

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ISRAEL**Leviticus 16; 26**

Memory Verse: *Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins* (Heb. 9:22b ESV).

Background Helps:

When God established his covenant with Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai, the people pledged their obedience to the covenant (Ex. 19:8; 24:3, 7). But immediately, they broke the covenant by making and worshiping the golden calf (Ex. 32). Such disobedience became a recurring pattern for the nation.

In Leviticus 26 the LORD gives further instructions to Moses while the people are still camped at Mount Sinai. He promises his people numerous blessings for obedience to his commandments (vv. 3-13). Among other things, he promises to “confirm my covenant with you. . . I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people” (vv. 9-12).

On the other hand, God also warns them about the punishments for disobedience to his commandments and breaking his covenant, including being scattered into foreign lands (vv. 14-39). But, if the people will humble themselves and confess their sins, “then I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land” (v. 42). The LORD promises that he will not destroy them utterly and break his covenant with them, “for I am the LORD their God. But I will for their sake remember the covenant with their forefathers, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the LORD” (vv. 44-45).

In other words, although the people of Israel, by their disobedience, would break the covenant God made with them through Moses, yet, if they would repent, God would restore them to the land because of the earlier covenant he had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that he would give them the land of Canaan.

(It is interesting to note that God's promise to Israel in Leviticus 26:12 is applied by Paul to the church in 1 Corinthians 6:16: “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”)

Of course, the people of Israel failed to keep the commandments of the Mosaic covenant again and again. Indeed, they were unable to do so because of their sinful nature! But even under the old covenant, the LORD made provision for their sins: the sacrificial system at the tabernacle. This week we will focus on the most important of these sacrifices: the ones offered on the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16. After reading through this chapter, you may want to consult the footnotes of the *NIV Study Bible* for Leviticus 16, which give a very helpful step by step description of the order of ritual for the Day of Atonement.

The book of Hebrews in the New Testament gives extensive commentary on the Old Testament Day of Atonement in Hebrews 9:1–10:18—see especially 9:6-15, 22-28; 10:1-10. The writer shows the inadequacy of the Old Testament sacrifices to take away our sins completely and permanently, in contrast to the once for all sacrifice of Christ, which the Old Testament Day of Atonement merely foreshadowed.

Lesson Helps:

Here’s are some suggestions for your lesson:

The aim: My students will learn about the Old Testament Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16, so that they will trust in the sacrifice of our High Priest, Jesus Christ, for the complete forgiveness of their sins.

It may be best to structure your lesson in the same way as the Background Helps above. First (after an interest-arousing “Hook” to capture their attention), review the blessings and punishments and restoration promised under the old covenant in Leviticus 26. Show how it was impossible for Israel (and for us) to keep God’s commandments.

Then study the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16, God’s provision of sacrifice for the sins of the people under the old covenant. Google “Day of Atonement” or “Leviticus 16” on the internet and download pictures for your lesson. But show also how these old covenant sacrifices were a temporary provision, repeated year after year for the sins of both priest and people, until the new covenant sacrifice was offered by our High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ—the sacrifice of himself. Finish your lesson with a look at key verses in Hebrews 9 and 10, and urge your students to trust in the once for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. Review the memory verse: Hebrews 9:22b.

Home Assignment:

 Read Deuteronomy 4–5.

 Memorize Deuteronomy 5:7.