

Yom Kippur

Leviticus 16:1–34; Numbers 29:7–11; Isaiah 57:14–58:14; Hebrews 9:1–15

notes by Tim Hegg

Yeshua—Our Heavenly High Priest

The Torah *parashah* chosen for reading on Yom Kippur contains the instructions for Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), and particularly the manner in which the Cohen Gadol (High Priest) was to perform the sacred ceremonies of the day. We should first note the strategic placement of this chapter as indicated by the opening verse: *Now Adonai spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they had approached the presence of the LORD and died.* The story of Aaron’s sons, Nadav and Avihu, and the errant manner in which they performed their duties, is given prior to our *parashah* in order to emphasize that God’s way of forgiving sins is entirely in harmony with His utter holiness. For God to forgive sin requires that His holiness and justice be satisfied and this is demonstrated in the sacrificial system where the life of an innocent animal is taken in exchange for the life of the sinner. The actions of Nadav and Avihu disregarded God’s clear instructions, and by so doing, openly denied that the God they served is sovereign and infinitely holy.

Having reminded us of the death of Aaron’s sons, Moses emphasizes that the duties of the Cohen Gadol must be carried out according to God’s instructions. Moses does this by the repeated phrase “that he may not die” (וְלֹא יָמוּת), emphasizing that God’s way of atonement is the only way. And this is because the duties prescribed for the High Priest on Yom Kippur as well as the whole of the sacrificial system, were a direct prophetic revelation of the work of Messiah Yeshua, Who is the eternal, heavenly High Priest at the right hand of the Father.

The first use of the phrase “that he may not die” is in v. 2:

Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at any time into the holy place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, or he will die; for I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.

The first law given is that Aaron is to enter the Most Holy place only at the appointed time. If he were to enter any other time, he would die. And the reason is that God appears in the cloud over the mercy seat. In other words, the very holiness of God demands that Aaron come only at the appointed time. Any other time would be an affront to God’s holiness. Here we learn that God has appointed a time for atonement. The festival cycle