

Numbers 8:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the Levites shall lay their hands upon the heads of the bullocks: and thou shalt offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering, unto the LORD, to make an atonement for the Levites.

Analysis

The Levites shall lay their hands upon the heads of the bullocks (וְסָמְכוּ הַלְוִיִּים, vesamkhu)—this semikha (hand-laying) transfers identity and guilt to the sacrifice. One bullock becomes a **sin offering** (chattat), the other a **burnt offering** (olah), covering both cleansing from defilement and total consecration to God. **To make an atonement for the Levites** (לְכַפֵּר עַל־הַלְוִיִּים, lekhaber) uses the root meaning 'to cover'—their sins must be atoned before they can minister.

Even those set apart for holy service require blood atonement. The dual sacrifice—sin and burnt offering together—establishes the pattern: forgiveness first, then dedication. This foreshadows Christ's single sacrifice accomplishing both purposes (Hebrews 10:10-14).

Historical Context

The Levitical consecration occurred in the second year after the Exodus (Numbers 1:1). Hand-laying on sacrifices was a standard ritual transferring the offerer's sins to the victim, but here the Levites themselves had already been presented as living offerings (v.11).

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. Why must even those called to ministry first receive atonement through sacrifice?
2. How do the twin offerings of cleansing and dedication apply to your Christian calling?
3. What does it mean that the Levites laid hands on the sacrifice after being offered themselves?

Interlinear Text

הַלְוִיִּם:	יִסְמְכוּ וְ	אֶת	יְדֵיהֶם	עַל	רֹאשׁ	הַפָּרִים
And the Levites	shall lay	H853	their hands	H5921	upon the heads	of the bullocks
H3881	H5564		H3027		H7218	H6499
וְעָשָׂה	אֶת	הָאֲחֵר	חֵטְאֵת	וְאֶת	הָאֲחֵר	
and thou shalt offer	H853	and the other	for a sin offering	H853	and the other	
H6213		H259	H2403		H259	
עֲלֶה	לִיהוָה	לְכַפֵּר	עַל	הַלְוִיִּם:		
for a burnt offering	unto the LORD	to make an atonement	H5921	And the Levites		
H5930	H3068	H3722		H3881		

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 29:10 (Parallel theme): And thou shalt cause a bullock to be brought before the tabernacle of the congregation: and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands upon the head of the bullock.

Hebrews 9:22 (Parallel theme): And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.

Leviticus 8:14 (Sin): And he brought the bullock for the sin offering: and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the bullock for the sin offering.

Leviticus 1:4 (Sacrifice): And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.

Numbers 8:8 (Sin): Then let them take a young bullock with his meat offering, even fine flour mingled with oil, and another young bullock shalt thou take for a sin offering.

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