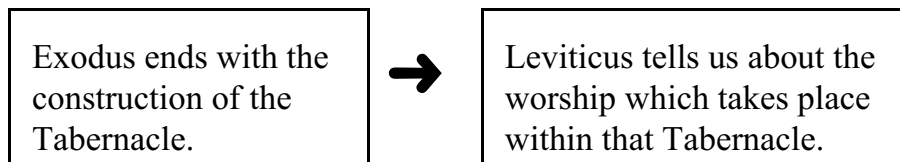


THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

The book of Leviticus gets its names from the old Greek Septuagint and refers to "that which pertains to the Levites." This title was given because so much of the book deals with the ministry of the priesthood which descended from the tribe of Levi.

As we read through this book, we are confronted by a bewildering array of laws and instructions about sacrifices and rituals and observances. They all have one thing in common. The rituals deal with WORSHIP and HOLINESS. In this, it is a continuation of the Law which is set forth in Exodus.



That is the way this book starts out. From the very first verse of the very first chapter, it begins with the Lord calling to Moses and speaking *to him from the tent of meeting...* (*Leviticus 1:1*). Exodus ends with the glory of the Lord moving into the Tabernacle. Leviticus picks up with the presence of the Lord calling out to Moses from inside the Tabernacle.

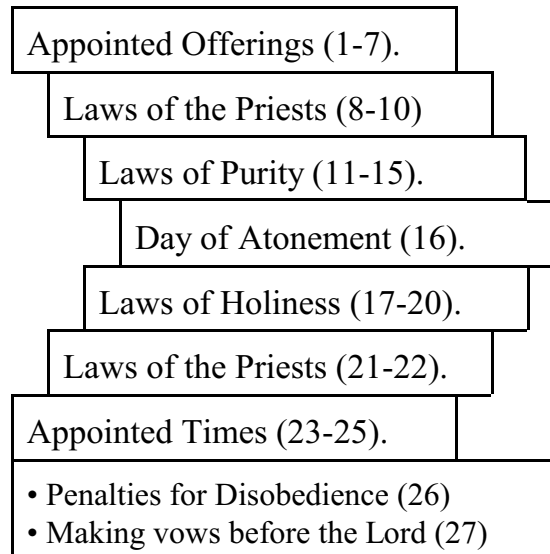
Leviticus teaches God's people how they are to approach Him and live pleasing in His sight. Its central command is to "be HOLY."

"...You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2).

GENESIS	EXODUS	LEVITICUS
Begins with creation	Begins in bondage	Begins in sacrifice
Depicts the rise of God's people	Tells of the redemption from Egypt	Sets forth the rituals of worship and of holiness

The big idea in Leviticus is holiness. The command, *You shall be holy, for I am holy*, is repeated four times (Leviticus 11:45; 19:2; 20:7; 20:26) as well as being said of the priests and how he shall be holy (Leviticus 21:8). These various laws were given to set the people of God apart as a special people, distinct from the other nations of the world.

As you first come to the book of Leviticus and begin to read through these various ceremonial laws, they seem to be a large, bewildering collection with little rhyme or reason. However, if you step back and look at the book as a whole, a grand design begins to emerge. The design is what scholars refer to as a chiasm -- a form of Hebrew parallelism.



A chiasm usually brings its primary focus to that which takes place at the pivotal or central portion of its parallel. That is the case here. Everything in the first part of the book moves toward the observance described in chapter 16 and everything after that point flows from what takes place in that chapter.

Thus, for today, I want to focus specifically on the teaching of Leviticus 16 as the Lord sets forth the observance for the most holy day of the year - *Yom Kippur* - the Day of Atonement.

One of the traditions that many American households have adopted is the rite we know as “Spring Cleaning.” It is that time of year when you go through all of the junk that you have accumulated and you toss it out. It may involve cleaning out a garage or an attic or several closets. *Yom Kippur* was like that. Although it was observed in the Fall, it involved a spiritual spring cleaning in which the spiritual debris was removed

I have made a career of fire fighting. Fire fighters are known for coming in and putting the wet stuff on the red stuff. But there is also something else that we do. It is called “overhaul.” It involves going through where the fire has been and taking anything out that might contribute to a re-ignition.

Spring cleaning and overhaul. The yearly Day of Atonement accomplished both. As we go through this passage, you might want to ask whether there is something in your own

life that needs to be overhauled. Is there some accumulated junk that needs to be removed?

SETTING FOR A SERMON

Now the LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they had approached the presence of the LORD and died. (Leviticus 16:1).

This chapter is given to us in the shadow of the deadly consequences of disobedience. The death of the two sons of Aaron had been described in Leviticus 10. It was there that they had made the fatal decision to approach the presence of the Lord utilizing “strange fire” -- that is, using a means of their own devices and apart from the instructions of the Lord to come into the presence of God.

There is an important lesson here. We don’t get to choose the means and manner in which we approach God. That is a lesson that has somehow been missed in today’s Postmodern culture. We live in an age that views truth as relative and in which people seem to think that there are many ways to approach God.

There is nothing new under the sun. What is true about people today was also true in Moses’ day. The Postmoderns of his day were a couple of theology students known as Nadab and Abihu. They thought to themselves, “Why should we limit ourselves to the ordinances that uncle Moses brought down from Sinai? Certainly we ought to get with a more contemporary program. Let’s utilize a system of worship that is more user friendly and contemporary to the worshipers of our new generation!”

And so, Nadab and Abihu put their plan into action. They brought a “strange fire” into the holy place. They used a means of trying to approach God that was contrary to that which had been established by Him. And they died.

Why does this chapter open with such a reminder? It is to remind us that we do not get to choose the manner in which we approach God. That isn’t said to protect Him as much as it is said to protect US.

In the closing benediction of his epistle to Timothy, the apostle Paul describes the Lord as: *He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords; 16 who alone possesses immortality and dwells in **unapproachable** light; whom no man has seen or can see* (1 Timothy 6:15-16). God, by His very nature, is unapproachable. We see this here in Leviticus 16:2. God is unapproachable, but He has made a way by which approaching Him becomes possible.

A PREVENTED APPROACH

And the LORD said to Moses, "Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at 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 over the mercy seat. (Leviticus 16:2).

If we are to understand this chapter, we must come to know a bit about the tabernacle. This was a large tented structure, the specific dimensions of which are set forth in the later chapters of the book of Exodus.

- The court
- The altar
- The laver
- The tent of meeting
- The lampstand
- The table of shewbread
- The altar of incense
- The veil
- The holy of holies

From our New Testament perspective, we have come to understand that each of these things portrayed something about Jesus. That means walking through the tabernacle was something akin to walking through an art gallery.

Last Monday was Valentines Day. Like the loving husband that I am, I took my wife out to eat. I happened to pick a place down on Las Olas Blvd where we had a romantic dinner. Afterward, we went for a walk past the shops and art galleries. One in particular caught our attention, for it featured the work of the well-known artist Salvatore Dali. In particular, it featured much of his impressionistic work.

As I was thinking back of the various impressions that were generated by his paintings, I was reminded of the various impressions we get of Jesus as we walk through the art gallery of the book of Leviticus and its setting within the tabernacle.

- The high priest
- The sacrifices
- The table of bread and the lampstand
- The very tabernacle itself

...all of these were pictures and impressions of Jesus. At no time was this more vivid than on Yom Kippur, the day of atonement.

The priests were required to minister within the Tabernacle each morning and each evening. But the one thing they were never permitted to do in any of their ministry was to pass beyond the veil which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. Not even Aaron, the high priest, was permitted to pass into this holiest place.

The one exception to this rule took place on the Day of Atonement. On this day (and only on this day), the High Priest was permitted to pass beyond the veil into the very presence of God.

PREPARATIONS FOR ENTRY

³ Aaron shall enter the holy place with this: with a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

⁴ He shall put on the holy linen tunic, and the linen undergarments shall be next to his body, and he shall be girded with the linen sash, and attired with the linen turban (these are holy garments). Then he shall bathe his body in water and put them on. (Leviticus 16:3-4).

Entering the presence of the Lord was no casual occurrence. There were preparations that had to be made.

1. The Clothing of the High Priest.

On this special day, the High Priest would be clothed in simple linen. The breastplate and the tunic and the gold and the blue and the scarlet would all be put aside.

It was a picture of the Messiah who would lay aside His majestic glory and honor to be born as a baby. Philippians 2:7 says that He *emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.*

2. Offering for the High Priest: *And he shall take from the congregation of the sons of Israel two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering. ⁶ Then Aaron shall offer the bull for the sin offering which is for himself, that he may make atonement for himself and for his household. (Leviticus 16:5-6).*

Before he could act as mediator between God and the people, the High Priest first had to offer up a bull as an atonement for his own sins and for those of his family. It was a reminder that, even though he held the exalted position of high priest, he also needed a Savior

How much different is our High Priest. Jesus needed no offering to be made on His behalf, for He was tempted in all points as we are, yet he was without sin.

THE PAIR OF GOATS

7 And he shall take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 8 And Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat.

9 Then Aaron shall offer the goat on which the lot for the LORD fell, and make it a sin offering. 10 But the goat on which the lot for the scapegoat fell, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make atonement upon it, to send it into the wilderness as the scapegoat. (Leviticus 16:7-10).

Two goats were then to be taken and presented before the Lord. There was nothing to distinguish them apart. Lots were cast. These lots would determine which goat would live and which would die. The goat on whom the lot fell was killed and used as a sin offering. The other goat is referred to as the “scapegoat.”

The phrase translated “to the scapegoat” is the Hebrew *LaAzazel*. The exact meaning of this term has been lost, though several ideas have been suggested.

1. It refers to the “goat of sending forth. *Azazel* is seen as a compound word made up of the joining of two Hebrew words.
 - a. *Az* is the Aramaic word for a "goat," but it is also occasionally used in Hebrew (Genesis 27:9; 30:32, 35).
 - b. *Azel* is the verb, "to go away."

Thus, this refers to the “goat of sending away.” The problem is that *Az* is normally used only to refer to female goats.

2. It refers to the “strength that goes away.”
 - a. *Az* is regularly used in Hebrew to describe “power” and “strength” and even “ferocity” (Genesis 49:3; Numbers 13:28)
 - b. *Azel* is the verb, "to go."

This pictures the goat that is sent out as being the object on which the ferocity of God is laid. It is sent out, bearing with it the wrath of God.

Which of these is correct. I do not know. Both would seem to fit the context of the passage.

Aaron was to take this goat and place BOTH his hands upon it as he confessed all of the sins of Israel (for most sacrifices he only placed one hand upon the animal).

THE PROVISION OF INCENSE

12 And he shall take a firepan full of coals of fire from upon the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of finely ground sweet incense, and bring it inside the veil. 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 ark of the testimony, lest he die. (Leviticus 16:12-13).

Aaron would now make his entry into the tabernacle. On his left would be the lampstand, casting its soft light throughout. On his left would be the table of shewbread with its twelve loaves of bread, one for each of the tribes of Israel. Before him would be the small altar of incense and then the veil and the holy of holies beyond. He had already made atonement for his own sins and for his family. Yet one thing still remained before he could enter into the most holy place. It was the incense.

The incense normally pictures the prayers of God's people. It would be placed upon the altar every morning and every evening. These were the times of prayer. Their prayer time touched a number of the senses.

- They would HEAR the audible prayers of God's people.
- They would SEE the cloud of incense coming from the tabernacle.
- They would SMELL the sweet odor of the incense

They would hear and see and smell all of these things and they would be assured that their prayers had come before the throne of God.

At the same time, there is something else that was accomplished by the incense. It served to OBSCURE. It hid the Mercy Seat. It hid the presence of God so that the high priest would not die when he came into that presence.

Do you remember what took place in the transfiguration? Jesus and three of His disciples went up into a high mountain and suddenly Jesus was transformed. He began to glow with an inner light that was so intense that we are told *His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light* (Matthew 17:2).

The disciples were “wowed.” But then a cloud came up and overshadowed all of them and suddenly they heard a voice and it was the voice of the Father. Why did the cloud come? It came to protect them. It came because God wanted them to live to be able to testify what they saw and heard.

Today we see these things through a cloud -- through a mirror dimly. But there is coming a day when we shall be changed and when we shall see Him face to face.

THE PLACE OF MERCY

14 Moreover, he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; also in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.

15 Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which 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, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. (Leviticus 16:14-15).

The preparations have now been completed. The high priest now moves through the veil and into the most holy place. There is only one article of furniture here. It is the ark of the covenant. It is a wooden box overlaid with gold. Inside were kept the broken pieces of the original tablets of the law. These were the tablets that Moses had broken when he came down from Sinai and found the people engaged in idol worship. They represented the broken law.

The fact of a broken law is the reason we need a day of atonement. We need to be redeemed because we are all law breakers. We have sinned against one another and we have sinned against God.

The lid of the ark of the covenant was made of pure gold. It must have been heavy. It held the golden statues of two mighty angels -- cherubim -- whose wings overshadowed the ark and whose faces looked toward the top of the ark. This lid was known as the mercy seat. It was known this way because this represented to throne of God. He was said to be enthroned above the cherubim (Psalm 80:1; 99:1).

The high priest would come here with the blood of bulls and of goats and he would sprinkle blood. The blood was an indication that a sacrificial death had taken place. An animal had been killed for the sins of the nation.

When the blood was applied to the mercy seat, something wonderful took place. What had before been a seat of pure gold and unflinching holiness was now changed. It

became a mercy seat -- a propitiation -- a place of satisfaction.

Jesus is our high priest. He has gone into the presence of God, not with the blood of goats or bulls, but with His own blood; His own death.

THE PRESENCE OF ONE

When he goes in to make atonement in the holy place, no one shall be in the tent of meeting until he comes out, that he may make atonement for himself and for his household and for all the assembly of Israel. (Leviticus 16:17).

It must have been a lonely thing for the high priest to enter into the tent of meeting. His actions up to this point had been performed before the entire assembly of the congregation of Israel. Everyone had been watching. Every eye was upon him. But now, as he entered into the tabernacle to perform the offering of atonement, there was only an audience of One. He was going into the very presence of God.

Jesus went to the cross for the audience of One. Abandoned by His followers, surrounded by those who mocked and reviled Him, He went into the presence of God on our behalf. And at the supreme moment of sacrifice, when men had done their worst, something took place on that cross to cause the Holy One to scream out, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken Me?"

There was a moment in time when the One who had never been alone from all eternity past was now alone. An instant when the Son was fatherless. A point when the Holy One of heaven was accounted an outcast; a time when the Sinless One was credited with your sins and with mine.

THE POWER OF BLOOD

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 of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar on all sides. 19 And with his finger he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it seven times, and cleanse it, and from the impurities of the sons of Israel consecrate it. (Leviticus 16:18-19).

The sacrifice rituals of the Old Testament were no pristine affair. They were messy. They involved the shedding of blood and they involved a lot of blood. What was it about

blood that was considered to be so significant?

Leviticus 17:11 tells us that *the life of the flesh is in the blood* and that it is given *on the altar to make atonement for your souls*, but what does that really mean?

There is a saying among paramedics that air goes in and out while blood goes round and round. Any deviation of this is a bad thing. Blood coming out is not a good thing. It was seen in the Bible as the sign of death. And more specifically, it was the sign of violent death.

When you spoke of shedding someone's blood, you were not describing a pin prick or even donating at the Red Cross. You were speaking of a violent death. Bloody. Messy.

God called for such a picture because sin is messy and it is violent and it calls for drastic measures. The most drastic possible measure was the death of His Son.

THE PASSING OF THE GOAT

20 When he finishes atoning for the holy place, and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall offer the live goat.

21 Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel, and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who stands in readiness. 22 And the goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a solitary land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness. (Leviticus 16:20-22).

There were two goats that were offered that day. Lots were cast and one was chosen to be the scapegoat -- the goat of sending away. When the process of atonement was completed, the living goat was brought forth and the high priest would place both his hands upon the head of this goat.

The sins of the nation would be identified with the goat. And then the goat would be led away into the wilderness, signifying that the sins of the people had been carried away. The language used here is later repeated to speak of how the Lord would lay upon Messiah the sins of us all (Isaiah 53:6).

One of the troublesome ideas faced by the people of the Old Covenant is that the goat assigned to carry away the sins of the people might somehow, in his wanderings, find his way back into the camp. What a tragedy! Thus they would take special care that the goat

be led far away out into the wilderness. In later years, it would become the practice that this duty would be assigned to a Gentile who would be enlisted for this task (Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, Page 318). What they did not realize is that this would also serve as a picture of Jesus who was delivered over to the Roman Gentiles to be put to death.

Jesus is our scapegoat and, with Him, there is a guarantee that our forgiveness is permanent. We never need fear that the sins of the scapegoat shall return to our doorstep.

As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:12).

The rituals of the Day of Atonement were to be repeated each year. For over a thousand years, this drama was acted out, first within the Tabernacle, and later within the Temple.

The ritual found its fulfillment on a spring day in the first century A.D. The Romans had set aside three crosses. Three thieves were destined to hang upon those crosses. They had been apprehended, judged, and found to be guilty. They were placed under the sentence of death. But one of those thieves missed his appointment. He never went to the cross. His name was BARABBAS.

Another man was led outside the camp -- outside the city -- to go and to die on the cross in his place. Jesus died upon the cross of Barabbas and Barabbas was set free.

We have been set free, too. And it was not because we were any more deserving. It was a gift of GRACE.