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Did Yom Kippur Really Work?
16: 29-34

Did Yom Kippur really work DIG: What is the seeming contradiction of the TaNaKh and the B'rit Chadashah regarding the Day of Atonement? Why weren't the Yom Kippur rituals performed as a means to attain salvation? How does Messiah's atonement surpass it?

REFLECT: Do you observe the Day of Atonement once a year? Why or why not? Is it only for Jews? What does it mean to deny yourself? Since the modern observance of the Temple-related rituals of Yom Kippur are impossible, why should we bother with it at all?

**The atonement affected by Messiah far surpasses the limited and earthly atonement
accomplished by the rituals of Yom Kippur.**

But in what sense are we to understand this **atonement**? Did the rituals of **the Day of Atonement** really remove the uncleanness, inequity, transgression and **sin** of **Isra'el**? If it did, why did **the Messiah** have to suffer and die? If it didn't, why does **the Torah** say that it did? Note the contradiction in the following passages.

For on this day, atonement will be made for you to purify you; you will be clean before ADONAI from all your sins (16:30).

This seems quite explicitly clear. The rituals of **the Day of Atonement cleanse from sin**. Yet the writer of the book of **Hebrews** claims that they did not, and could not, **cleanse from sin**.

For the Torah has in it a shadow of the good things to come, but not the actual manifestation of the originals. Therefore, it can never, by means of the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, bring to the goal those who approach the Holy Place to offer them. Otherwise, wouldn't the offering of those sacrifices have ceased? For if the people performing the service had been cleansed once and for all, they would no longer have sins

on their conscience. No, it is quite the contrary – in these sacrifices is a reminder of sins, year after year. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins (Hebrews 10:1-4).

How is this contradiction to be reconciled? One says the sacrifices did **cleanse**; the other says they did not and could not. We have already learned the answer. The writer to the **Hebrews** speaks regarding the eternal sense (Greek: *deuteros*, meaning *the world to come,* or *the heavenly Temple*), whereas **the Torah** speaks of the temporal sense (Greek: *protos*, *this present world*, or *the earthly Temple*). **The Torah** never claimed that the rituals of **Yom Kippur cleansed** the heavenly Sanctuary or made the way for human beings to enter there before **God**. **The Torah** limits concern to the earthly Tabernacle/Temple. It specifically says that **you will be clean before ADONAI from all your sins (16:30). The term before ADONAI or in the presence of ADONAI is used in the Torah as a technical term describing the Tabernacle/Temple, and specifically its interior.** Thus, **the Torah** can be understood to mean, **you will be clean before ADONAI from all your sins** as regards to the Tabernacle/Temple.

Uncleanness, iniquity, **sin** and transgression needed to be dealt with in the earthly Tabernacle/Temple. But it must also be dealt with in the eternal Tabernacle/Temple. In regard to the earthly Tabernacle/Temple**, a shadow** of the real one in heaven, **the blood** of **bulls** and **goats** was effective for **atonement** (**to see link click Cu – The Blood of the Bull and Goat**). But the **atonement** was limited to the confines of the Tabernacle/Temple.

It is critically important that we understand this distinction. The **Yom Kippur** rituals were never performed as a means to attain salvation. They were not brought to clear **the sinner's** conscience. They were not brought to provide forgiveness of **sins** in the court of eternal justice. **For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins (Hebrews 10:4).** In other scriptures the writer to the Hebrews explains that the sacrifices could not **cleanse** the conscience because they were only intended to relate to matters of the flesh, not the spirit. **This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings – external regulations applying until the time of the new order (Hebrews 9:9-10).**

Some make the mistake of assuming that prior to the death and resurrection of

Yeshua, people's **sins** were actually forgiven and salvation procured through their participation in the rituals of **the Day of Atonement**. **The Torah** was *never* meant for salvation. It is our blueprint for living (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Bk – The Ten Words**). Salvation has always been by faith (see the commentary on **Genesis Ef – Abram Believed the LORD and He Credited It to Him**). If we believe that the rites of animal sacrifice were effective for eternal salvation up until **Yeshua's** death, then **He** didn't need to die at all! If animal sacrifices were ever sufficient, then **Yeshua's** sacrifice and death would be simply a matter of convenience for the Orthodox Jews today. According to that thinking, it would be convenient that they no longer need to come up with two **goats** once a year (or a chicken as practiced by the Orthodox Jews today). But if not for **Yeshua**, **the goats** (or chickens) would suffice. That, however, isn't true.

So then . . . what then were the rituals of **the Day of Atonement** meant for? It's hard for us to understand because there is no Temple in our day. There is no place we can go to enter into a holy space occupied by the discernable presence of **YHVH**. But if there were, then we would better understand the need for **atonement** as it pertains to **God's** presence in this world. The sacrifices and Temple rituals of **the Day of Atonement** only pertained to cleansing the nation and Sanctuary. They were the rituals for the Temple in this world. The writer to the **Hebrews** made that very clear. He argues that if animal sacrifices were effective for cleansing the flesh, **how much more** effective is **Messiah's** sacrifice for cleansing the spirit. **The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ritually unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Messiah (Isaiah 52:13-53:52; Matthew 26:28; Ephesians 1:7; Romans 5:9), who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God (Hebrews 9:13-14)!**

Here we learn that the purification rituals of **Yom Kippur** and **the red heifer** (see the commentary on **Numbers Da – The Red Heifer**) were effective for cleansing the flesh, but could do nothing to **cleanse** the spirit. Spiritual cleansing could only be accomplished by faith and repentance. **Neither the purification offering, nor the guilt offering, nor the Day of Atonement can bring expiation without repentance (Tosefta Yoma 5:9)**.



Therefore, **the atonement** affected by **Messiah** far surpasses the limited and earthly **atonement** accomplished by the rituals of **Yom Kippur**. **But when Messiah came as High Priest of the good things that are now already here, He went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For He did not enter a Sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence (Hebrews 9:11-12** and **24).**[290]

Keeping the Day of Atonement: It is to be a permanent regulation for you that on the tenth day of the seventh month you are to deny yourselves and not do any kind of work, both the citizen and the foreigner living with you (16:29). Jews have always understood "denying yourself" to refer to fasting from all food and drink and abstaining from sexual relations. In classical Jewish tradition, bathing and washing are also forbidden, but as a result of the *halachah* of **Yeshua Messiah**, it is allowed for observant Messianic Jews and Gentiles today: **But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face (Matthew 6:17).**

It is a Shabbat of complete rest for you. This is a permanent regulation. The priest anointed and consecrated to be priest in his father's place will make the atonement; he will put on the linen garments, the holy garments; he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place; he will make atonement for the Tabernacle and the bronze altar; and he will make

atonement for the priests and for all the people of the community. This is a permanent regulation for you, to make atonement for the people of Isra'el because of all their sins once a year. Moshe did as ADONAI had ordered him (16:31-34).

Mishnah tractate Yoma 6:2 provides the wording of the ancient the confession: O ADONAI, Your people, the house of Isra'el, have committed iniquity, transgressed, and sinned before You. O, by ADONAI, grant atonement, I pray, for the iniquities and transgressions and sins that Your people the house of Isra'el have committed and transgressed and sinned before You, as it is written in the Torah of Your servant Moshe, "For on this day shall atonement be made for you to purify you of all your sins; thus you shall become pure before ADONAI."

In modern observance, the Temple-related rituals of **Yom Kippur** are, of course, impossible. One might wonder, "Why should I bother with it at all then?" Since **the atonement** of **Messiah** is final, once-and-for-all, why go through the motions of repentance, fasting and contrition on an annual basis?

This would be like a husband asking, "Since I married my wife, it should be obvious to her that I love her. Why should she have to hear it? If something changes, I'll let her know. Why should we bother with romantic nonsense? It would be like Moses asking, "Since we were liberated from Egypt, and we are still a free people, why should we bother going through the rituals of the Passover again this year?

It is certainly true that **Messiah's atonement** is **a permanent**, final service which secures us **atonement** and cleansing within the eternal, heavenly Tabernacle/Temple. But we are still very much alive in this present world here and now. While we are declared justified, sinless and pure, before the throne of **YHVH**, our actual experience of reality is one marred with imperfection. Though the flesh is legally dead, it is not actually dead. We still **sin**. We still need to confess. We still need to repent. We still need to make amends and reconciliation. We still need to seek **the Father**. **If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us (First John 1:9-10).**

In **Messiah**, our final, **permanent atonement** is an established fact (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ms – The Eternal Security of the Believer**).

As regards our position in the World to Come, it is a reality. But as we participate in this shifting, temporal world, we must continually remember to realign our lives with the reality of the eternal state. This realignment requires a consistent and continuous pattern of renewal. The annual celebration of **Yom Kippur** is ideally suited for exactly that.[291]

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for being such an Awesome **Father**! Praise **You** that the goal of salvation is not merely living with **You** in heaven, but it is also a joy that believers live with **You** now while on earth. **You** adopt us into **Your** family. **He chose us in the Messiah before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before Him in love (Ephesians 1:4).** How wonderful and amazing that **You** make those who love **You** to actually be part of **Your** family. **But whoever did receive Him, those trusting in His name, to these He gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12).***

*Families are built on relationships that live and thrive together. **You** have graciously chosen to live within those who love **You**, having given the promised **Holy Ruach** to each one who believes in **You**. **After you heard the message of truth – the Good News of your salvation – and when you put your trust in Him, you were sealed with the promised Ruach Ha'Kodesh (Ephesians 1:14)**. It gives me such joy to know that I am adopted into **Your** family, and that **You** are my Heavenly **Father**.*

*There may be trials and persecutions on earth for choosing to follow **You** – but the trials are only momentary compared to the great eternal joy of living with **You** in heaven forever and ever! **For I consider the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18).** It is a wonderful deep joy to follow **You** always, even when circumstances are hard, **Your** hand of love is outstretched and we run to **You** in love. In **Your** holy name and power of **Yeshua's** resurrection. Amen*