

Lesson 9 – Day of Atonement - Yom Kippur (יום כיפור)

Observed – 10 Tishri (7th Month - September / October)

The Origins

Leviticus 23:26–32 (ESV)

²⁶ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²⁷ “Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves and present a food offering to the LORD. ²⁸ And you shall not do any work on that very day, for it is a Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God. ²⁹ For whoever is not afflicted on that very day shall be cut off from his people. ³⁰ And whoever does any work on that very day, that person I will destroy from among his people. ³¹ You shall not do any work. It is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwelling places. ³² It shall be to you a Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict yourselves. On the ninth day of the month beginning at evening, from evening to evening shall you keep your Sabbath.”

Yom Kippur is the most solemn Jewish holy day. *Yom* means “day” and *Kippur* means “atonement” or “covering” (i.e. Covering of our Sins).

Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur bookend the most serious season in the Jewish calendar known as the Days of Repentance, the Days of Awe, or the High Holy Days. This period includes ten days of introspection and repentance, a time of making things right with God.



The high priest entered through the veil of the temple into the Holy of Holies once a year on Yom Kippur to make atonement for sins (his sins and the sins of the people). The high priest took with him the blood of the bull and goat sacrifices to sprinkle over and in front of the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant. The specific procedures for the sacrifices are laid out in Leviticus 16.

These sacrifices included two male goats (Lev 16:5). Lots were cast over these two goats to determine which would be for the Lord and which would be for Azazel (Lev 16:8). The one for the Lord was sacrificed as a sin offering for the people (Lev 16:9). The one for Azazel would be released into the wilderness bearing all the iniquities of the people (Lev 16:20-22). The specific meaning of “Azazel” is not known (Lev 16:8, 10, 26). It possibly refers to a place, a demon, or a “scapegoat.”

After the temple was destroyed in AD 70, the Jews could no longer offer the sacrifices for atonement. In place of sacrifices they have substituted prayer, good works, and charitable donations hoping to take away the penalty for their sins. Yom Kippur is a day of fasting, and no work is done on this day, including at home. Many Jewish people spend the day at synagogue, praying for forgiveness of their sins.

Jesus our True High Priest

When Jesus died on the cross, the veil was ripped from top to bottom (Matt 27:51-54).

Christ came as high priest and entered the Holy of Holies (heaven itself) once for all, by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12).

Believers in Jesus accept his sacrifice on the cross as the final atonement for sin: “justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:21-26).

Levitical High Priest	Jesus, the True High Priest
Had to offer sacrifices for his own sins (Heb 5:3).	Did not need to offer a sacrifice for himself because he was without sin (4:15). Able to sympathize with our weaknesses because he became human (2:17).
Offered sacrifices for the sins of the people (5:3).	Continually intercedes for the people (7:25). Entered the inner sanctuary one time on our behalf (6:19–20).
All earthly priests died and thus their priesthood ended (7:23).	Made a priest forever by God (5:6, 10; 6:20). A permanent priest because he lives forever (7:24).
Offered the sacrifice of goats and bulls (9:12–13).	He is both the one who offers the sacrifice and is the sacrifice himself (7:27).
Priest by birth and ancestry (5:4).	Was not a priest by birth (7:16).
Served in the earthly copy or shadow of the real sanctuary (8:5).	Serves in the real tabernacle of heaven (8:2; 9:11, 24). Has gone through the heavens (4:14).
Served under the old covenant (7:5).	Served under a new and better covenant (8:6).
Lesser than the ministry of Messiah Jesus (7:6–7).	Ministry is greater than the priests (8:6).
His animal sacrifices were not sufficient to accomplish the removal of sin (9:9; 10:11).	His sacrifice of his own blood is able to completely remove sins (9:14; 10:14).
His animal sacrifices were not sufficient to accomplish the removal of sin (9:9; 10:11).	He is both the one who offers the sacrifice and is the sacrifice himself (7:27).
Offered sacrifices year after year (10:1).	Offered only one sacrifice once for all, so there is no more need for sacrifices (9:26; 10:18).
Only the high priest entered the Most Holy Place in the earthly sanctuary (9:7).	All who have faith in Jesus can confidently enter the Most Holy Place in the heavenly sanctuary (10:19).

Background Passages

Leviticus 23:26–32 (ESV)

²⁶ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²⁷ “Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves and present a food offering to the LORD. ²⁸ And you shall not do any work on that very day, for it is a Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God. ²⁹ For whoever is not afflicted on that very day shall be cut off from his people. ³⁰ And whoever does any work on that very day, that person I will destroy from among his people. ³¹ You shall not do any work. It is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwelling places. ³² It shall be to you a Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict yourselves. On the ninth day of the month beginning at evening, from evening to evening shall you keep your Sabbath.”

Leviticus 16:1–34 (ESV)

¹ 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 uncleanness. 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.

Matthew 27:51–54 (ESV)

⁵¹ And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵² The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, ⁵³ and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴ When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

Romans 3:21–26 (ESV)

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Levitical Priesthood

Hebrews 5:3–4 (ESV)

³ Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. ⁴ And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

Hebrews 7:5–7 (ESV)

⁵ And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. ⁶ But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. ⁷ It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior.

Hebrews 7:23 (ESV)

²³ The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office,

Hebrews 8:5 (ESV)

⁵ They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.”

Hebrews 9:7 (ESV)

⁷ but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.

Hebrews 9:9 (ESV)

⁹ (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper,

Hebrews 9:12–13 (ESV)

¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the blood of goats

and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh,

Hebrews 10:1 (ESV)

¹ For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

Hebrews 10:11 (ESV)

¹¹ And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

Jesus, the True High Priest

Hebrews 2:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Hebrews 4:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Hebrews 5:6 (ESV)

⁶ as he says also in another place, “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”

Hebrews 5:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 6:19–20 (ESV)

¹⁹ We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, ²⁰ where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life.

Hebrews 7:24–27 (ESV)

²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. ²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

²⁶ For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ He has no need, like those high

priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.

Hebrews 8:2 (ESV)

² a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.

Hebrews 8:6 (ESV)

⁶ But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.

Hebrews 9:11–12 (ESV)

¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

Hebrews 9:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Hebrews 9:24 (ESV)

²⁴ For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

Hebrews 9:26 (ESV)

²⁶ for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Hebrews 10:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Hebrews 10:18–19 (ESV)

¹⁸ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,

ATONEMENT, DAY OF

(Heb. *yôm hakkippurîm*). On the 10th day of the 7th month (Tishri, September/October), Israel observed its most solemn holy day. All work was forbidden and a strict fast was enjoined on all of the people.

I. Purpose

The Day of Atonement served as a reminder that the daily, weekly and monthly sacrifices made at the altar of burnt offering were not sufficient to atone for sin. Even at the altar of burnt offering the worshipper stood 'afar off', unable to approach the holy Presence of God, who was manifest between the cherubim in the holy of holies. On this one day in the year, atoning blood was brought into the holy of holies, the divine throne-room, by the high priest as the representative of the people.

The high priest made atonement for 'all the iniquities of the children of Israel and all their transgressions in all their sins'. Atonement was first made for the priests because the mediator between God and his people had to be ceremonially clean. The sanctuary was also cleansed, for it, too, was ceremonially defiled by the presence and ministrations of sinful men.

II. Ancient observance

To prepare for the sacrifices of the day, the high priest put aside his official robes and dressed in a simple white garment. He then offered a bullock as a sin-offering for himself and the priesthood. After filling his censer with live coals from the altar, the high priest entered the holy of holies, where he placed incense on the coals. The incense sent forth a cloud of smoke over the mercy seat, which served as a covering for the ark of the covenant. The high priest took some of the blood of the bullock and sprinkled it on the mercy seat and on the ground in front of the ark. In this way atonement was made for the priesthood.

The high priest next sacrificed a he-goat as a sin offering for the people. Some of the blood was taken into the holy of holies, and it was sprinkled there in the manner in which the sin offering for the priests had been sprinkled (Lv. 16:11–15).

After purifying the holy place and the altar of burnt offering with the mingled blood of the bullock and the goat (Lv. 16:18–19) the high priest took a second goat, laid his hands upon its head and confessed over it the sins of Israel. This goat, commonly called the *SCAPEGOAT (*i.e.* escape goat), was then driven into the desert, where it symbolically carried away the sins of the people.

The carcasses of the two burnt offerings—the bullock and the he-goat—were taken outside the city and burnt. The day was concluded with additional sacrifices.

III. Significance

The Epistle to the Hebrews interprets the ritual of the Day of Atonement as a type of the atoning work of Christ, emphasizing the perfection of the latter by contrast with the inadequacy of the former (Heb. 9–10). Jesus himself is termed our 'great high priest', and the blood shed on Calvary

is seen as typified in the blood of bulls and goats. Unlike the OT priesthood, the sinless Christ did not have to make sacrifice for any sins of his own.

As the high priest of the OT entered the holy of holies with the blood of his sacrificial victim, so Jesus entered heaven itself to appear before the Father on behalf of his people (Heb. 9:11–12).

The high priest had to offer sin offerings each year for his own sins and the sins of the people. This annual repetition of the sacrifices served as a reminder that perfect atonement had not yet been provided. Jesus, however, through his own blood effected eternal redemption for his people (Heb. 9:12).

The Epistle to the Hebrews notes that the levitical offerings could effect only ‘the purification of the flesh’. They ceremonially cleansed the sinner, but they could not bring about inward cleansing, the prerequisite for fellowship with God. The offerings served as a type and a prophecy of Jesus, who, through his better sacrifice, cleanses the conscience from dead works (Heb. 9:13–14).

The OT tabernacle was designed, in part, to teach Israel that sin hindered access to the presence of God. Only the high priest, and he only once a year, could enter the holy of holies, and then ‘not without taking blood’ offered to atone for sins (Heb. 9:7). Jesus, however, through a ‘new and living way’ has entered heaven itself, the true holy of holies, where he ever lives to make intercession for his people. The believer need not stand afar off, as did the Israelite of old, but may now through Christ approach the very throne of grace.

In Heb. 13:11–12 we are reminded that the flesh of the sin offering of the Day of Atonement was burnt outside the camp of Israel. Jesus, also, suffered outside the gate of Jerusalem that he might redeem his people from sin.

IV. Modern observance

In modern Jewish usage the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*, is the last of the ‘10 Days of Penitence’ which begin with *Rosh Hashanah*—the Jewish New Year’s Day. This 10-day period is devoted to the spiritual exercises of penitence, prayer and fasting in preparation for the most solemn day of the year, *Yom Kippur*. Although the sacrificial aspects of the Day of Atonement have not been in effect since the destruction of the Temple, Jews still observe the day by fasting and refraining from all types of work.

The shophar, or ram’s horn, is blown to assemble the people for worship in the synagogue on the eve of *Yom Kippur*. At this time the impressive *Kol Nidre* (‘all vows’) service is chanted. The congregation penitently asks God to forgive them for breaking the vows which they were unable to fulfil.

Services are held on the next day from early morning until nightfall. At sunset the Day of Atonement is ended by a single blast of the shophar, after which the worshippers return to their homes.

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Azazel

(Lev. 16:8, 10, 26, Revised Version only here; rendered “scape-goat” in the Authorized Version). This word has given rise to many different views. Some Jewish interpreters regard it as the name of a place some 12 miles east of Jerusalem, in the wilderness. Others take it to be the name of an evil spirit, or even of Satan. But when we remember that the two goats together form a type of Christ, on whom the Lord “laid the iniquity of us all,” and examine into the root meaning of this word (viz., “separation”), the interpretation of those who regard the one goat as representing the atonement made, and the other, that “for Azazel,” as representing the effect of the great work of atonement (viz., the complete removal of sin), is certainly to be preferred. The one goat which was “for Jehovah” was offered as a sin-offering, by which atonement was made. But the sins must also be visibly banished, and therefore they were symbolically laid by confession on the other goat, which was then “sent away for Azazel” into the wilderness. The form of this word indicates intensity, and therefore signifies the total separation of sin: it was wholly carried away. It was important that the result of the sacrifices offered by the high priest alone in the sanctuary should be embodied in a visible transaction, and hence the dismissal of the “scape-goat.” It was of no consequence what became of it, as the whole import of the transaction lay in its being sent into the wilderness bearing away sin. As the goat “for Jehovah” was to witness to the demerit of sin and the need of the blood of atonement, so the goat “for Azazel” was to witness to the efficacy of the sacrifice and the result of the shedding of blood in the taking away of sin.²

¹ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1996). [Atonement, Day of](#). In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., pp. 104–105). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

² Easton, M. G. (1893). In [Easton's Bible dictionary](#). New York: Harper & Brothers.