

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

The Day of Atonement was a very special day in the life of the Israelites. On this day, the LORD would cleanse His people of any and all sin. This was done using a very visible ceremony which foreshadowed the work of Jesus Christ.

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest was allowed to enter into the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle (where the ark of the covenant was kept). This was the only day of the year on which he could do this. If he entered on any other day, he would die (w1-2). The tenth day of the seventh month was selected for the Day of Atonement. This roughly corresponds to mid-September on our calendars.

Order of Events on the Day of Atonement

- ! The high priest would bring an offering to prepare Himself for ministering in the Most Holy Place (v3). A young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering would be prepared for sacrifice.
- ! The high priest was to remove his usual elaborate dress, bathe, and put on plain linen garments (v4).
- ! Then two goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering were to be gathered in preparation.
- ! The bull that had been made ready earlier as the offering for the high priest was then offered as a sin offering for him (v6).
- ! The two goats that were selected as the sin offering for the people were brought before the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting (v7).
- ! Lots were cast to determine which goat would become a sacrifice and which one would become the scapegoat (w8-10).
- ! The high priest took the coals from the altar of the LORD and two handfuls of incense and took them behind the curtain— that is, into the Most Holy Place. The smoke from the incense was to keep the high priest from looking directly at the presence of God (w12-13).
- ! The bull's blood was sprinkled on the front of the atonement cover, and then sprinkled seven times in front of the cover (v14).
- ! After the bull (the priest's atonement), the goat was slaughtered as a

sin offering for the people. Its blood too was taken behind the curtain and handled in the same way as the bull's blood. No one was to be in the Tent of Meeting while the high priest was conducting any of this activity (w15-17).

- ! The high priest emerged from the Most Holy Place and sprinkled the blood of the bull and the goat on the altar to cleanse it (w18-19).
- ! The goat that had been designated the scapegoat was then brought forward. The high priest laid his hands on it and confessed the sins of the Israelites over the goat's head. Then the goat was sent away into the desert and never seen again (w20-23).
- ! Back inside the Tent of Meeting, the linen garments were removed, the priest bathed with water, and again put on the more elaborate clothing (w23-24).
- ! Having done that, he would come out and sacrifice the whole burnt offerings, both for himself and for the people (w24-25).
- ! A few final notes: The man who had released the scapegoat into the desert had to wash his clothes and bathe himself with water before coming back into the camp. What was left of the bull and goat that had been used as the sin offerings was taken outside the camp and burned. The man who burned the animals also had to wash before returning to camp.

The Day of Atonement was to be a lasting ordinance. It was a day on which the people would do no work but would observe this ceremony of special cleansing and forgiveness from the LORD. A provision was also made for the work of the high priest to continue through the generations (v32).

Read w30-31 where the LORD summarizes the Day of Atonement

Notice how the Day of Atonement had to be repeated year after year. Once Christ came, there was no longer any need for these sacrifices because Jesus Himself was the fulfillment of this "foreshadowing."

**Write down your own thoughts on the Day of Atonement.
Pay special attention to its connections with the Messiah:**