

Acharei Mot

אֲחֵרֵי מוֹת

“After the death”

Leviticus 16:1 – 18:30

Torah Together



Among other topics, this *Torah* portion describes the ritual to be performed annually on the **Day of Atonement** (*Yom Kippur*) by the High Priest. Further insight into the character of God can be gained as well as a better understanding of our need for atonement and its importance to God.

1. The Day of Atonement - 16:1-34

a) In the opening verses, God ties this section to a recent event in the lives of the Israelites. What was this event? What do you think the connection is?

The instructions for the day of atonement (Yom Kippur) begin by recalling the deaths of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu. They died because they came before God without proper preparation and process. This passage describes how one (the high priest) is to come before God.

b) How is Aaron instructed to dress for this specific service? Is this different than usual?

After bathing, Aaron was to put on the sacred linen tunic, sash, and headdress. Clothed only in white, he did not wear the ephod or the blue robe.

c) What sacrifice was Aaron to offer first? What type of offering was it and what was its purpose?

Aaron's 1st offering was a bull, a sin offering for himself and his household.

d) What offering was to be made “for the whole community of Israel”? What was the process to be followed for this offering?

The offering for the whole community consisted of 2 goats. Lots were cast and one goat was sacrificed as a sin offering for the people; the other was the azazel or scapegoat which carried the sins of the people outside the camp.

A Dangerous Job

In **Leviticus 16:2** God states that Aaron (or the High Priest) could not go into the Holy of Holies (with the Ark) any time he chose “or else he will die, because I appear in a cloud over the atonement cover.” This implies that close interaction with our Holy God can be a dangerous thing. Does this give you additional insight into the character or nature of God?

The Scapegoat

In **Leviticus 16:8**, the Hebrew word often translated as **scapegoat** is *azazel*, which literally means “goat of departure or removal.” The ritual described in **Leviticus 16:20-22** then assures the removal of all the sins of the Israelites from the community. (In practice, the scapegoat was usually pushed off a steep cliff, assuring death and eliminating the possibility of the goat’s return.)

The term *azazel* has become the topic of some debate. Some believe that it is the name of a false god or demon of satan. Others believe it is the name of one of the fallen angels referred to in **Genesis 6:1-2**. Still others think it refers to the specific rugged mountain cliff from which the goat was cast down.

e) Verse 2 explains the danger to Aaron (or the high priest) when he goes into the Most Holy Place. What, according to verse 13, is he supposed to do to prevent this? What else does he do in the Most Holy Place at this time?

If Aaron (or the high priest) was present before the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place as God appeared above it, he would die. (Note that the cover for the ark is called the kapporet or atonement cover.) To prevent this, he was to first take a censer with incense behind the curtain so that the smoke would conceal the atonement cover. Then he was to sprinkle some of the blood from the bull (his sin offering) on the atonement cover and seven times before the atonement cover.

f) After Aaron had made atonement for himself and his family, what did he do with the goat to which God’s lot fell? What was the purpose for this? Who helped Aaron in the Tent?

The goat to which God’s lot fell was slaughtered as a sin offering for the people and it’s blood was taken to the Most Holy Place and sprinkled on the atonement cover as was done with Aaron’s sin offering. This was also done for the Tent of Meeting and for the Altar of Burnt Offering. The purpose was to make atonement for the “uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites” (verse 16). He was to do this alone.

g) Explain the procedure to be followed with the second goat after Aaron had completed the sacrifices for himself and for the Israelites. What symbolism do you see in this?

The high priest (Aaron) was to lay his hands on the head of the goat and confess the sins of the Israelites, thereby transferring them to the goat. A man (traditionally another priest) was to take the goat outside the camp into the desert where it was to be released (presumably to die). (Traditionally, the goat was pushed off a cliff and its death was assured.)

h) What did both Aaron and the man who released the scapegoat have to do as they completed their tasks for atonement? What was done with the carcasses of the two animals that were sacrificed for atonement? Why do you think this was done?

Both Aaron and the man who took the goat into the wilderness had to bathe before continuing their normal duties. The carcasses of the bull and the sacrificial goat were to be burned up outside the camp.

i) When was the atonement ceremony to be held? What were the Israelites required to do on this day? Do you think believers could benefit by observing this today?

The Day of Atonement was to be the 10th of Tishri, the 7th month. The Israelites were required to “deny themselves” which is usually taken to mean fast for the day. This seems to be a meaningful ritual even today in recognition of the atoning sacrifice of Yeshua on our behalf.

“This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites.”

Leviticus 16:34

2. Eating Blood Forbidden - 17:1-15

a) According to the first several verses, where were all animal sacrifices to be carried out? When an Israelite sacrificed an animal, what type of offering was it to be? What was the punishment for disobedience? What do you think God’s purpose was for this commandment?

This command concerned only animals that were to be killed as a sacrifice (korban) to God. All such offerings were to be slaughtered by the priest at the entrance to the tent of meeting as fellowship or peace offerings. An offender was “guilty of bloodshed” and was to be “cut off from his people.” In verses 5 and 7 God gives an indication that this was to eliminate any sacrifices to other gods.

b) God seems to be quite serious about the commandment not to eat blood. What reason is given for this? Does this make sense to you? What happened to one who disobeyed this commandment?

In verse 10, God says that He himself will cut off the person who eats blood. The life of the animal is in the blood and God has given it to the people to make atonement for their lives (verse 11). The just punishment for sin is death but God has graciously allowed an animal to die in our place. The animal’s spilled blood is proof that it gave its life for our sin.

3. Unlawful Sexual Relations - 18:1-30

a) As this passage opens, which societies does God caution the Israelites not to copy? What were they to do instead? Why?

The Israelites were not to follow the customs of the Egyptians or the Canaanites. Instead they are to obey God’s laws, to live by them. They had made a covenant with God and promised to obey his commands.

Scripture Link:

God is not commanding that all meat come from animals sacrificed to him. However, no animal sacrifice was to be made anywhere but at the Tabernacle.

Deuteronomy 12:20-26 makes it clear that an Israelite may slaughter an animal for food where ever he chooses. However, these are not to be considered as offerings to God.

What’s so special about Blood?

It’s clear that God places special value on blood. From the very beginning, we know that the result of sin is death. (**Genesis 2:17**) When Adam and Eve first sinned, God graciously allowed them to substitute the life of an animal in place of their own. It was the blood of this animal that provided the proof that a life had been given to atone for their sin. God considers ALL life sacred and from His perspective, “the life is in the blood.” (**Leviticus 17:11, Deuteronomy 12:23**) Eating blood then profanes that which God considers sacred.

The Day of Atonement

The **Day of Atonement** (*Yom Kippur*) is the holiest day of the year on the Hebrew calendar. It is observed on Tishri 10, which typically occurs in late September or early October. It is the only **appointed time** (*mo'ed*) of God that is not celebrated with a feast. Instead, believers are to “deny themselves and not do any work...” (**Leviticus 16:29**). To deny one’s self is commonly understood to mean to fast. Thus observers typically spend the day (starting at sundown on *Tishri* 9) in prayer and fasting. The ten days from *Yom Teruah* to *Yom Kippur* (*Tishri* 1 – 10) are known as the **Days of Awe**. During this period, believers reflect on their sins during the past year and seek forgiveness from anyone that they have wronged. They are then to **repent** (*teshuvah* in Hebrew) and **return** to God’s ways so that on the Day of Atonement, these sins can be atoned for. Thus, on *Yom Kippur*, atonement (or payment) is made for the sins of the believer and they are forgiven so that they may rededicate themselves to living a life pleasing to God.

When the Tabernacle (and the Temple) existed, this was the one time of the year when the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies which housed the Ark of the Covenant. His task was to present the blood of the offering made for the atonement of the sins of the people. He was to sprinkle the blood of the animal (that had given its life as a substitute for the people to pay for, or atone, for their sin) on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant. This cover, fashioned from pure gold, was known as the Atonement Cover (*kapporet* in Hebrew). It was in a cloud above this cover that God would appear to the High Priest (**Leviticus 16:2**).

Atonement

The Hebrew for both the words *kippur* and *kapporet* come from a root that means “to cover or hide.” By extension, it can also mean to “cover or pay for sin.” God has mercifully allowed us to “pay for” or “make atonement for” our sin. Can you see the connection between *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement and the *Kapporet*, or Mercy Seat?

Also, the small (usually black) head covering typically worn by religious Jewish men is called a “kippah.” Can you see how this name is appropriate for this object?



b) List some of the restrictions placed on sexual relations. Given the instructions in these verses, what can you conclude about the neighboring cultures?

There were to be no sexual relations with close relatives: mother, father's wife, aunts, sisters, sisters-in-law, daughters, daughters-in-law, etc. These were obviously some of the practices of the Egyptians and the Canaanites.

c) Can you think of any examples from the Bible in which these instructions were violated? What can you conclude from these examples?

Rueben had sexual relations with his father Jacob's concubine, Bilhah (Genesis 35:22). Judah had relations with his (dead) son's wife, Tamar (Genesis 38). Jacob married two sisters which caused many problems. (Verse 18 strongly suggests monogamy.) Also, it was common for Egyptian siblings to marry and the Canaanites practiced child sacrifice to Molech.

d) Is there any doubt about God's view of homosexuality?
If it hadn't been clear from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, God makes it clear in verse 22 that homosexuality is "detestable."

e) In verses 24 through 30, how does God describe these practices? What did these practices do to the people that lived in the land? What was the effect on the land? What did "the land" do? Can you see how this might tie into Genesis 15:16?

God calls these practices "detestable" and says that the current inhabitants had become "defiled" and the land itself had become "defiled." The land would "vomit out" or "disgorge" these nations before the Israelites. In Genesis 15:16, God said to Abraham that "the sin of the Amorites had not yet reached its full measure." These may have been the sins of the Amorites.

f) Were these laws for the Israelites only? What was to be done with someone who violated these laws? What do you think this meant?

These laws were for the Israelites and the aliens living among them, i.e., Hebrew converts. One who disobeyed was to be "cut off from their people," probably put outside the camp and not allowed back in.

Detestable to God
In **Leviticus 18:24-28**, God explains how he feels about these sexual practices: they are detestable and defile the person and the land. God had judged the previous inhabitants of the land of Canaan for these practices and used the Israelites as the instrument of his punishment. This is why Israel has a "legal right" to the land. Furthermore, God explained that if the Israelites defiled the land in this way, they too would be punished (exiled or "vomited out" of the land). Sadly, history shows that this is exactly what happened.

Digging deeper

1. *Yom Kippur*, or the Day of Atonement, was clearly an important day for the Israelites. See how many parallels you can find between the ceremony followed on *Yom Kippur* and the sacrifice of Yeshua.

Many parallels are possible. Yeshua took the sins of the world on his head and was killed outside the camp (city). It was through his sacrifice that believers could be in right standing before God, the meaning of atonement.

2. In the original Hebrew, the name for the second goat, or the scapegoat, is *Azazel*. There are several schools of thought as to the meaning of this word. See what you can discover about *Azazel*.

Azazel is thought to be a) the term for the second goat or scapegoat, b) the name of the place where the goat was taken to die (meaning "a land which is cut off"), or c) the name of one of satan's demons to which the sins of the people were returned.

3. **Leviticus 17:11** states God's view of an animal's blood. **Hebrews 9** also has a lot to say about blood. Starting at the beginning of the Bible and focusing just on blood, list some of the teachings that you feel are important about blood.

One interesting thought goes like this: When Adam and Eve sinned in Eden, God sacrificed an animal for each individual to provide clothing. Next, when the angel of death passed over Egypt killing the first born, a lamb was sacrificed for each family. Then, once each year at Yom Kippur, an animal was sacrificed for the sins of the nation of Israel. Finally, Yeshua was sacrificed for the sins of the entire world. The main point is that the just punishment for sin is death and death occurs when an animal (human or otherwise) is parted from its blood. The blood is the witness of the death of the animal which is required because of sin.

For further study, see

Haftarah : Jeremiah 46:13-28

Brit Hadashah : Luke 2:22-24; John 19:31-37; Acts 13:16-17;
Revelation 8:6 – 9:12; 16:1-21