

## Leviticus 16:29-34

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Throughout Leviticus, God has been giving the Israelites very specific instruction for the appropriate worship within the Tabernacle. We have noticed that Leviticus 1vs2 has a strange word order which suggests that the primary sacrifice of an Israelite is actually themselves before they select an animal or grain to offer the Lord. Chapter 16 has been about the ritual service on the Day of Atonements on which multiple atonements are made for the Altar, the Holy of Holies, the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, the High Priest and his family as well as the Israelite community. Later rabbis will comment on the nature of sacrifices in general saying: if God truly wanted sacrifices then He could have asked the angels of Heaven to bring Him burnt offerings. Sacrifices then are something that humans do. And in this chapter, they are directed for atonement with a live goat to carry the sins of the people away to Azazel and the desert.

God instructs the Israelites that this should be a lasting ordinance, a ‘forever law’ on a particular day, the tenth day of the seventh month. What does a lasting ordinance mean in the context of the later covenants? The next covenant recorded in the Torah is the Covenant of Peace with the household of Pinchas in Numbers 25vs12-13. Does this later covenant abrogate the previous one? And the answer to this question is no. The same question and answers are given about the Covenant Joshua makes at Shechem (Josh 24) and the Davidic Covenant with King David. The pattern is the same, later Covenants do not abrogate the previous Covenant. Thus when we come to the New Covenant, which is made with the House of Israel and Judah, the Torah will be written on the hearts of man. Within the Torah is of course Leviticus and Yom Kippur. The nature of the lasting ordinance gets even more complicated when we consider that the Tabernacle at Shiloh was destroyed by Philistines, thus ceasing the sacrificial ritual in that place. Later the First Temple was destroyed, again ceasing the sacrificial ritual while in Babylon. By the establishment of the Second Temple, the Holy of Holies was actually empty with no Ark of the Covenant, thus the High Priest could not bring the required blood to sprinkle on the Ark as there was no such thing, nor could he meet God in the Cloud above the Atonement Cover as again there was no such thing. Jesus Himself, as described in the Gospels, was constantly in the Temple with its empty Holy of Holies and no presence of the Shechinah, yet He still referred to the Temple as His Father's house! These incidences and periods of time with no ritual gave the Jewish people impetus to exegete and think through the meaning, role and application of sacrifices. Sacrifices in and of themselves are not bad. How could they be as they are directed by God to perform? Rather, the most important sacrifice to God was of ourselves, the broken spirit and contrite heart! The Epistle to the Hebrews likewise declares that the Temple ritual was disappearing and fading away, an allusion to the coming destruction of the Second Temple, which is different from being abrogated.

God instructs the Israelites, as well as the foreigners living within Israel, to afflict their souls. Exactly what that means is open to interpretation. It has come to mean fasting from food and drink, intimacy with spouses and extended times of prayer and repentance. The body is connected with the soul, since at Creation, Adam was a body without life until the Lord breathed into him and Adam became a soul (*nefesh*). Jeremiah 32vs41 notes that God Himself has a soul. How this is connected to a ‘body’ in the Lord’s case is unclear but is perhaps connected to the Messiah in some way? Afflicting the soul meant also afflicting the body in some capacity, hence the fasting. However, what is done in the body, as a result of the soul, must not be devoid of the heart. Isaiah 58 reminds us that true fasting includes care and concern

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for the poor and is not self-centred, inward-looking ritual. Who are the strangers who dwell amongst the Israelites in this case? These are the Gentiles who reside in the land. Those close to Israel are thus bound to these laws for Yom Kippur as well.

These instructions were important, for the Lord Himself declares (vs30) that, then you will be clean before the Lord from all your sins (ESV). As there is no punctuation in the Hebrew text. A comma or period can seriously affect the interpretation. The interpretation of the above verse construction of the ESV implies that only those sins committed 'before' God are cleansed. Note the wording is cleaned and not forgiven! In other words, sins against another person could not be made right by this ritual act on Yom Kippur. The Mishnah reads: For transgressions that are between man and God, the Day of Atonement affects atonement, but for transgressions between man and man, the Day of Atonement does not affect atonement. This is echoed in the teaching of Jesus when He says, If you are offering your gift at the altar (that's in the Temple by the way with an empty Holy of Holies) and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First, go and be reconciled to them, then come and offer your gift (Matt 5). Jesus also taught that we have the power to forgive people's sins and also to not forgive (John 20), and in the Lord's Prayer forgiveness is conditional on our own acts of forgiveness (Matt 6). All that in relation to the forgiveness provided by the death and resurrection of Jesus makes for another long and interesting discussion.

In summary, then, the Lord provides detailed instructions for ritual worship. These rituals and sacrifices have meaning and value. Sacrifices of animals or grains should not be removed from the intention of the heart of the worshipper. The relationships between man and God and man and man are both vitally important. These relationships endure even when the Temple ritual does not. Sacrifices always begin within ourselves before we bring anything, including praise, before the Lord, which also endures forever.