down upon the ark of the covenant, He saw the sin of man - represented by the items in the ark of the covenant: Then, the high priest would come and sprinkle atoning blood seven times on the mercy seat - on top of the emblems of Israel's sin. God would see the blood cover over the sin, and atonement would be made.

This captures the thought behind the Hebrew word for atonement: Sin was not removed, but covered over by sacrificial blood. The New Testament idea of atonement is that our sin is not merely covered, but removed, so there is no barrier between God and man any longer. Some like to separate the word atone to read "at-one." As you are at one with God.

I'm sure this was an awesome day for the high priest. He must perform accurately and meticulously in the presence of God. The slightest deviation would mean instant death. He probably rehearsed the ritual many times before the performance actually took place. As far as we know, no high priest ever died in the Holy of Holies. The only two who died were Nadab and Abihu.

When Jesus offered a perfect atonement for sin, He did not need to make a sin offering for Himself:

Hebrews 7:26-28 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.

Christ was made sin for us on the cross. This is the counterpart to the brazen altar in the tabernacle. Then, as our Great High Priest, He entered into heaven and offered His own blood for our sins. Now the throne of God is a mercy seat for us. All of this is clearly taught us in Hebrews 9 and 10.

Whereas Aaron went with fear and trembling, we are bidden to come with boldness according to Hebrews 4:16. Where he did not dare linger and could come only one day in the year, we are bidden to come constantly. Christ, our High Priest, carried His own blood and the sweet incense of His own intercession into heaven, and He is there today at God's right hand.

The Preparation of the People:

After Aaron had gone in for himself and his house, he was to go into the Holy of Holies for the people.

Leviticus 16:15 "Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which is for the people, bring its blood inside the veil, do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat.

Leviticus 16:16 So he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all

their sins; and so he shall do for the tabernacle of meeting which remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness.

Leviticus 16:17 There shall be no man in the tabernacle of meeting when he goes in to make atonement in the Holy *Place*, until he comes out, that he may make atonement for himself, for his household, and for all the assembly of Israel.

Leviticus 16:18 And 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 some of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar all around.

Leviticus 16:19 Then he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, cleanse it, and consecrate it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.

Now he is going in, not only for himself and his family, but for the children of Israel. This is done because of their transgressions and because of their uncleanness. The same ritual is followed in slaying the goat as in the slaying of the bullock for Aaron. He goes into the Holy of Holies as before, but now the atonement covers the Holy Place itself because of the contamination of Israel. Even the brazen altar itself must have the blood applied because this is where the sins of Israel were confessed and atoned; it is polluted because of the sin of the people.

All of this is to remind us of the One who died on the cross for us. It is not the cross that is important; the importance is in the One who died on the cross.

1Peter 1:18–19 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

All of this revealed the inadequacy of the ritual of the blood of bulls and goats:

Hebrews 9:23 It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

After the high priest's sin had been dealt with, after the tabernacle itself was cleansed, Aaron then would deal with the sin of the people through the transference of sin and release of the scapegoat.

Leviticus 16:16 So he shall make atonement for the Holy *Place*, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins; and so he shall do for the tabernacle of meeting which remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness.

Leviticus 16:17 There shall be no man in the tabernacle of meeting when he goes in to make atonement in the Holy *Place*, until he comes out, that he may make atonement for himself, for his household, and for all the assembly of Israel.

Leviticus 16:18 And 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 some of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar all around.

Leviticus 16:19 Then he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, cleanse it, and consecrate it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.

Leviticus 16:20 “And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy *Place*, the tabernacle of meeting, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat.

Leviticus 16:21 Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send *it* away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man.

Leviticus 16:22 The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness.

Aaron had sprinkled the blood of “the Lord’s goat” on the mercy seat and now he places his bloody hands on the head of the live goat and confesses the sins of Israel. The laying on of hands denotes the fact that this goat is now identified as the sins of Israel.

Of Christ it is said,

Isaiah 53:6 ...the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

2Corinthians 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us...

Aaron put that goat into the hands of a man who had no personal interest in it, and Israelites were stationed at intervals to see that the job was done. The live goat finally disappeared into the wilderness, never to be seen or found again. The news that the goat was gone was relayed from station to station so that it was known later in the Tabernacle.

This was a perfect demonstration of atonement under the Old Covenant, before the completed work of Jesus on the cross. Sin

could be “put away,” but never really eliminated - that goat, bearing the sin of Israel, was alive somewhere, but put away.

How could one know for certain that God had accepted the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement? What if someone accidentally encountered the scapegoat in the wilderness? What if the scapegoat wandered back among the people of Israel?

Through their traditions, the Jews began to deal with these concerns.

“On the head of the *scape-goat* a piece of scarlet cloth was tied, and the tradition of the Jews states that if God accepted the sacrifice the scarlet cloth turned *white* while the goat was led to the desert; but if God had not accepted this expiation, the *redness* continued, and the rest of the year was spent in mourning.” (Clarke)

Later, Jews altered the ceremony so the goat would be killed, and have no chance of encountering Israel again:

“The Jews write, that this goat was carried to the mountain called Azazel, whence the goat is so called; and that there he was cast headlong; and that the red string by which he was led turned white when God was pleased with the Israelites, otherwise it remained red; and they mourned all that year.” (Poole)

Did God always accept this sacrifice?

“And the ancient Hebrews write, that forty years before the destruction of the temple, which was about the time of Christ’s death, this red string turned no more white.” (Poole)

When Jesus’ blood red body was risen from the dead, and clothed with white garments, it was proof forever that the red had changed to white - and atonement at the cross was perfect and complete!

Just as the news was passed from station to station that sin was removed, so the good news that Jesus Christ has taken away our sins has been passed from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to Paul the Apostle, then to the early church fathers, and finally to me and to you. Jesus has put away our sins in a perfect and complete manner.

When the high priest is there with his bloody hands on the head of the goat, I think of my Lord on the cross. John pointed Him out, "... Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Dean Law has well said, "Faith transfers our sins; Christ removes them; God forgets them."

Leviticus 16:23 "Then Aaron shall come into the tabernacle of meeting, shall take off the linen garments which he put on when he went into the Holy *Place*, and shall leave them there.

Another Jewish tradition: These particular garments were never worn again.

Leviticus 16:24 And he shall wash his body with water in a holy place, put on his garments, come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people, and make atonement for himself and for the people.

The ritual of the great Day of Atonement has now been completed. All that was left for Aaron to do was to wash up. This finds no counterpart in Christ. When His work was finished, He sat down at the right hand of God. Aaron did not dare enter the holy place for another year, but our Lord sits in the presence of the Father because there is no taint of sin upon Him now - even though He bore all sins upon the Cross.

When atonement was finished, the priest emerged from the tabernacle in glory - with the humble garments taken off, and now in his normal clothes for glory and beauty.

Leviticus 16:26 And he who released the goat as the scapegoat shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp.

Leviticus 16:27 The bull *for* the sin offering and the goat *for* the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy *Place*, shall be carried outside the camp. And they shall burn in the fire their skins, their flesh, and their offal.

Leviticus 16:28 Then he who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp.

The one who led the goat into the wilderness was contaminated by contact with the live goat and must wash his clothes and bathe

himself. The carcasses of the bullock and goat were taken without the camp and burned, and the people who did that had to wash themselves.

Leviticus 16:29 *"This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you.*

Whatever day of the week Yom Kippur fell on was considered a Sabbath. The people did no work; their atonement was accomplished by grace through faith without any works of righteousness.

"Afflict your souls" was interpreted to mean fasting and confession of sins. The word *"afflict"* is the same word used to describe the affliction of the Jews by the Egyptians.

We have a New Testament counterpart:

James 4:8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse *your* hands, ye sinners; and purify *your* hearts, ye double minded.

James 4:9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and *your* joy to heaviness.

James 4:10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

Repentance is a lost word in Churches. We're trying to get people to say, *"Here I am,"* before they say, *"Woe is me."*

Leviticus 16:30 For on that day *the priest* shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, *that* you may be clean from all your sins before the LORD.

Leviticus 16:31 *It is* a sabbath of solemn rest for you, and you shall afflict your souls. *It is* a statute forever.

Leviticus 16:32 And the priest, who is anointed and consecrated to minister as priest in his father's place, shall make atonement, and put on the linen clothes, the holy garments;

Leviticus 16:33 then he shall make atonement for the Holy Sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tabernacle of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly.

Leviticus 16:34 This shall be an everlasting statute for you, to make atonement for the children of Israel, for all their sins, once a year." And he did as the LORD commanded Moses.

Yom Kippur traditionally ends with the blowing of the Shofar, the trumpet which heralds the coming of the Messiah.

After these events, the Jews stood there a sinful people, but accepted.

You and I are still a sinful people, but accepted – only in a much fuller, richer, more permanent way. We don't have to wait another year to come trembling with ritual cleansing; we can come any time with boldness to the throne to receive mercy and grace.

Conclusion

You know the Jews had a calendar based on the number seven:

1. There were seven days in a week.
2. Every seventh year was to be a Sabbath of rest upon the land.
3. The year after every seven times seven years, every fiftieth year, was a year of Jubilee when many debts were canceled.

It's interesting that when the year of Jubilee came, it always began with the evening concluding the annual Day of Atonement.

Here is what that tells us: Jesus' atonement for sin is final and complete. The sacrifice is over; it is the year of Jubilee for all those who trust in Him for their salvation.