

LEVITICUS

Lesson 23 - Chapter 16

One of the greater challenges that faces Believers who are slowly awakening to our Hebrew faith roots and the undeniable reality that our Messiah Jesus is fully Jewish, is how to deal with the purely and entirely Hebrew cultural context of the Word of God.

Another challenge that is sort of tangled up with that one is one that comes not from Christian doctrines but rather from Jewish doctrines; and this is generally called Tradition. As we studied the dietary laws contained in Torah.....that which is commonly called Kashrut by Jews but which the gentile community calls Kosher eating.....we should have noticed at once how **short** the section on dietary law is in Leviticus 11 and how minimal were the dietary requirements put on Israel. In most Bibles Leviticus 11 is something less than 2 pages in length; even when coupled with its counterpart in Deuteronomy 14 it would be hard to fill 3 full pages with the kosher eating rules set down by Yehoveh. Yet Jewish Tradition has multiplied these basic, simple, and straightforward 3 pages of ordinances of God regarding eating into literally thousands of pages of rules and prohibitions, stuffed into several volumes.

For those of us who wish to take God's Torah seriously, separating Hebrew traditions and rabbinic rulings, as well as Christian dogma, from the original words of Yehoveh is not an easy or a comfortable task. Yet there is no need to make worship and learning sterile and bland; what to retain as useful and meaningful liturgy and teaching, and what to set aside, is difficult but not impossible. Many traditions are beautiful, and poignant, and full of truth and meaning; but others can send us down the wrong track even if on the surface it seems so good.

We have this exact challenge in dealing with Leviticus 16, which is primarily about the all-important God-ordained ritual observance called Yom Kippur.....the Day of Atonement (that is coming up soon). As I set about reading the enormous number of Hebrew commentaries on this chapter it became apparent that precious few of them actually directly addressed Leviticus 16; most simply explained the longstanding traditions and extensive rabbinical rulings that had developed over the centuries concerning the observance of Yom Kippur. The most dramatic shift in how Yom Kippur was observed took place after 70 A.D. when the city of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple were destroyed by the Roman Empire. The city was quickly rebuilt but to this day the Temple has not ever stood again. So all the rituals we have been studying in Leviticus, including the ones we're about to, **REQUIRED** the presence of the Temple and its altars and Priesthood in order to be performed. Therefore it's easy to imagine why, if the Jews were going to continue to practice these treasured feasts and holy day observances as they had for over a 1000 years.....and to do so **AFTER** there no longer **was** a Temple that had always been the necessary center of the observances..... they would have to re-invent and modify the way they interpreted the Levitical instructions.

That said it doesn't mean they SHOULD have done that. What they were supposed to do was accept Yeshua as their Lord and Savior. What they should have done is to do what could be done without a Temple and let the remainder go until the Temple would be rebuilt (as per Ezekiel and Revelation).

So I would like to enter a caution to all of us before we take one more step in reading and understanding and digesting God's Torah: we must at all times separate God's Laws in the Scriptural Torah from what men, usually Hebrew men, have said about those Laws in the Oral Torah. Much of the carefully orchestrated liturgy that is followed by religious Jews today often has only limited Biblical connection. So coupled with the nearly 2000 year trend of gentile Believers to remove any remnant of Jewishness from these same passages, we find ourselves in modern times caught between a rock and a hard place; the rock of Jewish Tradition and the hard place of Christian allegorical interpretations and denial of the continuing existence of the Torah. I'm certainly not in any way degrading or criticizing some of the beautiful and meaningful Jewish practices and ways of observing God's proclaimed holy days that the church would do well to pay attention to and consider adopting in some form or another; but let's not get so caught up in our earnest desire to rediscover our Hebrew Roots that we forget to distinguish between the consecrated things of God and the merely commendable things of men.

Let's see what God had to say about the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur.

READ LEVITICUS 16 all

In Hebrew thinking, and probably rightfully so, there is no more important and necessary event as Yom Kipper.....the Day of Atonement.

In a nutshell the Biblically stated purpose of Yom Kippur is twofold: 1) to purify the Tabernacle (and later the Temple) from the uncleanness brought into it and it's grounds by priest and commoner alike. And 2) to purify the people, the priests, and the High Priest. So the goal was to maintain a ritually pure sanctuary. This was because if Yehoveh's earthly dwelling place were defiled He would NOT maintain His presence there; it is impossible that His infinite Holiness could cohabitate with earthly uncleanness. This is not an assumption as Scripture clearly states that premise.

Now this original and Biblical viewpoint that the focus of the Yom Kippur observance was to purify the sanctuary, eventually gave way after the destruction of the Temple to a **new** viewpoint that Yom Kippur was primarily for judgment and **atonement of sin** for the people of Israel. Not once, but twice, the Temple was destroyed; the first time resulted in their exile to Babylon, and the second in their dispersion into the Roman Empire. Both times the people found themselves in a position of being unable to be purified from their uncleanness and unable to have blood sacrifices atone for their sins. Not satisfied with that condition, or willing to accept God's judgment on them and eventual provision of restoration for them, they began using their human intellect to devise ways around the problem. The result in many cases was Tradition.

So how, exactly, would the Tabernacle become defiled with impurity; so defiled as to NEED to be cleansed, when such scrupulous attention was paid to make sure no uncleanness came anywhere near the holy sanctuary? It could occur in a number of ways actually such as a priest not properly performing his duties but being ignorant of his error; or unclean food accidentally finding its way into the courtyard; or someone dying in the Tabernacle grounds, or by someone who touched someone who died entering the Tabernacle grounds. Leviticus chapters 11-15 gave extensive details on what constituted uncleanness and the fact is that uncleanness to some degree or another, at some time or another, was inevitable for every Israelite. I think one reason we as modern Believers are to be taught and know about these rituals and rules even after Yeshua has transformed them, is to help us to grasp the eternal seriousness of uncleanness and that in our natural state, without God, there is NO escaping its death grip on us. Uncleanness is everywhere we turn; it's a state people (non-Believers) can enter into even through no personal moral failure (remember the unclean state a woman enters into to who simply gives birth), and can be contracted from even accidental contact with unclean people and things. There was, and remains, no watertight connection between avoiding sin and so doing avoiding impurity.

As we have read Leviticus 16 we can readily see just how involved and complex these particular rituals of Yom Kippur are. God makes it clear in the first verse just how DANGEROUS of a job the High Priest has. Verse one takes us back to chapter 10 when Yehoveh roasted Aaron's sons Nadav and Avihu in a public display of His wrath and the suddenness of His judgment upon those who transgress His holiness; even more so for those who have been set apart for the task. So at this point in Leviticus the gruesome deaths of these two newly ordained priests were very recent; and in some ways we have Yehoveh explaining to Moses what Aaron's two sons did wrong, and how the other priests.....especially Aaron the High Priest.....could avoid a similar fate. In paraphrase God tells Moses that no priest can enter the Holy of Holies, into the chamber of God's presence, except when God calls him to do so. The penalty for disobedience to this command is death.....as if Moses and several thousand horrified witnesses hadn't already figured that one out on their own.

Let me pause for a moment to throw a bucket of cold water on a phrase sung in many beautiful Christian songs: that as Believers we now enter into the Holy of Holies. This is NOT TRUE and it comes as result of the church's insistence that the Old Testament be used as a doorstop but no longer studied as the Word of God!! As Believers we do NOT metaphorically or otherwise enter into the Most Holy Chamber of God's sanctuary when we are saved. Common priests (which are what we are equated to in the New Testament) can enter ONLY the outer chamber of the holy sanctuary, a chamber called the Holy Place. The Holy of Holies is reserved for the Father and for His Mediator, the High Priest. Since the permanent Mediator and High Priest is Yeshua then it is He alone that can be in Yehoveh's direct presence in the Holy of Holies. We, as regular priests to Yeshua's High Priest position, are permitted to enter the Sanctuary of God; but until these corrupt bodies are given up for transformed ones in the future, or upon our death when only our cleansed and holy-fied spirits are in Heaven, we cannot get any closer to God than the Holy Place.

Verse 3 says that WHEN on that one day per year that Aaron and all his High Priest successors in the following years were allowed and required to enter the Holy of Holies, a

young bull for a Hatta'at offering, the purification offering, would be required as would a Ram for the 'Olah, the burnt offering.

Next we find that the usual glorious garments the High Priest wore during his daily duties.....a blue robe, a jeweled chest plate, and beautiful and costly fabrics..... were to be removed and in their place he was to wear very simple white linen clothing. In front of the people, where the High Priest performed his usual duties, the fabulous and expensive outfit he wore made it clear that the High Priest was the holiest man in Israel; and that as God's mediator he stood between Israel and God Almighty. But when standing in Yehoveh's presence the plain white clothing made of fine linen that the High Priest now wore symbolized the lowly status that even the holiest man on earth bore in comparison to the incomparable holiness of the God of the Universe.

And of course as we have now come to expect (and really as students who have come this far in Torah we need to understand that it is a given) before Aaron dons these slaves' clothes, he is to be cleansed in water.....he is to immerse himself in Living Water to remove uncleanness.

It is no coincidence that both Daniel and Ezekiel describe the angels who stand before the Lord as wearing plain white garments. Nor should we overlook the words of Revelation 19:8 as regards what someday we who are Believers shall be wearing as we stand before our Lord:

NAS Revelation 19:8 *And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.*

Verses 5 and 6 show us this dual nature of the Yom Kippur rituals: the people of Israel as a whole.....as a nation or a congregation..... are to supply 2 male goats as their national Hatta'at (purification) offering; the High Priest, in this case Aaron, is to supply a young Bull as his **personal** Hatta'at offering on behalf of himself.

We now begin to get the rules and ordinances for what has come to be called the Scapegoat ritual.....a fascinating ritual, rich with meaning, which has mesmerized the Jewish people for centuries.

Aaron is to take both He-goats and stand them OUTSIDE the Tabernacle sanctuary. Next he is to cast lots over the goats. The outcome of the lots will determine which of the two goats shall become the Hatta'at sacrifice for the purification of the people of Israel; the other becoming the Scapegoat that will be released.

It is here in verse 8 that one of the more controversial phrases in the entire Bible is presented; and it says of the procedure for choosing the goats' fates, "**.....one lot for Yehoveh, and one lot for Azazel.**" What, or who, is Azazel? Of this there is no end to debate not just among Christian scholars but Jewish as well. Most of your Bibles probably won't even HAVE the word "Azazel" in them; rather, the word "scapegoat" is substituted; but Azazel is the original Hebrew and a good concordance will show you that reality.

Part of the problem with this verse is that if taken in the most literal way, based on the customs

of the time in which it was written, what it means is not very comfortable for us. The more comfortable interpretations are generally two: first is that Azazel is a rare Hebrew noun meaning “complete destruction”. Second is that the great Hebrew Sage Rashi says that Azazel means “rocky precipice”; as by the time of Christ part of the traditional way of dealing with the Scapegoat was to push it backwards off of a cliff to its death.

However those two interpretations really don't pass the smell test. First there is no “pushing off a rocky precipice” requirement in the Scriptures (it was added many years later) and second the only other mention of this indeed rare word “Azazel” in Hebrew literature is in the book of Enoch, which of course is not inspired but rather forms part of what scholars call Pseudepigraphic literature. And in Enoch Azazel is the name of a specific demon.

The more widely and recently upheld opinion is that Azazel was indeed a name ascribed to a demon or some other kind of evil spirit being that lived out in the wilderness. The idea we see developing in these verses is that of the two goats one will be a holy sacrifice to Yehoveh and the other will be sent out into the wilderness into the unholy domain of Azazel, a demon who represents, or might even be, Satan. We'll explore that a little more in a few minutes.

Verse 10 makes something clear that as we revisit the Azazel matter shortly, is an important ingredient; it is that the goat, which is to be sent out to Azazel, is to be left alive; in other words this goat will not be slaughtered nor is it to be considered in any way a sacrifice. It is assumed that it will die out in the wilderness, but it is NOT to be ritually slaughtered. The goat that is “for Yehoveh”, however, is indeed a sacrifice and will be killed.

Verse 11 tells us that once the lots are drawn and the fate of each goat is decided the sacrificial bull (for the purification offering) is to be slaughtered on behalf of Aaron and his household; and then from the hot coals of the Altar of Burnt Offering (where the Bull is being burned up) Aaron is to take a fire-pan full of these coals, add some special incense, and then go inside the sanctuary. Now the danger really begins as Aaron (the High Priest) is about to enter the presence of God, who will tolerate not one iota of uncleanness in His presence.

Aaron takes his smoking fire-pan, or censor, pulls back the curtain (the Parokhet) that separates the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, and enters the earthly dwelling place of Yehoveh. As the lump in his throat rises Aaron approaches the Kapporet, the mercy seat, and lays the censor next to it. The smoke, described as a cloud, now engulfs the area between the wings of the cherubim that rise out of the Mercy Seat; this is the place where God's presence meets with man on earth.

What is the importance of the smoke surrounding the mercy seat? Well, a couple of points come to mind; first it is said that no man can look upon God and live. The smoke acted as a veil that permitted Aaron to face the Ark of the Covenant and the Kapporet...to be present in the same room with God; yet the cloud of smoke obscured God so that Aaron could not look directly upon Him. Second the smoke, as a cloud, has some kind of obvious link to the constant mention that God traveled with Israel in the form of a cloud. Bottom line: the cloud of smoke was not for the benefit of God....it was as **a protection** for the High Priest..... “lest he die”.

Aaron dips his finger into the bowl of Bulls blood and sprinkles some of the blood onto the front of the Kapporet.....the Mercy Seat.....the lid the sits atop the Ark of the Covenant. We know it's the front side of the Mercy Seat where the blood is spattered because it's called the "east" end. And the Holy of Holies faces eastward. Next Aaron does the same.....using exactly 7 sprinkles.....using the blood of the sacrificed goat. So blood from both the sacrifices is presented....first the one for Aaron personally (the Bull) and second the one for the Israelite people as a whole (the goat)... and thus atonement is made for Aaron and for the whole congregation of Israel.

Verse 16 reminds us that the ULTIMATE purpose for this procedure is to cleanse the sanctuary FROM the **tum'ot**; that is the uncleanness brought about by the Israelites, even those brought about by their sins. Remember that some uncleanness is NOT brought about by sin, and some is. These rituals purge the Tabernacle from all varieties of uncleanness.

I think the last few words in the last half of verse 16 are especially poignant; it says that God dwells with Israel "...in the midst of their **tum'ot**.....in the midst of all their uncleanness". What a great God! What a merciful God! Despite Israel's inherent uncleanness God chose to live in their midst, for their benefit, because He loved them.....only requiring that once a year His holy dwelling place be cleaned from all this manmade pollution that defiled it.

Now that the sanctuary is purged other holy things need to be cleansed as well. So in verse 18 the Altar of Burnt Offering has some of the Bull and goat's blood applied on it.

Next, beginning in verse 20, we get one of the most amazing and highly visual demonstrations of how our sin is taken from us, transferred to a substitute, (which must be an innocent living creature) and then the sin is removed far from us. Not just covered, but we are rid of it. Basically then the Israelites using the Scapegoat was a shadow of what Yeshua HaMashiach would do for us on a permanent basis. Even the Scapegoat ceremony whereby all the Israelites could do was stand helplessly, in awe, and watch as God did all that was needed to cleanse them from their sins, is a shadow of our position today.

Aaron lays both hands of the head of the scapegoat.....the goat chosen for Azazel. And, upon this goat he confesses Israel's sins.....all of Israel's transgressions for the past year since the previous year's Day of Atonement. And the weight of Israel's iniquities is placed onto the male goat the goat is sent away out into the wilderness.....the barren desert.....never to return.

Let's pick-up our discussion of this Azazel.

It is thought that Azazel is the demon ruler of the desert wilderness. If this smacks of magic and sorcery then I'm afraid it just does. But just because magic and sorcery make perverted use of the divinely created spiritual world doesn't mean the spirit world doesn't exist. We know that the wilderness is often considered, Biblically, as a place of wickedness and death much as darkness (choshkek) is considered an evil trait. We read of demons being cast out and sent to the wilderness, a dry place, and a symbolically lifeless place. Now the question for us is to wrestle with is this: is Azazel intended to be symbolic **of evil**, or is it literally the **name** of a real evil force, a particular demon ruler?

Before I offer my opinion on that let's get an overview of what is happening here. Two goats are chosen; one is for God, the other is for something that is obviously anti God. The one that, by lots, is decided is **for** God....that is set apart for holiness..... will be used as a sacrifice to Yehoveh. By it's blood will the sins of Israel be atoned for. The other goat that is designated for the thing that is against God, this thing named Azazel, will be used as the depository and carrier of Israel's sin and uncleanness. The High Priest, as mediator for the people of Israel, ceremonially transfers all the sin and uncleanness of Israel into, or onto, the scapegoat...the goat that has been designated as this depository of sin for Azazel. The scapegoat is then lead out into the wilderness, the sin and uncleanness of Israel sent far away, into the domain of the evil force.

The Azazel of the book of Enoch was a fallen divine being (a benei elohim, also called a son of God) who had relations with human women. He was given jurisdiction over magic and sorcery. His domain was the jagged rock of the wilderness and he was exiled to remain there under the watchful eye of a very powerful heavenly angel. Now let me state emphatically, that most of this is ancient Hebrew legend. Yet it is valuable to help us at least understand the Jewish view of Azazel some 100 years before the birth of Christ.

It seems to me that what is being related here in Leviticus 16 about the Scapegoat is that the source of all evil, the devil, Satan, is symbolized by Azazel; and Azazel is forced into receiving back that which he sent out into the world: sin and uncleanness. Picture this goat, supernaturally carrying with it all the iniquities of Israel that God has removed from them, heading out into the Devil's domain; this goat, loaded up with everything the Evil One had used to try and defeat God by means of defeating His people. It's like the enemy tossing a hand grenade over the fence; only for you to pick it up and throw right back into his lap. And there's nothing he, Satan, can do about.

In some ways this Scapegoat is a display of God's invincibility and the inevitability of God's plan for redemption.....a demonstration for all to see that Satan simply cannot defeat Yehoveh's plans. God, in my view, is in one aspect of the Scapegoat ritual mocking Satan.

Now a couple of other details and then I'd like to make mention of how the observance of Yom Kippur was changed, especially after the Temple of was destroyed in 70 A.D.

Verses 25 –28 describe how only certain parts of the Hatta'at sacrifice are to be burned up on the Altar, and other parts are to be taken outside the camp and burned. Only fat and certain cuts of meat, and certain entrails were burned on the Altar of Burnt Offering; the hides, the contents of the bull's and goat's intestines, and the remaining portions of meat had to be removed from even the precinct of Israel. The idea here is this: those parts offered-up to God were an ordained sacrifice; they were holy. The burning up of those parts sends up a sweet savor to Yehoveh; it is a very positive and obedient thing. The remaining parts of those animals, which are taken outside the camp to an unclean place and burned up on a common wood fire, are NOT another part of the sacrifice. Rather the purpose is that these parts are destroyed by fire. It is getting rid of the parts that are not for God, parts that are not holy, and therefore have less than no value. It is very similar in principle to sending the scapegoat off into the wilderness whereby the things that are NOT **of** God or **for** God.....that is, the sin and

uncleanness.... are sent back to the Adversary.

Next WHEN the Day of Atonement is to occur is specified: on the 10th day of the 7th month of the year. And on this day it is to be a special Sabbath.....kind of a super-Sabbath. Let me be clear.....this is NOT the 7th day Sabbath. It's a different Sabbath for a different purpose. Unlike the 7th day Sabbath, which is to be a day of joy and good eating, the Day of Atonement Sabbath is a day, the Bible says, "to afflict yourselves". This is not talking about harming one's self; this is talking about **depriving** one's self. And the depravation starts by fasting.....a definite departure from the 7th day Shabbat where a large and joyous meal is served. If I were to use a familiar word for the motto of the Yom Kippur Sabbath it would be "**abstain**". Abstain from food, work, drink, bathing, sex.....if it's personally enjoyable you're not to do it.

Further for those who continue to want to say, "oh, yes but this was only for Israel"; look what it says in verse 29: ".....this is for the native and the sojourner that sojourns in your midst". That is non-native people who have joined Israel, even slaves who have NOT joined Israel but who are living among Israel, are to observe and benefit from this special Sabbath for Yom Kippur. Because they are in God's eyes part of the community of Israel, so they too MUST have had their uncleanness purged and sins atoned for on this amazing day.

Finally it is made clear that Yom Kippur is not a temporary ordinance; as it says in verse 34, this is a law for the ages. It is permanent.

Now let's very briefly see how the observance of Yom Kippur has evolved since it's instruction in Leviticus 16. Modern religious Jews continue to honor Yom Kippur as the holiest and most important of all the feast days. But somewhere along the line since its inception Rabbis who eventually controlled the religion of the Hebrews decided that on the Day of Atonement God supposedly judges that person for the past year, determines whether that person's name will be written in the Book of Life for the coming year, and that judgment is sealed. The judgment process begins 10 days earlier on Rosh Hashanah, Jewish New Year. For the 10-day period in between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur a person is supposed to spend much time on inner reflection and sincerely repent as a preparation for that Day of Judgment.

Because Yom Kippur is so serious and sober weddings cannot be held during that 10 days of penitence. Special charity is given to the poor on Yom Kippur. Members of some Orthodox sects will wear all-white garments on Yom Kippur (an obvious link to the special Yom Kippur garments of Israel's High Priest). And unlike any other day of the year Jewish men will wear **Tallit**, prayer shawls, at EVENING synagogue services (under all other circumstances tradition is that **Tallit** are used only for morning synagogue services).

So much has changed regarding Yom Kippur. Once seen as a national day of purification of repentance, it is now very individualistic in orientation. As there was no Temple after 70 A.D., the Jews have found themselves in a bind: how do they become cleansed from their uncleanness and have their sins atoned for if there is no Temple to sacrifice at and no High Priest to make atonement for them? Sometime around 800 A.D. a ritual sprung up among some Jews that many Orthodox groups continue to this day; it is called Kapparot. In this ritual a male chooses a rooster, and a female chooses a hen, and the chickens are literally swung

around over the heads of the Jewish worshipper 3 times while praying out loud: “ ***This is my substitute, my vicarious offering, my atonement; this chicken shall meet death, but I shall find a long and pleasant life of peace***”. I don’t think any further comment on this practice is needed.

Another modern view is that what the Day of Atonement’s series of Levitical rituals used to accomplish, is today brought about by prayer, repentance, and good deeds. In fact even the concept of original sin....whereby ALL humans, including Israelites, are born with a sin nature..... has given way to a belief that everyone starts life as good and pure, and that it is entirely possible to keep it that way. Of course by asserting this instead of the truth, that means that salvation (as Believers think of it) isn’t even necessary provided a man can maintain the clean and holy condition he was born in; that indeed a man CAN find righteousness on his own. That a man can be SELF justified if he follows the Torah scrupulously.

Recognizing that certain sins are considered much more serious than others, Judaism says that grave sins such as profaning God’s name cannot be atoned for simply by repentance, prayer, or observing the modern day traditions of the Day of Atonement. Rather it is one’s ***own death*** that atones for those gravest of sins. So in death you have paid the price for your uncleanness and sin and are henceforth clean and able to live in the world to come.

Is it not amazing, and sad, what length people.....Israel, Jews, and gentiles..... will go to, to avoid accepting Messiah Yeshua?

Let’s end by reading a New Testament passage that explains beautifully what Yom Kippur is for, and how Yeshua HaMashiach will fulfill it (and has already fulfilled some aspects of it). Now that we have a much better idea of what these Levitical sacrifices and rituals are about, I think you’ll find Hebrews 9 far more understandable and meaningful.

READ HEBREWS 9 all

It is as I said earlier in this lesson Messiah Yeshua who has entered the Holy of Holies, not us. Up to the death of Yeshua all of the sacrificial ritual had been a shadow of things to come. They indeed served their immediate purpose and indeed DID atone for sins prior to the advent of Jesus. But Yeshua would take it all to another and higher level by means of His own blood.

Next week we’ll talk a little more about Yom Kippur and then move into Leviticus 17 that begins a series of chapters that speaks of the basic principles of two important aspects of Israel’s existence that are closely coupled: food and sacrifice.