

LEVITICUS

Chapter 16

The Day of Atonement

The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died, 2 and the LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat. 3 But in this way Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with a bull from the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. 4 He shall put on the holy linen coat and shall have the linen undergarment on his body, and he shall tie the linen sash around his waist, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water and then put them on. 5 And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. 6 “Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. 7 Then he shall take the two goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting. 8 And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel. 9 And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and use it as a sin offering, 10 but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel. 11 “Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. He shall kill the bull as a sin offering for himself. 12 And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil 13 and put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die. 14 And he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat on the east side, and in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times. 15 “Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. 16 Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses. 17 No one may be in the tent of meeting from the time he enters to make atonement in the Holy Place until he comes out and has made atonement for himself and for his house and for all the assembly of Israel. 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 some of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar all around. 19 And he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it and consecrate it from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel. 20 “And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. 21 And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. 22 The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness. 23 “Then Aaron shall come into the tent of meeting and shall take off the linen garments that he put on when he went into the Holy Place and shall leave them there. 24 And he shall bathe his body in water in a holy place and put on his garments and come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people and make atonement for himself and for the people. 25 And the fat of

the sin offering he shall burn on the altar. 26 And he who lets the goat go to Azazel shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp. 27 And 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. Their skin and their flesh and their dung shall be burned up with fire. 28 And he who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp. 29 “And it shall be a statute to you forever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you. 30 For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins. 31 It is a Sabbath of solemn rest to you, and you shall afflict yourselves; it is a statute forever. 32 And the priest who is anointed and consecrated as priest in his father's place shall make atonement, wearing the holy linen garments. 33 He shall make atonement for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. 34 And this shall be a statute forever for you, that atonement may be made for the people of Israel once in the year because of all their sins.” And Aaron did as the LORD commanded Moses.

16:1–34 See 23:26–32; 25:9; Ex 30:10; Nu 29:7–11; Heb 9:7. The order of ritual for the Day of Atonement was as follows: 1. The high priest went to the basin in the courtyard, removed his regular garments, washed himself (v. 4) and went into the Holy Place to put on the special garments for the Day of Atonement (v. 4). 2. He went out to sacrifice a bull at the altar of burnt offering as a sin offering for himself and the other priests (v. 11). 3. He went into the Most Holy Place with some of the bull's blood, with incense and with coals from the altar of burnt offering (vv. 12–13). The incense was placed on the burning coals, and the smoke of the incense hid the ark from view. 4. He sprinkled some of the bull's blood on and in front of the cover of the ark (v. 14). 5. He went outside the tabernacle and cast lots for two goats to see which was to be sacrificed and which was to be the scapegoat (vv. 7–8). 6. At the altar of burnt offering the high priest killed the goat for the sin offering for the people, and for a second time he went into the Most Holy Place, this time to sprinkle the goat's blood in front of and on the atonement cover (vv. 5, 9, 15–16a). 7. He returned to the Holy Place (called “Tent of Meeting” in v. 16) and sprinkled the goat's blood there (v. 16b). 8. He went outside to the altar of burnt offering and sprinkled it (v. 18) with the blood of the bull (for himself, v. 11) and of the goat (for the people, v. 15). 9. While in the courtyard, he laid both hands on the second goat, thus symbolizing the transfer of Israel's sin, and sent it out into the desert (vv. 20–22). 10. The man who took the goat away, after he accomplished his task, washed himself and his clothes outside the camp (v. 26) before rejoining the people. 11. The high priest entered the Holy Place to remove his special garments (v. 23). 12. He went out to the basin to wash and put on his regular priestly clothes (v. 24). 13. As a final sacrifice he went out to the great altar and offered a ram (v. 3) as a burnt offering for himself, and another ram (v. 5) for the people (v. 24). 14. The conclusion of the entire day was the removal of the sacrifices for the sin offerings to a place outside the camp, where they were burned, and there the man who performed this ritual bathed and washed his clothes (vv. 27–28) before rejoining the people. (CSB)

16:2 *not to come at any time into the Holy Place.* The deaths of Nadab and Abihu necessitated regulations for the protection of those coming into God's presence. Aaron is not to enter the Most Holy Place indiscriminately (here called just “Holy Place”), but only on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), and then only after carefully following God's prescribed means of cleansing. (TLSB)

I will appear in the cloud. Refers to the cloud of smoke from the incense burned by the high priest as he entered God's presence (v 13). These regulations protected those serving God from defiling themselves and incurring God's wrath. Cf Ex 19:16–25. (TLSB)

16:3 *Holy Place.* The Most Holy Place (see v. 2). (CSB)

bull. For Aaron's cleansing (vv. 6, 11). Before Aaron could minister in the Most Holy Place for the nation, he himself had to be cleansed (Heb 5:1–3); not so Christ, who is our high priest and Aaron's antitype (Heb 7:26–28). (CSB)

16:4 Before entering into the Lord's presence, the high priest prepared himself by washing completely and dressing in the manner God ordained. These are the high priest's "sacred vestments." Cf 8:5–9. (TLSB)

16:5 *two male goats for a sin offering.* One was the usual sin offering and the other a scapegoat. No single offering could fully typify the atonement of Christ. The one goat was killed, its blood sprinkled in the Most Holy Place and its body burned outside the camp (vv. 15, 27), symbolizing the payment of the price of Christ's atonement. The other goat, sent away alive and bearing the sins of the nation (v. 21), symbolized the removal of sin and its guilt. (CSB)

On the Day of Atonement, Aaron offered two sacrifices for the entire Israelite community, including resident aliens. (TLSB)

ram. For the sins of the people; the one in v. 3 was for the sins of the high priest. Both were sacrificed at the end of the ceremony (v. 24). (CSB)

16:6–10 An outline of vv. 11–22. (CSB)

16:8 *cast lots.* One male goat was designated as belonging to God; the second was assigned to Azazel. (TLSB)

Azazel. Commonly translated as "a departing goat" or "[e]scapegoat." In modern Hbr, the words *lekh la-azazel* correspond to Eng "go to hell," which is exactly what the Israelite community wanted to happen to their sins before sending it off into the wilderness to die (vv 21–22). The death of this goat atoned for Israel's sins. (TLSB)

16:10 *make atonement over it.* The high priest placed his hands on the scapegoat and confessed Israel's sins over it (CSB)

16:12 *beaten small.* Finely ground. (TLSB)

16:13 The smoke of the incense covered the ark so that the high priest would not see the glorious presence of God (v. 2) and thus die. (CSB)

cloud. Provided a screen between the high priest and the mercy seat. The mercy seat is where God dwells; His presence was often marked by a cloud or theophany. God was present whether or not the cloud/theophany was visible. (TLSB)

so that he does not die. The incense cloud protected the high priest from seeing the Lord and dying. (TLSB)

16:15–16 *atonement for the Holy Place.* The blood sprinkled on the mercy seat and on the ground cleansed the Most Holy Place of Israel's sins. (TLSB)

16:16 *Tent of Meeting.* Here and in vv. 17, 20, 33 the term means the Holy Place. (CSB)

16:18–19 Leaving the Most Holy Place, the high priest carried the sacrificial blood and cleansed the altar of burnt offering in the courtyard of the tent of meeting. Over the course of the year, this altar had become defiled by the sins brought before it. Through ritual cleansing, blood was sprinkled seven times, symbolizing God’s perfection in this act. (TLSB)

16:21 *lay both his hands on the head.* With the laying on of hands, the priest offers a corporate confession of the acts of rebellion and sin the Israelites had committed against God. In so doing, the high priest transferred their sin to the scapegoat, which would take their sins away from them and into the wilderness. (TLSB)

confess ... the iniquities. Wicked acts performed against God; sin. (TLSB)

16:20–22 A summary description of substitutionary atonement. The sin of the worshipers was confessed and symbolically transferred to the sacrificial animal, on which hands were laid. (CSB)

16:23 *leave them there.* The high priest’s garments are holy and must stay inside the tent of meeting. Removing them would defile God’s holiness. (TLSB)

16:24 *burnt offering ... burnt offering.* The two rams mentioned in vv. 3, 5. (CSB)

Final act of cleansing for the altar of burnt offerings. (TLSB)

16:29, 31 *afflict yourselves.* Lit. “humble (or afflict) yourselves.” The expression came to be used of fasting (Ps 35:13). The Day of Atonement was the only regular fast day stipulated in the OT, though tradition later added other fast days to the Jewish calendar (see Zec 7:5; 8:19). (CSB)

16:29 *seventh month.* Tishri, the seventh month, begins with the Feast of Trumpets. The Day of Atonement follows on the 10th day, and on the 15th day the Feast of Tabernacles begins. (CSB)

The Day of Atonement was celebrated annually on the 10th day of the seventh month. Included in the self-denial practiced by the Israelites was a 24-hour abstention from food, drink, bathing, anointing, and sexual intercourse. The Israelites often wore sackcloth and ashes as a sign of mourning over the sins they had committed. (TLSB)

16:30 *clean before the Lord.* On the Day of Atonement the repentant Israelite was assured of sins forgiven. (CSB)

16:31 *Sabbath of solemn rest.* God connected the cessation of work on the seventh day of the week (Ex 31:15), the cessation of work in the seventh month on the Day of Atonement, and the complete cessation of cultivation of the land in the seventh year (Lv 25:4).(TLSB)

you shall afflict yourselves. By showing penitence before God. “There are monstrous debates about changing the law, ceremonies of the new law, and changing the Sabbath Day. They have all sprung from the false belief that in the Church there must be something similar to the services set forth in Leviticus [1–7], and that Christ had commissioned the apostles and bishops to come up with new ceremonies necessary to salvation. These errors crept into the Church when the righteousness that comes through faith was not taught clearly enough. Some debate whether or not keeping the Lord’s Day is not a divine right, but similar to it. They prescribe the extent to which it is lawful to work on holy days. What else are such disputes except traps for the conscience?” (AC XXVIII 61–64). (TLSB)

16:34 *once in the year.* Heb 9:11–10:14 repeatedly points out this contrast with Christ’s “once for all” sacrifice. (CSB)

Ch 16 Once a year, on the 10th day of the seventh month, God implemented a mandatory Day of Atonement. Ritual sacrifices cleansed the sanctuary, tent of meeting, altar, priests, and entire congregation of their sins. The chief cleansing agent was blood, which pointed forward to Jesus’ sacrifice. By His death, Jesus offered the perfect sacrifice and entered the heavenly sanctuary with His blood (Heb 9:11–14), opening the way for believers to enter into God’s presence (Heb 6:20). • We give You thanks, Lord, for Your abundant mercy. You heard Your people’s prayers of repentance and sent Your precious Son to die for all. By His blood, we are made clean and enter into eternal life with You. Amen. (TLSB)