

## 25.

## **MESSAGE 20**

### **THE DAY OF COVERINGS**

**Leviticus 16:1-34**

#### **Introduction**

Leviticus 16 is a climax to everything that has gone before in the book of Leviticus. It is built on and combines much of what had been revealed previously in the MESSAGES from The Tabernacle. It tells of Israel's great annual observance that came to be called the "Day of Atonement." The Hebrew word translated "atonement" literally means "covering" (see comments on Lev. 1:4 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading to cover over him). It refers to covering over a person or an object to protect it from the effects of sin. The word "atonement" in Christian theology refers to Jesus' vicarious, substitutionary death to pay the penalty for sins for sinners. It applies to the pardon we receive from the penalty for our sins when we accept Jesus as our Savior. In Leviticus, the word "covering" applies to a different concept. It refers to protecting a person and his possessions from sins that come into his or her life after that person becomes a believer and is saved. "Covering" in Leviticus was granted to Israelites as the result of the person's offering fire-offerings and performing many other actions in obedience to God. Covering did not occur from the grace of God only, as salvation does. It symbolized how God covered Israelite believers from their sins when they lived for Him, obeyed Him, and served Him. Therefore, the word is translated literally in these comments as "covering", to avoid reading into it ideas it did not contain.

Traditionally the special day described in this chapter has been called "The Day of Atonement." In these comments, it will be called more literally "The Day of Coverings." Actually, no name is given to the day in this chapter; however, it is called "The Day of the Coverings" in Leviticus 23:27; 25:9 and "a day of coverings" in Leviticus 23:28. It is important to notice that in each of those references "coverings" is plural, indicating the multiple coverings that took place on that day. Those coverings included covering all of the priests, covering all of the people, and covering The Tabernacle and all of its parts.

The Day of Coverings was not the only day on which covering from sin could be experienced. The ceremonies revealed in the previous MESSAGES from The Tabernacle had been rich in symbolism concerning covering over worshipers to protect them from the effects of their sins. That covering resulted from offering fire-offerings (Lev. 1:4; 4:20,26,31,35; 5:6,10,13,16,18; 6:7; 7:7; 8:15,34; 9:7; 10:17) and from observing regulations concerning clean and unclean (12:7,8; 14:18,19,20,21,29,53; 15:15,30). The ceremonies described previously were designed to be practiced by individuals and groups anytime they felt a need for them and whenever it was appropriate to express experiences that were taking place in their lives. In those observances, covering from sin came as the person experienced in his heart the repentance, dedication, or cleansing symbolized by the ceremony. The Day of Coverings, on the other hand, was a day when everyone in the nation was called on to repent and to fully dedicate himself or herself to Jehovah so that covering from sin might come to everyone and everything in the nation. Jehovah knew that, as the weeks and months of every year rolled on, unworthy deeds and thoughts would come into the lives of His people. Those unworthy and sinful deeds would hinder their fellowship with God and also would hinder fellowship among the people themselves. As a result, sadness and harm would come to the people and to everything that belonged to them. The relationship of the whole nation to God would be damaged, and the blessings He provided for them would be diminished. Therefore, Jehovah provided a great day in every year when the whole nation would be called away from its sins to repentance and to the covering or protection that repentance brings.

The ceremonies of the Day of Coverings were multiple in number and rich in meaning. Because of the variety of the ceremonies to be conducted on that day, the Day of Coverings became the most important of all of Israel's festival days (see MESSAGES 30-34 for the other festivals authorized at Sinai). The Day of Coverings was different from the other festival days in that the others were days of feasting and rejoicing, while the Day of Coverings was a day of sorrow and repentance. However, most of the symbols of the day were not new. They were the same symbols described in the previous MESSAGES concerning the offerings and the cleansing ceremonies, except that on the Day of Coverings they were applied to the whole nation and in some cases were observed in expanded forms.

It is important to remember that the symbols of the previous MESSAGES represented experiences in the lives of persons who were in covenant relationship with Jehovah (see INTRODUCTION TO SECTION I under the heading Symbolism of the Ceremonies). The same was true when those symbols were applied to the nation on the Day of Coverings. They described experiences of a nation that was in covenant relationship with Jehovah. Thus, it is a mistake to make the Day of Coverings picture salvation, as so many interpreters have done. Just the fact that the day was observed every year shows that it did not picture salvation, because salvation can occur only once in a person's life. On the other hand, experiences important to the daily practice of the saved life can and must occur frequently. The Day of Coverings symbolized the repeated need for spiritual and moral renewal in the life of a nation that belongs to Jehovah.

Prior to this MESSAGE, the Day of Coverings had been mentioned once—when Jehovah gave instructions concerning the construction of the altar of incense (Ex. 30:10). Later, Jehovah gave instructions concerning additional observances that were to be conducted on that day, in addition to the ceremonies described in this chapter (Num. 29:7-11).

#### Critical Note

Advocates of the development theory of the Pentateuch generally hold that the Day of Coverings did not originate in the time of Moses but that it was a late development that came into being during or after the time of Ezra, who led one of the groups that returned to Israel from the Babylon exile in about 457 B.C. The chief argument used to substantiate that position is that the Day of Coverings is not mentioned in Biblical literature outside of the Pentateuch in any extant Jewish writings until the Book of Sirach, which was written about 200 B.C. The critics especially emphasize that the day is not mentioned in certain Biblical passages where they think it should have been mentioned if the day was being observed in those times (such as 2 Chr. 7:7-9; Ezra 3:1-6; Neh. 8:1-9:3). Based on this silence about the Day of Coverings in extant writings, the critics propose their own ideas concerning the origin of the observance. Their theories are a tremendous edifice to build on a foundation of silence. Argument from silence is a dangerous and deceptive method. Any theory based on silence alone should be faced with skepticism. It should be noted that, after the Book of Sirach, no other reference to the Day of Coverings is found in extant Jewish or Christian literature until the book of Hebrews (perhaps 66 A.D.) and the writings of Philo (who lived from 20 B.C. to 50 A.D.). Does the silence of at least 250 years between the Book of Sirach and the Book of Hebrews overthrow the genuineness of the reference in the Book of Sirach, as silence between the Book of Leviticus and the Book of Sirach is supposed to overthrow the genuineness of the references in Leviticus? The critics don't think so because they believe Sirach but not Moses. However, the most devastating evidence that reveals the incorrectness of the critical theories is that the ceremonies of the Day of Coverings reached their highest point with the splattering of blood on The Covering (usually called "the mercy seat"), which was placed over the Ark of the Covenant (see comments on Lev. 16:2 below). Every indication is that The Covering, and the Ark on which it was placed, were not in existence after the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. When the Israelites returned from the exile in Babylon, they built a new temple; but the record of the rebuilding makes no mention of the Ark or of The Covering. Later in the years just before Jesus was born, Herod the Great enlarged and beautified that temple. Afterward it was called "Herod's Temple." Herod's temple is mentioned many times in the New Testament, but not the Ark of the Covenant or The Covering. Therefore, almost all historians and interpreters conclude that the Ark and The Covering were destroyed when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and that they were not rebuilt after the return from the Babylonian exile. Hebrew 9:1-4 supports that conclusion in that the passage describes the way the Ark had been used in the "first covenant." The statement certainly implies that the Ark and The Covering were not in use when Hebrews was written, just a few years before Herod's temple was destroyed by the Romans. If the Day of Coverings originated in the time of Ezra, after he returned from Babylon, the religious leaders in Ezra's time originated a ceremony that centered in The Covering about 130

years after it ceased to exist. Such a claim is too incredible to believe. The problems of the late origin theory for the Day of Coverings are much more serious than any supposed problems in the Book of Leviticus.

Many interpreters have been led astray in interpreting the Day of Coverings because they have rearranged the materials in this chapter to fit their theories. In these comments, careful attention will be given to the order and logic of the materials as they exist, in order to arrive at the ideas Jehovah poured into them rather than trying to extract from them ideas that this or any other interpreter would like to find there. Thus, outlining the MESSAGE of this chapter in the order and form in which it is written in the book is of great importance. The natural outline of the MESSAGE in this chapter is as follows:

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### Interpretation

Introductory note (16:1)

**Verse 1. And Jehovah spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron when they offered before Jehovah and died.**

This verse is another Introductory Note, indicating another MESSAGE delivered to Moses from The Tabernacle. A time note is attached, which states that this MESSAGE was given “after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they offered before Jehovah and died.” That event was described in MESSAGE 11 (Lev. 10:1-7). It occurred on the day the priests first officiated at The Tabernacle altar, immediately after they were hallowed to the priesthood. The sequence of events was as follows: (1) As Jehovah’s had commanded Moses when he was on the mountain for 40 days and nights (see comments on Leviticus 8:1-32 in MESSAGE 10), Moses led in formal ceremonies hallowing Aaron and his sons to the priesthood. Those ceremonies were conducted on the first of seven days that were called “the days of fillings” (see Introduction to MESSAGE 10 and comments on Lev. 8:33-36 in MESSAGE 10). (2) Aaron and his sons spent the remaining six of the seven days of fillings in study and prayer, preparing for their new responsibilities (see comments on Lev. 9:1 in MESSAGE 10 and on Lev. 10:1 in MESSAGE 11). (2) During the six days of prayer and study in The Tabernacle, Jehovah delivered to Moses and Aaron the six MESSAGES on practices concerning clean and unclean that are recorded in Leviticus 11-15, (see Introductory Note to each of MESSAGES 14 through 19). Moses delayed recording those MESSAGES until after the days of hallowing and fillings were completed in order to avoid interrupting his description of the hallowing events. (3) On the eighth day, the new priests began their official duties as priests (see comments on Lev. 9:1 in MESSAGE 10). (4) That same day, Nadab and Abihu offered an unauthorized offering before The Tabernacle and were stuck dead (see comments on Lev. 10:1 in MESSAGE 11). (5) Immediately afterward, while Moses and others were conducting the burial of Nadab and Abihu, Jehovah delivered MESSAGE 12 to Aaron concerning not drinking

alcoholic beverages (see Introduction to MESSAGE 12). (6) When Moses returned from the burial, he approved Aaron’s deviation regarding the sin-offering, which constituted MESSAGE 13 (see Introduction to MESSAGE 13). Thus MESSAGES 11 through 13 were all given on the same day, the day the priests began their official duties and the day Nadab and Abihu rebelled.

The MESSAGES in the Book of Leviticus were generally spoken by Jehovah on successive days beginning on the day The Tabernacle was erected in the first day of the first month of the second year of the Exodus (see comments in INTRODUCTION TO LEVITICUS under the head Theme). However, MESSAGES 11-13 were all delivered on the same day and MESSAGES 14-19 were recorded out of the order in which they were spoken. Therefore, the order in which the MESSAGES were delivered in comparison with the order in which they are recorded is as follows:

<u>Days</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Messages</u>
1	Erection of The Tabernacle	1
2-9		2-9
10	Hallowing ceremonies	10
11-16	Last 6 of 7 days of fillings	14-19
17	Priests began their duties and Nadab and Abihu rebelled	11-13
18		20

In order to make it clear that the MESSAGE in this chapter was actually spoken on the day after Nadab and Abihu rebelled and died, Moses recorded the time note in this verse.

Counting the day The Tabernacle was erected as Day 1, MESSAGE 20 was delivered on the eighteenth day, and the date was the eighteenth day of the first month of the second year after the Israelites left Egypt, which was the month Abib (Ex. 13:4).

1. Warning to Aaron not to enter the inner room of The Tabernacle at unauthorized times (16:2)

**Verse 2. And Jehovah said to Moses, Tell Aaron your brother not to come at all times into the Holy [Place] within the veil before the face of The Covering that [is] on the Ark, and he will not die, for I will keep on appearing in a Cloud above The Covering.**

And Jehovah said to Moses, Tell Aaron your brother not to come at all times into the Holy [Place] within the veil. Jehovah began this MESSAGE with a warning to Aaron not to enter the inner room of The Tabernacle at unauthorized times. The word translated “the Holy [Place]” was a general word referring to any holy place (see comments on Lev. 4:6 in MESSAGE 2 under the heading of the Holy [Place]). Jehovah added the words “within the veil” to specify clearly which Holy [Place] He intended. “Within the veil” was inside the inner room of the tent portion of The Tabernacle. The inner room was separated from the outer room by “the veil” (Ex. 26:33). In Exodus 26:33-34, the inner room is called “The Holiness of Holinesses” or “The Most Holy [Place].” The point was that Aaron was not free to enter the inner room of The Tabernacle any time he chose. He was to enter it only at one specified time in performance of his official duties.

This MESSAGE was intended primarily for Aaron, because the high priest alone was permitted to officiate over the ceremonies of the Day of Coverings. During those ceremonies, he entered into The Most Holy Place (see comments on vs. 11 and 32 below). The warning of this verse did not mean that Aaron was never permitted to enter the inner room but that he was to be careful to enter it only on the occasion when he was authorized to enter.

and he will not die. If Aaron observed the warning, he would not die. The clear implication was that, if he failed to heed the warning, the penalty would be death (see Introduction to MESSAGE 24 and comments on Lev. 20:2 in MESSAGE 24). This warning was most appropriate because Aaron’s two older sons had died the day before for conducting an unauthorized

ceremony before The Tabernacle. Aaron was warned not to commit a similar offense in defiance of Jehovah’s instructions. If he failed to follow Jehovah’s instructions just as they were given, he too could die.

before the face of The Covering that [is] on the Ark. This reference is the first mention in the Book of Leviticus of The Covering that was on top of the Ark of the Covenant. It had been mentioned previously in MESSAGES to Moses on the mountain, which are recorded in Exodus 25:17-22; 26:34; 30:6; 31:7; 35:12; 37:6-9. The Covering was a slab of solid gold that covered the Ark of the Covenant in the inner room of The Tabernacle. Made into the The Covering and rising above it were the symbols of two cherubim, the mightiest of the angels. They were shown bowing their wings and faces toward The Covering, to show that the highest order of angels gave great reverence to the presence of God and His forgiving grace. The word translated “covering” is a noun built on the same root as the word translated “atonement” in most English translations. The literal meaning of the word is “covering” (see comments on Lev. 1:4 in MESSAGE 1). In this verse, it is the name of the most sacred place where Jehovah covered the sins of repentant believers. Though this slab of gold has generally been translated as “mercy seat” in English translations, the literal translation of its name is “The Covering.”

Some interpreters hold that “the covering” simply means that the gold slab was a physical covering or lid for the Ark. However, this Covering above the Ark was always connected with the idea of covering the people from their sins. Therefore, it is proper to conclude that the slab of gold was called “The Covering,” not because it served as a lid for the Ark, but because it was the most special of the places that symbolized covering people to protect them from their sins. Since the name was used only for the slab of gold that was on the Ark, it will be written in capitals in these comments and called “The Covering.”

for I will keep on appearing in a Cloud above The Covering. The reason why Aaron was not free to enter the inner room at any time was that Jehovah’s presence in the form of a fiery Cloud

appeared above The Covering at all times. The state of the verb translated “will keep on appearing” is imperfect, indicating incomplete or continuing action. The meaning is that the appearance of The Cloud over The Covering was a continuing phenomenon. It abode there continually. The Cloud represented the full presence of Jehovah God. Coming into the full presence of God without proper preparation was dangerous, because no one can see God in His fullness and survive.

The Cloud symbol for Jehovah’s presence was a familiar one to the Israelites by that time. It had helped rescue them from the Egyptian army (Ex. 14:19-20,24) and had guided them all the way from Egypt to Mount Sinai (Ex. 13:20-22; 20:18,21; 40:36-37). A fiery Light appeared in the Cloud at night (Ex. 40:38) and also in the daytime on special occasions (Ex. 14:19-20; 16:7,10; 19:9,16-18; 20:18,21; 24:15-18; 29:43; 33:9-10,18-23; 40:34-35,38; Lev. 9:6,23-24). When The Tabernacle was erected, The Cloud and the fiery Light settled over it to show that God revealed His presence there (Ex. 40: 38). The dark Cloud and the fiery Light represented different aspects of God’s character. The dark Cloud represented the mystery of God, who is hidden from human insight and wisdom because He is too great to be understood by human reason alone. The fiery Light represented God’s revealing power, by which He shows Himself to people in ways we could never discover on our own (see comments on Lev. 9:6,23b MESSAGE 10). In Exodus 40:35, the Light in the Cloud is called “The Glory of Jehovah.” Therefore, the Cloud is often properly called “The Glory Cloud.”

This verse makes it clear that The Cloud and the fiery Light were present at all times within the inner room of The Tabernacle. Exodus 40:35-38 states that, after The Tabernacle was erected, The Cloud rested on The Tabernacle, that is, on the roof above The Tabernacle. Some have suggested that the Cloud that rested on the roof of The Tabernacle extended through the tent into the inner room. Perhaps that suggestion is correct, so that when the Cloud lifted off of The Tabernacle to indicate that the Israelites were to move to another location, The Cloud left the Holiness of Holinesses as well, so that The Tabernacle could be folded and moved to the new location. Numbers 4:4-20 says that, when

it was time to move The Tabernacle, Aaron and his sons were to cover the furniture of The Tabernacle before the Levites came in to move it. That chapter says nothing about the Cloud during the dismantling and moving of The Tabernacle. However, the actual wording of this verse is that Jehovah continually appeared above The Covering in “a Cloud,” not “The Cloud.” That wording may indicate that The Cloud within The Tabernacle was not the same Cloud as The Cloud that rested on the roof, though it was of the same nature. No reason exists why two separate revelations of Jehovah could not have occurred at the same time. His presence certainly was not limited to one place at a time, and no reason can be given why the symbol of His presence should have been limited to only one place at a time.

It was a fearful experience to approach close to the fiery Cloud that symbolized Jehovah’s presence. If Aaron approached it without proper covering from his sins and without protection from the full brightness of The Glory Fire, he would not survive (see comments on v. 13 below). Thus, Aaron was warned not to enter the place where The Cloud and The Fire continually appeared unless he was properly authorized and prepared.

2. Preparation for the ceremonies of the day (16:3-5)
  - a. Preparation of Aaron (16:3-4)
    - (1) Preparation for his offerings (16:3)

Verse 3. **And thus Aaron must come to the Holy [Place], with a young bull for a sin-offering and a ram for a rededication-offering.**

Jehovah then proceeded to describe the one time when Aaron could enter the inner room of The Tabernacle that contained the Ark, The Covering, and the fiery Cloud. The description began with the preparation to be made in advance for the ceremonies of the day. First, Aaron was to take the animals to be used for his offerings to the Holy [Place], that is, to the courtyard of The Tabernacle (see comments on Lev. 6:16 in MESSAGE 5 under the head The Holy [Place]). The offerings were

intended not only for himself, but also for his whole family, as is shown clearly by verse 6. The priests were to bring their offerings first, to set an example for the people. The animals Aaron was to bring were a young bull for a sin-offering (see comments on Lev. 4:3 in MESSAGE 2) and a ram for a rededication-offering (see comments on Lev. 1:10 in MESSAGE 1). The sin-offering could have been a full-grown bull, but a young animal was called for to void placing too great a financial burden on Aaron. The rededication-offering could have been a bull (see comments on Lev. 1:3 in MESSAGE 1), but a less expensive ram was specified on this occasion for the same reason.

- (2) Preparation by bathing and by putting on his holy clothing (16:4)

Verse 4. **And he must put on a holy linen coat, and linen breeches must be on his body; and he must be girded with a linen sash and a linen turban. He must wear these holy clothes. He must bathe in water, and he shall put them on.**

And he must put on a holy linen coat, and linen breeches must be on his body; and he must be girded with a linen sash and a linen turban. He must wear these holy clothes. Also, Aaron was to make preparation by dressing himself in the holy clothing of a priest. Except for the turban, the pieces of clothing that are named are the clothes of both the high priest and the regular priests, which are described in Exodus 28:40-43 (see comments on Lev. 8:7-9 in MESSAGE 10). It must be assumed that Aaron also put on all the other special clothes of the high priest, which are described in Exodus 28:1-39, because it had been stated specifically in Exodus 28:29,33-35 that Aaron was to wear them when officiating in the inner room of The Tabernacle. Some have thought that the clothes mentioned in this verse were special clothes to be used only on the Day of Coverings, but the names of the clothes are the same as those described in Exodus 28 and the description “holy clothes” was applied to clothing in both passages (Ex. 28:2,4; 29:29; 31:10; 35:19,21; 39:1,41; 40:13). The clothes here are called “linen clothes” because linen was the basic material from which they were made.

That description does not imply that they were without the colored design work that was commanded in Exodus 28 for the high priest’s clothing. The nouns describing the clothing are not accompanied by definite articles. Each priest surely had more than one set of clothing. Aaron was to put on one of the suits of clothing he had for service in The Tabernacle. The verbs describing Aaron’s clothing himself are imperfects, which should be understood as subjunctives and translated with the helping verb “must.” Clothing himself with the special specified clothing was required for Aaron to enter into the presence of God revealed by the Glory Cloud. Failing to do so would bring about his death for the sin of rebellion.

He must bathe in water, and he shall put them on. Before putting on the special clothing, Aaron was to wash himself ceremonially in the courtyard of The Tabernacle, as he had done on the day of his hallowing (Ex. 29:4; see comments on Lev. 8:6 in MESSAGE 10). Evidently this procedure was to be followed each time a priest dressed himself in his holy garments. The washing symbolized his need and desire to rid himself of sins every time he prepared to serve God at His Tabernacle.

- b. Preparation of the congregation (16:5)

Verse 5. **And he must take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin-offering and one ram for a rededication-offering.**

The congregation was to present two male goats for a sin-offering (see comments on Lev. 4:23 in MESSAGE 2) and a ram for a rededication-offering (see comments on Lev. 1:10 in MESSAGE 1). The animal specified for the rededication-offering was a ram, which was neither the most expensive nor the least expensive of those permitted (see comments on Lev. 1:3; 10,14 in MESSAGE 1). It was expensive enough to be meaningful for the congregation but not so expensive as to be a burden. The usual animal to be used for a sin-offering in behalf of the congregation was a bull, but a male goat was allowed instead if the sin-offering was accompanied by a bull rededication-offering (see comments on Lev. 4:14 in MESSAGE 2 and on Lev.

9:3 in MESSAGE 10). However, in this case two male goats were to be used for the sin-offering instead of a bull. Verses 20-22 explain that this special provision for the sin-offering was because the second goat was to be used in a unique way that was a special provision for the Day of Coverings (see comments on those verses below).

### 3. The covering ceremonies (16:6-28)

#### a. Presentation of the sin-offerings (16:6-10)

##### (1). Of Aaron (16:6)

**Verse 6. And Aaron shall present the bull as the sin-offering for himself and shall cover over for himself and for his house.**

The actually ceremonies of the day were to begin with Aaron's formally presenting to Jehovah the sin-offering that was for himself and his house, which means his family. "His house" probably included not just his sons but all of their family members. Just presenting the animal at the altar provided covering for Aaron and his family. Other covering would be provided by additional ceremonies, but with this offering their covering had already begun.

##### (2) Of the congregation (16:7-10)

**Verse 7. And he shall take the two goats and set them at Jehovah's face at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.**

Next Aaron was to formally present at the altar the two male goats that were to constitute the sin-offering of the people.

**Verse 8. And Aaron shall cast lots on the two goats. One lot [shall be] for Jehovah, and the other lot for complete removal.**

And Aaron shall cast lots on the two goats. The two male goats were each to fill distinctly different roles in the ceremonies. One was to die, and the other was to live. The goat that was to be used for each role was to be chosen by casting lots.

One lot [shall be] for Jehovah, and the other lot for complete removal. These words have been most puzzling to interpreters. The remainder of the MESSAGE makes the use of the goats clear, and it is best to interpret their symbolism in the light of the use made of them rather than in the light of the rather obscure phrases of this verse. Therefore, the full meaning of "for Jehovah" and "for complete removal" will be discussed in comments on verses 15-22.

The word that makes the phrases of this verse most obscure is the Hebrew word אָזָזִל or *azazel*, which is translated above as "complete removal." In the whole Old Testament, it occurs only in this verse, and in verses 10 and 26 of this same chapter. The scarcity of its use does not provide sufficient evidence to determine its meaning. However, the word was based on a root that means "to remove." A variety of speculations have been offered concerning the meaning of the word. Some have taken it to be the name of a particular area in the desert. That suggestion is most surely incorrect, since a specific location would have been useless to a traveling people who soon would be moving into other areas. Many have interpreted the word to be the name of a demon supposedly living in the desert. This suggestion is based on the contention that, if one goat was for Jehovah, the other goat must have been for a demon. Though this interpretation has been widely followed, it is most unlikely. No record has ever been found that any group of people ever believed in a demon named "Azazel," and most certainly not the Israelites. This interpretation holds that the Israelites were to give the goat as an offering to the demon to appease him so he would not harm them. Such a pagan concept is most out of keeping with the spiritual nature of the offerings of Leviticus. Surely this view must be in error. By far the most satisfactory explanation is that the word was a noun meaning "removal," probably "complete removal." This explanation gains rich meaning when compared with the ceremony of the second goat as described in verses 20-22.



Verse 9. **And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for Jehovah and offer it [as] a sin-offering.**

The goat that was chosen by lot “for Jehovah” was to be offered as a sin-offering in the usual manner. The slaying of the goat does not seem to occur until verse 14, so what is referred to in this verse is the presentation of the goat by pressing hands on its head to signify that the goat represented the people and their repenting of their sins (see comments on Lev. 1: 4 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading And he shall press his hand on the head of the rededication-offering and on Lev. 4:15 in MESSAGE 2 under the heading And the elders of the congregation shall press their hands on the head of the bull at Jehovah’s face).

Verse 10. **And the goat on which the lot fell for complete removal must be presented alive at Jehovah’s face to provide covering by it by [its] complete removal into the wilderness.**

The second goat, which was chosen by lot “for complete removal,” was presented before Jehovah at the same time. If this goat was to be given to a demon, it is unexplainable why it was to be presented to Jehovah. This verse simply states that it was presented before Jehovah so that it could be used to symbolize covering “by [its] complete removal into the wilderness.” Since the animal was a part of the sin-offering and since “covering” referred to covering from sin (see comments on Lev. 1:4 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading to cover over him), it should be understood that the removal referred to was the removal of sin. Verses 21-22 support this conclusion. They say that the second goat was to be sent away into a secluded place in the wilderness, from which it could not return. Sending the goat away expanded on the symbolism of the sin-offering, which pictured forgiveness, the removal of sins for the people’s lives.

b. The blood ceremony of the sin-offerings (16:11-19)

(1) Of Aaron (16:11-14)

Verse 11. **And Aaron shall present the bull as a sin-offering for himself and shall make covering for himself and for his house, and he shall kill the bull as a sin-offering for himself.**

After the animals had been presented, the next step was to kill the bull that was the sin-offering for Aaron and his family. Though the offering was in behalf of Aaron and his family, the statement is clear that Aaron was to present it, that is, to actually offer it on the altar. Only the high priest was qualified to officiate over the ceremonies of The Day of Coverings.

When the animal was killed, the was caught in a bowl in the usual manner. It represented as always Aaron’s and his sons’ pouring out or giving up their lives to Jehovah. It also represented their faith that the promised Son was going to come and suffer to pay the price for their sins and crush the head of the Serpent (see comments on Lev. 1:5 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading shall offer the blood, and splash the blood).

Verses 12-13. **12 And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar at Jehovah’s face and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it within the veil.**

**13 And he shall put the incense on the fire before Jehovah that the cloud of the incense may shield The Covering that is over The Testimony, and he will not die.**

And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar at Jehovah’s face and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it within the veil. The blood ceremony for the sin-offering of the priests on the Day of Coverings was to be different from that of the usual sin-offering. Instead of being splattered before the veil, smeared on the horns of the altar of incense, and then poured out in the trough at the base of the altar of rededication-offering (see comments on Lev. 4:5-7 in MESSAGE 2), it was to be carried into the inner room of The Tabernacle. The purpose of this

change was not to symbolize a different truth from those of a regular sin-offering but to symbolize the same truths in a fuller, more expanded way.

And he shall put the incense on the fire before Jehovah that the cloud of the incense may shield The Covering. Offering the blood of the sin-offerings on the Day of Coverings was the only ceremonial occasion when Aaron was authorized to enter “within the veil,” that is, into The Most Holy Place. He could also enter it to cover the furniture in it with skins when The Tabernacle was to be moved to a different location (see Num. 4:5-6,15). No one but the high priest ever had the privilege of entering The Most Holy Place when its furniture was not covered in preparation for moving. Even when Aaron entered The Most Holy Place, it was necessary for him to be protected from the full brightness of the glorious revelation of the presence of Jehovah that appeared constantly above The Covering.

To protect himself from the brightness of the Glory Fire, Aaron was commanded to take with him a censer on which he had placed coals from the altar of incense and two handfuls of finely beaten incense. The smoldering incense immediately caused a thick cloud of smoke to fill the room. Aaron would then be protected from the full glare of the fiery Light by two clouds. The first Cloud was the dark Cloud that always accompanied the Glory Fire (see v. 2 above), and the second cloud was the cloud of smoke from the incense. Aaron would be able to see the revelation of Jehovah, but he would be shaded from its full glare by the dark Cloud and the incense cloud.

The word translated “shield” in verse 13 is translated as “cover” in most English translations. That translation is permissible, but it is misleading because the word is a different word from the word translated “Covering.” The word is translated “shield” above to preserve the distinction. The two clouds shielded Aaron to protect him from being overwhelmed by God’s brilliant presence. The Covering symbolized a different kind of covering, that is, protection from the effects of his sins, or forgiveness.

that is over The Testimony. The Covering is said to be “over The Testimony,” because the Record of God’s revelations to Moses was called “The Testimony.” The Record was called “The Testimony” because it witnessed or testified to what God had revealed to Moses for His people to do (Ex. 16:34; 25:16,21-22). That Record was kept in the Ark.

and he will not die. When Moses was shielded from the overpowering brilliance of the Glory Fire, he would not die. Being protected by the smoke was equivalent to Moses’ experience when he was told on the mountain after Israel’s great sin that he could not see God’s face and live, so God covered him with His hand and then allowed him to see His back (Ex. 33:18-23; 34:5-7).

Verse 14. **And he shall take from the blood of the bull and splatter [it] with his finger on the face The Covering on top, and he shall splatter the blood seven times with his finger at the face of The Covering.**

And he shall take from the blood of the bull and splatter [it] with his finger on the face The Covering. Then Aaron was to splatter some of the blood with his finger onto the top of the Covering. The word translated “splatter” is the same word used in Leviticus 4:6 with regard to handling the blood of a sin-offering (see comments on Leviticus 4:6 in MESSAGE 2 under the heading shall take [some] of the bull’s blood . . .).

on top. The word translated “on top” literally means “eastward,” which strictly would mean the narrow edge of The Covering that faced toward the east or the front of The Tabernacle. However, the words “on the face of The Covering,” which immediately preceded the word “eastward,” cannot reasonably refer to that narrow edge. Most likely in this case the word means “on top.” Splattering the blood on The Covering corresponded to smearing blood on the horns of the altar of incense in the normal sin-offering for a priest and, therefore, symbolized that Jehovah accepted the prayers of Aaron and his sons after they repented of their sins (see comments on Lev. 4:7 in MESSAGE 2 under the heading And the priest shall put some of the

blood on the horns of the altar of incense of spices . . .).

and he shall splatter the blood seven times with his finger at the face of The Covering. Next, Aaron was to splatter some of the blood with his finger seven times “at the face of The Covering.” This expression seems to mean in front of The Covering on the ground inside the Most Holy Place. This action corresponded to splattering the blood “before the veil,” that is, outside the veil in a normal sin-offering of a priest. Therefore, it symbolized that Jehovah accepted Aaron and his sons for service in The Tabernacle after forgiving their sins (see comments on Lev. 4:6 in MESSAGE 2 under the heading shall take [some] of the bull’s blood . . .). Splattering the blood seven times pictured the completeness of their covering from sin and of their acceptance for service at The Tabernacle, since the number seven was considered to be a symbol of completeness.

(2) Of the congregation (16:15-19)

(a) To cover and cleanse the people (16:15)

Verse 15. **And he shall kill the goat of the sin-offering that [is] for the people and bring its blood into the house of the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull. He shall splatter it on The Covering and at the face of The Covering.**

And he shall kill the goat of the sin-offering that [is] for the people. After completing the blood ceremony of the sin-offering for himself and his family, Aaron was to return to the courtyard of The Tabernacle. There he was to kill the male goat that had been chosen by lot for the sin-offering of the congregation. Both goats constituted the sin-offering of the congregation, but this one was called “the goat of the sin-offering” because it followed the normal procedure for sin-offerings, though with certain variations for this special occasion. The fact that this goat was used in the normal way for sin-offerings also explains why it was said to be “for Jehovah” in verse 8. It was offered to Jehovah at The Tabernacle in the customary manner of fire-

offerings (see comments on Lev. 1:5 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading And he shall kill the bull).

and bring its blood into the house of the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull. He shall splatter it on The Covering and at the face of The Covering. After killing the goat and catching its blood in a bowl, Aaron was to take some of the blood and return to the inner room of The Tabernacle. Here the inner room is called “the house of the veil” because the veil formed it into a separate house or room. Behind the veil in front of the Ark and The Covering, he was to repeat the same ceremony with the blood of the goat that he had performed with the blood of his bull sin-offering. The nation of Israel had been set aside for holy service to Jehovah in just as real and important a way as the priests. For that reason, the form and symbolism of the blood ceremony was the same for a priest and for the congregation in normal sin-offerings (see comments on Lev. 4:16-18 in MESSAGE 2). They were also the same in the special procedures for sin-offerings on the Day of Coverings.

(b) To cover and cleanse The Tabernacle (16:16-17)

Verse 16. **And he shall cover over the Holy [Place] because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions according to all their sins. And thus he shall do for the Tent of Meeting that is abiding with them in the midst of their uncleanness.**

And he shall cover over the Holy [Place] because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions according to all their sins. While in the most holy portion of The Tabernacle, Aaron was to use the blood of the sin-offering of the congregation to cover and cleanse the Holy [Place] itself, just as Moses had used the blood of the sin-offering of the priests to hallow both the priests and the altar on the day of their hallowing (see comments on Lev. 8:15 in MESSAGE 10 under the heading and put [it] on the horns of the altar round about with his finger, and

cleansed the altar). The term “Holy [Place]” was a general term for any holy place (see comments on Lev. 4:6 in MESSAGE 2 under the heading the Holy [Place]), but the context makes it clear that the Holy [Place] in question here was the inner room of The Tabernacle.

And thus he shall do for the Tent of Meeting. Then Aaron was to cleanse the whole of the Tent of Meeting. It is not clear whether he splattered blood all about The Tabernacle to cover it from the sins of the people or whether the blood ceremony he had already performed was sufficient for covering the Holy [Place] and the whole Tabernacle at the same time. Comparison with Leviticus 8:10-11,15 indicates that the splattering of the blood in The Most Place was sufficient to bring covering to the whole Tabernacle.

that is abiding with them in the midst of their uncleanness. The Tabernacle had been dirtied by the uncleanness of the Israelites, in whose midst it was. When a person sins, everything that belongs to that person is dirtied and hurt because he abuses them with his sinfulness. Since the sins of the people had dirtied The Tabernacle, it was logical and right that the blood of their sin-offering would be used to cleanse it.

Verse 17. **And no man shall be in the Tent of Meeting when he enters to make covering in the Holy [Place], until his coming out and [until] he has made covering for himself and for His house and for all the assembly of Israel.**

No one was to be in the tent portion of The Tabernacle when Aaron performed these ceremonies. Since only priests were allowed in the tent portion and they were allowed only in the outer room, this instruction means that no priests were to be allowed in the outer room when Aaron entered the inner room. Thus no other offerings were to be offered that would distract from the holy ceremony Aaron was performing. Everyone was to concentrate on the meaning of these richly significant offerings that Aaron was to offer in behalf of himself, his family, and the whole nation. All of them were being covered and forgiven because all of them were repenting. Renewal was being granted to the whole nation. At that holy

moment, no other ceremony or action was to distract their attention from the forgiveness being given to the whole nation.

(c) To cover and cleanse the altar  
(16:18-19)

Verses 18-19. **18 And he shall go out to the altar that is at Jehovah’s face and cover over it, and he shall take from the blood of the bull and from the blood of the goat and put [it] on the horns of the altar round about.**

**19 And he shall splatter from the blood onto it with his finger seven times and cleanse it and hallow it from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel.**

And he shall go out to the altar that is at Jehovah’s face and cover over it. The altar referred to in these verses is the altar of rededication-offering that was located in the courtyard outside the entrance to tent portion of The Tabernacle. The altar of incense was inside the first room of The Tabernacle, and it had already been covered in verse 16 along with the Tent of Meeting and all its contents.

and he shall take from the blood of the bull and from the blood of the goat and put [it] on the horns of the altar round about. The altar outside the Tent was to be covered from the effects of the people’s sins by Aaron’s putting a mixture of some of the blood from his bull sin-offering and some of the blood of the people’s goat sin-offering on the horns of the altar and by splattering some of the blood seven times on the altar itself. Since both the priests and the people had confessed themselves to be sinners, the sins of both had helped to dirty it. Thus, blood from both sin-offerings was to be used to cover it from sins.

And he shall splatter from the blood onto it with his finger seven times. Splattering the blood seven times symbolized how completely their sins were covered.

and cleanse it and hallow it from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel. In verse 19, “cleansing,” and “hallowing” are made to be equivalent to “cover” in verse 18. The three words

had different basic meanings, but their use was so interrelated that they all came to have the same meaning. All three referred to the removal of sin and its effects, so that the person or object could reflect the likeness of Jehovah (see comments on Lev. 8:15 in MESSAGE 10).

c. The goat of complete removal (16:20-22)

Verses 20-22. **20 And when he shall have made an end of covering over 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 according to all their sins, and he shall put them on the head of the goat and send [it] away by the hand of a waiting man into the wilderness.**

**22 And the goat shall bear on it all their iniquities into a deserted land, and he shall let the goat go in the wilderness.**

The sin-offering of the congregation was to be continued by the ceremony of “the goat of complete removal.” Aaron was to press his hands on its head and confess over it the sins of the nation. Confessing all the sins of the people could not have meant naming every sin separately. It meant confessing that their sins were great and many. In this case, Aaron’s pressing his hands on the head of the goat meant that the confessed sins of the people were symbolically placed on the goat, so it could carry them away. The only possible conclusion from this part of the ceremony is that the goat of complete removal represented Jehovah, not a demon (see comments on v. 8 above). Only Jehovah can bear away people’s sins. Pressing Aaron’s hands on the head of the goat of complete removal had a different significance from that same act in regular sin-offerings. In regular sin-offerings, pressing the hands on the head of the animal meant that the animal represented the worshiper and his surrendered life (see comments on Lev. 1:4 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading And he shall press his hand on the head of the rededication-offering and on Lev. 4:15 in MESSAGE 2 under the heading And the elders of the congregation shall press their

hands on the head of the bull at Jehovah’s face). In this case, the animal represented God’s assuming the burden of the sins of the people and removing it from them.

Someone was to lead the goat away into the wilderness and let it go, far enough away so that it would not be able to return. Taking the goat away was to symbolize that, when Jehovah removes the burden of sin, He removes it completely forever. Removing the effects of sin was not pictured so graphically in the normal sin-offering. That truth is so important that the sin-offering of the congregation on The Day of Coverings was enlarged to emphasize it. This ceremony can be compared with the releasing of one of the birds in the cleansing ceremony for tsaraath (see comments on Lev. 14:6-7 in MESSAGE 17 and on Lev. 14:53 in MESSAGE 18). The lesson in each is the same. Jehovah takes away the effects of sin from the sinner’s life and removes them completely.

d. Aaron’s second washing (16:23-24a)

Verses 23-24a. **23 And Aaron shall come into the Tent of Meeting, and he shall put off the linen clothes that he put on when he went into the Holy [Place], and he shall leave them there.**

**24a And he shall bathe his body in water in Holy Place, and he shall put on his clothes and come forth.**

A second washing of Aaron took place next. It is possible that the first washing (v. 4) represented ceasing to sin, whereas this washing represented removing the effects of sin. In both cases, washing symbolized removing sins through the effort of the person himself, a concept with which the Israelites were now familiar after the revelations concerning the cleansing ceremonies (see comments on Lev. 11:25,28,31-38,40 in MESSAGE 14, on Lev. 12:4 in MESSAGE 15, on Lev. 14:2-9 in MESSAGE 17, on Lev. 14:49-53 in MESSAGE 18, and Lev. 15:11-27 in MESSAGE 19). The washings showed that, even though Jehovah Himself participated in removing the effects of sin from the sinner’s life, the forgiven sinner also was responsible to work to remove those effects from his life and to keep himself clean from sins in the future.

In preparation for the washing, Aaron was to enter The Tent of Meeting and remove his clothes with the exception of his breeches (see comments on Lev. 8:6 in MESSAGE 10). He was to leave his clothes there, so obviously he was to leave the Tent. Aaron was to wash himself at the laver in the courtyard and then return again to the outer room of The Tabernacle and dress himself again in his special clothes. Most commentators have tried to explain how the second clothes were different from the ones Aaron took off. This effort is unnecessary. Aaron did not remove his clothes in order to dress himself in different clothing. He did in order to wash himself and then put back on the same clothes he had removed. The sequence of events makes that procedure plain. The place of removing his outer clothing was The Tent of Meeting. He was to leave his clothes there, a strange procedure unless he was to go back to put them on again. The place of washing was “Holy Place.” This expression is the same term used in Leviticus 10:17 (see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 13 under the heading Why have you not eaten the sin-offering in The Place of Holiness), except that here the article is omitted. Even though the article is missing here, it is obvious that the term was meant to refer to The Holy Place or the courtyard, because the laver was located there. After washing his hands and feet, Aaron was to go back into the Tent and put on his holy clothing. Then he was to “come forth” to offer rededication-offerings. The offerings were offered in the courtyard, so he had to reenter the tent portion of The Tabernacle in order to “come forth” to offer them. It should be obvious that the reason he reentered The Holy [Place] was to put back on the clothes he had left there.

e. The rededication-offerings (16:24b)

Verse 24b. **And he shall offer his rededication-offering and the rededication-offering of the people and cover over himself and over the people.**

Next, Aaron was to offer the rededication-offering for himself and the rededication-offering for the people, even though the ceremonies of the sin-offerings were not finished. Offering the rededication-offerings in the midst of the ceremony of the sin-offerings shows that the meanings of the

two offerings closely resembled each other, a fact that had previously been shown in Leviticus 5:7-10 (see comments on those verses in MESSAGE 2). The rededication-offerings were offered to symbolize complete surrender of the whole life to Jehovah. This same surrender of the worshiper’s life was symbolized in the sin-offering by splattering of the blood of the sin-offering, so the rededication-offerings were offered here in the midst of the ceremony of the rededication-offerings to expand on the importance of total surrender in connection with the sin-offering, just as the blood ceremony in the most holy room of The Tabernacle and sending away the goat of complete removal had expanded on other aspects of the sin-offering.

f. The fat ceremony of the sin-offerings (16:25)

Verse 25. **And he shall roast the fat of the sin-offering on the altar.**

Then the fat of the sin-offerings was to be roasted on the altar. Though the words “fat” and “sin-offering” are in the singular, they undoubtedly referred to the fat from both the sin-offering of the priests and the sin-offering of the congregation. Offering the fat on the altar symbolized surrendering the best that was in their lives to God (see comments on Lev. 3:3-5 in MESSAGE 1 and on Lev. 4:8-10 in MESSAGE 2).

g. The meat ceremony of the sin-offerings (16:26-28)

Verse 26. **And the one who lets go the goat for complete removal shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp.**

The man who carried the goat of removal into the wilderness was to wash his clothes and bathe himself and then reenter the camp. The reason this instruction is mentioned here is that verses 27-28 say that a priest was to carry the meat of the sin-offering outside the camp, wash himself, and return to the camp. Thus, the return of both men to the camp are appropriately mentioned together. The meat of the sin-offering was to be carried outside the camp by a priest (see comments on Lev. 4:11-

12,21 in MESSAGE 2). Most likely the task of leading away the goat of complete removal also was to be carried out by a priest. They were to return to the camp together.

**Verse 27. And the bull of the sin-offering and the goat of the sin-offering, whose blood was brought in for covering in the Holy [Place] shall be carried forth outside the camp, and their hide and their flesh and their fecal matter shall be incinerated with fire.**

The meat of the sin-offerings was to be incinerated outside the camp, in accordance with instructions given in Leviticus 4:11-12, 21 (see comments on those verses in MESSAGE 2). This portion of the ceremony symbolized Jehovah's acceptance of the sinner back into His service after his sins were forgiven. In a sin-offering for a ruler and a sin-offering for an ordinary citizen, those portions of the sin-offering were given to the priests for their support. In a sin-offering for a priest and in a sin-offering for the congregation, of which the priest was a part, those portions were incinerated in a clean place outside the camp. That practice was commanded for sin-offerings that were in any way in behalf of the priests so the priests would not benefit from their own offerings. The meaning was the same whether the meat was given to the priests or incinerated in a clean place outside the camp. It meant that the forgiven person was accepted back by God for use in His service after he was forgiven and covered (see comments on Lev. 4:11-12, 21; in MESSAGE 2 and on Lev. 6:26 in MESSAGE 7).

**Verse 28. And the one who incinerates them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp.**

The priest who carried the meat outside the camp was to wash his clothes and bathe his body. This washing symbolized the removal of any sinful contact that may have come to him while outside the camp of the people of God. It did not indicate that the meat that was carried outside the camp and incinerated was sinful or unclean. This washing was not mentioned in Leviticus 4 in connection with regular sin-offerings. It is likely, however, that this detail was added here with the understanding that it should apply to all sin-offerings of a priest and of

the congregation. If not, then this provision was another expansion of the ceremony for sin-offerings to be practiced on the Day of Coverings in order to picture more fully the removal of the sin of a repentant believer.

4. Interpretation of the day (16:29-34)

a. Its date (16:29a)

**Verse 29a. And it shall be to you a statute for an age [that] in the seventh month on the tenth day of the month**

The Day of Coverings was to be held on the tenth day of the seventh month of every year. At that time, the seventh month was called by the name "Ethanim" (1 Kings 8:2), though later in Jewish history it came to be called by the name "Tisri". It corresponded to the latter part of September and the first part of October. Since the Hebrews began their months with the new moon, the days of their months varied in relation to our calendars. No reason is given for setting the observance for that time of the year; however, it is logical that the date was chosen because it fell just as the grape and olive harvests were ending and before the planting of the grain crops that were to be harvested the next spring (see comments on Lev. 23:34 in MESSAGE 34). Thus, it was a time of relaxation when farmers were relatively free of labor and would have time to participate wholeheartedly in the observance.

Jehovah gave the commandments for the Day of Coverings on the eighteenth day of the first month of the year (see comments on v. 1 above). The first observance of the Day of Coverings was to occur just a few days short of six months later.

b. Its spirit (16:29b-31)

Verses 29b-31. **29b you must afflict yourselves, and you must not do any work, [including] the native and the sojourner who sojourns among you.**

**30 For on this day you must be covered to cleanse you from all your sins. At Jehovah's face, you must be clean.**

**31 A sabbath of a sabbath it must be to you, and you shall afflict yourselves. [It is] a statute for an age.**

You must afflict yourselves, and you must not do any work. The day was to be a day of sincere repentance, not just symbolizing repentance. The Israelites were to agonize over their sinfulness and refrain from any kind of work so they could concentrate on repenting. The point was that the mere performance of the ceremonies of the day was not sufficient to bring covering and cleansing from their sins. The ceremonies symbolized the cleansing, but repentance in their hearts made the cleansing possible.

[including] the native and the sojourner who sojourns among you. Mourning and repentance was to be practiced by persons who were born Israelites and by sojourners among them. This statement contains the first reference in Leviticus to “sojourners,” though such persons had been referred to several times in previous MESSAGES at Sinai (Ex. 12:19,48,49; 20:10; 22:21; 23:9,12). It is important to know exactly who was designated by the term “sojourner.” Exodus 12:48 shows that a person so designated was one who had been circumcised and who was entitled to participate in the Passover Feast. This verse shows that sojourners were permitted to participate in the observance of the Day of Coverings. Leviticus 17:8-9 shows that they were allowed to stand before The Tent of Meeting at the altar of rededication-offering and present fire-offerings to Jehovah (see comments on those verses in MESSAGE 21). It is obvious from these references that a “sojourner” was a person who worshiped Jehovah. He was not a worshiper of another god. He was a person who had accepted Jehovah as his God and who had been accepted into the privileges and responsibilities of Israelite life. Thus, from the point of view of Jehovah worship, he was a proselyte; while from the point of view of the nation, he was a naturalized citizen. The words “stranger” or “foreigner” are not good translations of this Hebrew word, though it has been rendered in that way in many English translations.<sup>1</sup> The person was not a stranger or a foreigner but a person from another nation who had

been accepted as a Jehovah worshiper and an Israelite.

For on this day you must be covered to cleanse you from all your sins. At Jehovah’s face, you must be clean. Jehovah required those who were His people to be covered from their sins on the Day of Coverings. They were His people, but they still had sin in their lives. On this day, all of them needed to be forgiven of their sins so they could serve Him more fully. In order to be forgiven, they needed to be sorry for their sins and repent.

a sabbath of a sabbath it must be to you, and you shall afflict yourselves. They also needed to turn aside from secular activities so they could concentrate on repenting and seeking forgiveness. The word “sabbath” is a transliteration of a Hebrew word which means “a ceasing” or “a time of ceasing.” It was not applied only to the seventh day in the week but also to a number of different times set aside for ceasing from work in order to worship Jehovah (see comments on Lev. 19:3 in MESSAGE 23 and on Lev. 23:11 in MESSAGE 31). The “ceasing” or “rest” did not imply idleness but ceasing from regular labors in order to be busy worshiping and serving Jehovah. This emphasis becomes obvious from the activities prescribed for the sabbath day that is described in this chapter, that is, The Day of Coverings. The Sabbath was not an idle day but a busy day of worship.

The second word translated “sabbath” in this verse is almost identical in form to the first word translated “sabbath.” The two words are identical in meaning. The closest translation of the whole phrase into English is “a sabbath of a sabbath,” that is, a day of special emphasis on ceasing from work. It is similar to the expression “a holiness of holinesses,” which means an object of special holiness. “A sabbath of a sabbath” was a special time of extra ceasing from secular activities in order to concentrate completely on worshiping and serving God. On an ordinary “sabbath,” only cessation from occupational labor was required (Ex. 12:16; Lev. 23:7,8,21,25,35,36; Num. 28:18,25,26; 29:1,12,35). On “a sabbath of a sabbath,” cessation from all kinds of work was required, including household chores (Ex. 20:10; 31:4; 35:2,3; Lev. 23:3,30,31; see comments on Lev. 23:3 in

<sup>1</sup> KJV, ASV, and RV translate this word as “stranger,” CEV, CJB, GNB, HCSB, and MSG as “foreigner,” LITV, MSG, and NASB as “alien,” and BBE as “those from other lands.”



MESSAGE 30). The term “a sabbath of a sabbath” was applied to only three occasions: the weekly Sabbath (Ex. 16:23; 31:15; 35:2; Lev. 23:3; see comments on Lev. 23:3 in MESSAGE 30), the Day of Coverings (Lev. 16:31; 23:32; see comments on Lev. 23:32 in MESSAGE 30), and the sabbatical year (Lev. 25:4; see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 37). On the Day of Coverings, the Israelites were to refrain from all forms of secular activity, including household chores, in order to give themselves completely to repenting.

c. Its purpose (16:32-33)

Verses 32. **And the priest who is anointed and who is filled in his father’s place and wears linen clothes, holy clothes, shall cover over [the nation].**

The covering ceremonies were to be conducted by the high priest. “Who is anointed” and “wears linen clothes, holy clothes” could be applied to all the priests. However, “who is filled in his father’s place” can only mean a son or descendant of Aaron who assumed the position of high priest after Aaron’s death. When Aaron died and one of his descendants was anointed and his hands filled with the responsibilities and privileges of the high priest’s office, the new high priest was to conduct the ceremonies just like Aaron would.

Verse 33. **And he shall cover over the Holiness of Holinesses and over the Tent of Meeting and over the altar. And he must cover over the priests, and he must cover over all the people of the assembly.**

The purpose of the Day of Coverings was for the nation to obtain covering from the effects of its sins. This verse shows that covering was to extend to the Holiness of Holinesses, that is, to the inner room of The Tabernacle. It was also to extend to the whole Tent of Meeting, to the altar where offerings were offered, to the priests, and to all the people. The Day of Coverings was a day in which the effects of sin were to be removed from everyone and everything in Israel. The whole nation was to be restored to full harmony with Jehovah and with each other. On that day, the nation and the people who already belonged to Jehovah were to be

renewed in their commitment to Him and in their relationship with Him.

the Holiness of the Holiness. This exact expression is used only here in the whole Old Testament, though the similar expression “Holiness of Holinesses” is used often to describe objects of special holiness. The expression in this verse must have the same meaning. In Exodus 26:33,34 “holiness of holinesses” is used to describe the inner room of The Tabernacle. In Leviticus 12:4, “The Holiness” is used to refer to the whole Tabernacle (see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 15 under the heading The Holiness). The additional word “of the Holiness” must mean that it applies to a place of special holiness within The Tabernacle. It must refer to the inner room of The Tabernacle, where God’s presence was symbolized by the Ark, The Covering, and the Glory Cloud. The whole Tabernacle was a holy place. The inner room was a place of special holiness.

d. Its perpetuity (16:34)

Verse 34. **And this [day] shall be to you a statute for an age to cover over the people of Israel from all their sins once in the year. And he did as Jehovah commanded Moses.**

And this [day] shall be to you a statute for an age. The practice of the Day of Coverings was to be continued on and on indefinitely. The words translated “statute for an age” are the same words found in Leviticus 3:17 (see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 1 under the headings Here is a statute and for an age). The observance of this day was established for an indefinitely long period of time, but not necessarily without ever an end. The expression leaves room for God to eventually abolish the observance of the Day of Coverings, which indeed He did in Christ.

To cover over the people of Israel from all their sins once in a year. The Day of Coverings emphasized that even people who were set apart and hallowed to God needed to be covered from their sins regularly. The Israelites were God’s people. If they truly accepted Him in their hearts, they belonged to Him forever. However, they were still weak toward sin. Their sins interfered with their fellowship with God. They need to be forgiven and

covered or protected from the effects of their sins again and again. The Day of Coverings called the whole nation to renew their commitment to God and to be cleansed anew regularly every year.

And he did as Jehovah commanded Moses. Aaron carried out the commands just as God gave

them to Moses. Carrying out those commands involved the whole nation. Aaron and the Israelites obeyed God's commands about the Day of Coverings when the day came that God had specified for their observance, which was six months after these commandments were given (see comments on vs. 1 and 29a above).

### **Application**

Christians need regular forgiveness for our sins just as much as the Israelites did. Periodic renewal is needed by a whole church, which will result in strengthened fellowship with God and heightened spiritual power. Sin in the life of a Christian does not cause him to lose his salvation, but it does interfere with his fellowship with God. He needs to confess his sins and be restored to full fellowship with God on a regular basis. However, more is also needed. Periodically, the whole church needs to renew itself as a unit. Otherwise, individual rededications are drowned in the midst of a church that is growing steadily colder.

Christians have traditionally sought this periodic renewal through revivals. Some today disparage revivals, saying that they do not last. It is obvious that they do not last indefinitely, because the world constantly presses on the church and drags down its spiritual vitality. The fact that the good effects of renewal and revival do not last indefinitely is a reason for having more revivals, not a reason for discontinuing them. A revival, the effects of which last only for months, is much better than no revival at all. Periodic revival and renewal helps to keep a church free of serious sin and helps keep the congregation close to the Lord. The church that does not seek revival periodically is subject to dying permanently. However, real renewal and revival in a church is accomplished only through genuine repentance and recommitment, not simply through holding services. They come from "afflicting the soul" and through prayer. They require turning aside from our regular routine in order to concentrate on seeking God and yielding to Him.

Not only do churches need spiritual renewing. Nations also need it. In the Middle Ages, European nations that had strongly embraced and served Jesus became sinful and rebellious. Their Christianity became mere cold ritual and a means of political control. The Reformation brought strong tides of revival and renewal into many of those nations, and the history of Western Civilization was changed for the better. In the early days of America, revival fires twice burned brightly when the spiritual life of the nation had become stained and hard. As a result of those times of revival, America experienced advance in all aspects of its life. In the years since, many in America have begun to accept as normal sinful deeds that God has forbidden. Among those deeds are drunkenness, recreational drug use, abortion, euthanasia, and homosexuality. In addition, corruption, dishonesty, and immorality have invaded high places of government, and ordinary citizens are guilty of heinous deeds that once were considered unthinkable. America is in need of another time of sweeping revival and renewal. The lessons of the Day of Coverings need to be learned in our beloved land. It is time for committed Christians to pray that repentance of sin and commitment to righteousness will again take hold of American life. The problems of American do not primarily grow out of economic issues. They grow out of spiritual decay in the lives of our people. Let us pray that a time of spiritual refreshing will sweep over America in our time, like God wanted it to happen yearly in ancient Israel.