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The Day of Atonement

Leviticus 16:1-34 and 23:26-32, Numbers 29:7-11

The Day of Atonement DIG: What does atonement mean? Why did the high priest have to make atonement for himself and the people before entering the Most Holy Place? What was the need for two goats? How does the modern Jewish practice differ from the biblical practice? What does the Day of Atonement have to do with the Great Tribulation? What are the messianic implications of the Day of Atonement?

REFLECT: How do you handle your problems when things go wrong? Do you have a favorite scapegoat? Do you blame God? Do you consider your problems a product of a fallen world? Or do you consider them the result of a wrong relationship with Him? How do you think God would like to help you resolve your problems? If He told you would you be willing to listen? Why or why not?

The word atonement is not a literal translation from the Hebrew, but is a theological concept. The Hebrew word actually means *covering*. So to **atone** for means *to cover*. On the basis of the one perfect **sacrifice** of **Christ, God covered**, or *passed over* **the sins** of the faithful that were **committed** from Adam to **Messiah (Romans 3:25)**. In other words, the righteous of the TaNaKh, were saved by faith in **Yeshua** of prophecy; whereas, the saints of the B'rit Chadashah are saved by faith in the **Jesus** of history, who has fulfilled - or will yet fulfill - every prophecy in the TaNaKh concerning **Him**. It is **Jesus Christ**, and **Him** alone, who can save the guilty **sinner** in any age!

On Yom Kippur, or the Day of **Atonement, Isra'el's sins**, until then unconfessed, were *covered* by the ministry of **the high priest**, pointing us forward to the ministry of **Christ**. Throughout the year, day after day, month after month, sacrifices were continually offered on the **bronze altar**. Yet, **God** decreed that on that particular day, once a year, **atonement** should be made for **Aaron** and **his** house, for **the Most Holy Place** and the Tabernacle, and for the whole **people of Isra'el**. That day pointed to the need of a **Savior** to come.⁶⁵²

Leviticus Chapter 16 is the illustrated truth of **Leviticus 17:11**, where it states that it is **the blood** that makes **atonement** for the soul. **ADONAI spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached Him. The ceremony on the Day of Atonement can be divided into seven sections.**

First, the Most Holy Place: God's message came after **the death of the two sons of Aaron** that is recorded in **Leviticus 10:1-7**. They **died** because they **approached God** in an improper manner. Thus, the lesson learned was that when one **approached God** it was to be done in a specific way and failure to do so would result in death. It is not true that all paths lead to heaven. **God is the One** who decides the means by which one can approach **Him** and here **He** spells it out. **ADONAI said to Moses His servant: Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the inner veil, or else he will die, because I will appear in the Sh'khinah glory over the mercy seat. The Most Holy Place** could only be entered one day of the year, and that was **the Day of Atonement**, and even then only by **the high priest (Leviticus 16:1-2)**.

Secondly, the Preparation: This is how **Aaron** was to enter the **Sanctuary area**, first, he was to slaughter a **young bull for his unintentional sin**. Secondly, on this special occasion, his **burnt offering** was increased by adding a **young bull, a ram, and seven male lambs**, in addition to the new moon offerings (**Numbers 28: 11-15, 29:7-10**). Thirdly, **he needed to bathe himself with water before he put on the proper clothing necessary for entering the Most Holy Place**. Fourthly, **he put on the sacred white linen tunic, with white linen undergarments next to his body; he was to tie the white linen sash around his waist and put on the white linen turban**. The fact that **he** was dressed only in white pointed to the purity that was needed to approach **God**. Once again, no shoes were mentioned (**16:3-5**).

Thirdly, a Summary Statement of the Ceremony: **Aaron** offered **the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household**. **Then he presented the sacrifices for the people. He took the two goats and presented them before God at the gate of the Tabernacle**. By the use of the Urim and the Thummim (**to see link click [Gb](#) - The Urim and Thummin: The Means of Making Decisions**), **lots were cast for the two goats - one lot for ADONAI and the other for the scapegoat. The goat for ADONAI was the sin offering and the scapegoat was for Azazel, which means removal**. In other

words, **the scapegoat** was for the *removal* of **sin**. Both **goats** were presented alive before **God**. After the first **goat** was slaughtered for a **sin offering**, the **other** was sent into the wilderness. The picture was: after the shedding of **blood**, came the removal of **Isra'el's sins (16:6-10)**.

Fourthly, the Atonement for the High Priest: Aaron slaughtered the **young bull for his own sin offering**. It was **to make atonement for himself and his family**. Then **burning coals** were removed from **the bronze altar** in the Tabernacle courtyard and taken inside **the Holy Place**. He took a **censer full of burning coals from the altar of incense and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and took them behind the inner veil**. The **burning censer** caused **the smoke to conceal the mercy seat** and kept the high priest alive. Then **some of the bull's blood** was sprinkled **seven times** over **the mercy seat (16:11-14)**. *That was the first time the high priest entered the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement. By Jesus' day, no one ever spoke God's name except the high priest, at this time, on this day.*

Fifthly, the Atonement for the People: The atonement **for the people** consisted of **two goats**. The first **goat, the goat for ADONAI**, was slaughtered **for the sin offering**. Its **blood** was brought into **the Most Holy Place** and sprinkled **on the mercy seat**. *That was the second time the high priest entered the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement.* The **atonement** was made **because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins had been**. **No one** was **to enter the Sanctuary until the atonement** had been made **for the high priest and the whole nation of Isra'el**. Then he came out of the Sanctuary and went **out to the bronze altar and made atonement**. **The blood of the bull made atonement for the high priest, and the blood of the goat made atonement for the people**. **The blood** of both was **put on the horns of the bronze altar and sprinkled seven times** around its base **to cleanse it and to set it apart from the uncleanness of the Israelites (16:15-19)**.



Having done all of that with **the blood** of the first **goat**, **the high priest** came to the second **goat** known as **the scapegoat**, the **goat** for **Azazel**, or *removal*. **He** laid **both** his **hands** on **the head of the scapegoat** and confessed **all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites - all their sins - and put them on the goat's head**. **The scapegoat** took on **the sins of the people** and was a substitute for them. **The goat** was then taken **away** by another **man** and driven out **into the desert**. The point should not be missed that only with the shedding of **the blood of** the first **goat** could **the scapegoat** *remove* **the sins** of the nation. **Blood** needed to be shed for **atonement** to be made **(16:20-22)**.

As written in the Talmud, Tractate Yoma 39b states two Jewish stories concerning the scapegoat. I mentioned earlier that **two goats were presented before the high priest and lots were cast to decide which goat would die and which would be the scapegoat.** **The Jewish legend states that for centuries the lot always fell on the goat to the right, which emphasized good fortune. But as of 30 AD, the lot always fell on the goat to the left, which emphasized bad fortune. So even the rabbis recognized that something unique was happening at that time.** But unfortunately they never drew the right conclusion. They never realized that **the Messiah** had died and the final sacrifice for **sin** was made and so **the goat** was no longer acceptable.

There is another Jewish story concerning the two goats known as the story of Azazel. Based upon Isaiah 1:18 where Isaiah stated that **though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, it became a Jewish custom to tie a scarlet ribbon around the neck of the scapegoat.** **As the scapegoat was sent out into the desert, the scarlet ribbon would miraculously turn white, symbolizing that God had forgiven Isra'el's sins for the next year.** The same Jewish legend states that the scarlet ribbon

stopped turning white forty years before the Temple was destroyed. The Temple was destroyed in 70 AD. Forty years earlier was 30 AD, the year of the crucifixion; the year of the final sacrifice for sin. Again, what the rabbis failed to conclude from this legend is the reason why the scarlet ribbon stopped turning white. The reason why God was no longer forgiving the sins of Isra'el by means of the two goats is given in Hebrews 10:18: **Where sins and lawless acts have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice necessary for sin.**

Sixthly, the Cleansing of the Participants: Then the blood stained white linen garments that the high priest had worn were taken off in the Holy Place. He bathed there before putting on his regular garments. Then he came back out to the bronze altar and sacrificed the burnt offering for himself and for the people. The fat was then burned on the altar. The man who released the scapegoat, then washed himself and his clothing before returning to the camp. The remains of the bull and the first goat were taken outside the camp and burned. The man who did the burning had to bathe himself and wash his clothing before returning to the camp (16:23-28).

Lastly, the Institution of the Day of Atonement: ADONAI decreed that it would be an annual celebration wherever they lived. On the tenth day of the seventh month they denied themselves and did not do any work, because on that day atonement would be made for them and they were cleansed from all their sins. It was considered a Sabbath day of rest, and they were to deny themselves spiritually. The responsibility of the high priest was twofold. First, he was to put on the sacred linen garments, and secondly, he was to make atonement for five things: the Tabernacle, the Sanctuary, the bronze altar, himself and for all Isra'el (Leviticus 16:29-34 and 26:32). We may conclude, then, that the approach to ADONAI has always been limited, and it was never true that there are many ways to God. There has always been one way. Under the Torah, that one way was by means of the Day of Atonement sacrifice. Today, it is by the final sacrifice, the shed blood of Jesus Christ.⁶⁵³

The Modern Jewish Practice: Today there are three different Jewish names for the Day of Atonement. The first is *Yom Kippur*, which means **the Day of Atonement**. The second is *Shabbat Shabbaton*, which means *the Sabbath of Sabbaths*. It is the most holy of all the days of rest, and all the obligations of the Sabbath apply to that day also. The third designation is *Yom Hakippurim*, which means **the Day of Atonements**. This is a plural form, because in Jewish theology

atonement is made for the dead as well as the living. This is one of the reasons why a special prayer of remembrance for the dead is made on that day.

Concerning **the Day of Atonement**, the basic principle in modern Judaism is that man, on his own, can **atone** for his own **sins** and they have established certain substitutions for the biblical practice.

Most Jews today do not sacrifice anything. They have substituted prayer, repentance and charity for sacrifice. **The Day of Atonement** is looked upon as a day of preparation for the joy of the next holy season, the Feast of Tabernacles. So in preparation, *among very orthodox Jews*, there is the sacrifice of a chicken. For a male, a rooster is offered, and for a female, a hen is offered. There is a special Hebrew prayer recited at the killing of the chicken that states, "This is my substitute. This is my exchange. This is my **atonement**. This fowl will go to its death, and I shall enter a good and long life of peace." Today *the very orthodox Jews* in New York are under attack from PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) for killing these animals. No, I am not kidding.

The Jewish concept of this day is that it is a day of judgment. **The rabbis teach that on this day there is the weighing in heaven of good deeds and bad deeds in order to determine whether one is going to be inscribed for a good year or not**, which is, of course, works righteousness. We cannot, nor has anyone ever been able to, work our way into heaven (**Romans 3:22**).

So what **sins** are atoned for on **the Day of Atonement**? According to Judaism, **sins** between **God** and man are atoned on that day, but **sins** between man and man are not forgiven on **the Day of Atonement** until the offender has appeased the offended. **A famous rabbi once said as he was commenting on Psalm 51, "He who repents is regarded by ADONAI as if he went up to Jerusalem and offered sacrifices to Him."**

On a normal day there are three Jewish services. The first is known as the *Shacharit*, which is the morning service. Second is the *Mincha*, which is the afternoon service. Third, there is the *Maariv*, which is the evening service. On the Sabbath day, however, there is a fourth one added that is known as the *Musaf*, which means *the additional service*. On **the Day of Atonement** there is a fifth service added known as the *Neilah*, which means *the concluding service*. The Book of **Jonah** is read on **the Day of Atonement** to teach that one cannot run away from **God**, and with repentance, **He** will forgive even as **He** forgave **the sins** of Nineveh.

Therefore, **the Day of Atonement** in modern Judaism is not so much atoning for the **sins** of the past year, as it is self-denial of the body. **The affliction, according to the rabbis, is five forms of self-denial on the Day of Atonement. First, they are to abstain from eating and drinking in order to enhance spirituality. Secondly, they are to refrain from washing and bathing for these things cause comfort, and they are not to feel comfortable on that day. Thirdly, they are to refrain from anointing. In those days people were anointed with oil and this was a refresher. Today this prohibition includes hand and facial creams for the same reason. Fourthly, no leather shoes or sandals are to be worn. The rabbis teach that the whole earth is holy ground and therefore shoes of rubber or canvas must be worn so that the ground may be felt. The last denial prohibits any sexual relations with a spouse.**

There are several modern Jewish customs surrounding **the Day of Atonement**. It is the climax of a forty-day period of self-examination, for it included the thirty days of the previous month plus the first ten-day of the current month, since **Yom Kippur** always falls on the tenth of the month.

The rabbis teach that on this day Moses brought down the second set of the Ten Commandments and announced the good news that God had forgiven their sin of worshipping the golden calf.

Jewish people fast during **the Day of Atonement**. However, they do eat a meal before fasting, consisting of *challah* or egg bread decorated with birds because man is compared with winged angels. It is supposed to express a hope that their prayers will fly to heaven with ease on this day. The twenty-four hour fast is broken by eating salty herring, thus causing them to drink more than normal and restoring their body fluids faster.

The preparations for **Yom Kippur** actually begin on the day before. On that day several things happen. First, a chicken is sacrificed by those very Orthodox Jews who still sacrifice on this occasion. Secondly, assistance is given to the poor. Thirdly, Jews try to be reconciled with those they have offended. Fourthly, there are immersions, or ritual baths, for the purpose of symbolizing the purification in preparation for the repentance to come. Fifthly, there was a time when they lashed themselves with forty lashes in the synagogue in order to afflict the body even further. And lastly, there is confession, which is recited three times before the meal, after the meal, and after nightfall on the day before **Yom Kippur**. Once you really

understand **the** biblical **Day of Atonement** from **Leviticus 16**, it is striking to notice how little of what goes on today by the Jews has anything to do with the Bible.⁶⁵⁴

The Future Affliction of the Great Tribulation: During this study it has been pointed out that modern Judaism teaches the affliction of the body, though in the Scriptures it was affliction of the soul. **God**, however, is going to bring both afflictions with the fulfillment of **the Day of Atonement**. The Passover was fulfilled by the death of Christ. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was fulfilled by the sinlessness of His bloody offering. The Feast of Firstfruits was fulfilled by the resurrection of **Yeshua**. The Feast of Weeks was fulfilled by the birthday of the Church. The first cycle of feasts was fulfilled with Christ's First Coming. Then between the first cycle and the second cycle there is a four-month interval that is symbolic of the Age of the New Covenant that interrupts the program of the feasts of **Isra'el**. Then comes the second cycle of holy festivals. The Feast of Trumpets will be fulfilled by the Rapture of the Church, and **the Day of Atonement** will be fulfilled by the Great Tribulation.⁶⁵⁵

The Messianic Implications in the book of Hebrews: The background of what the book of **Hebrews** has to say about **the Day of Atonement** is largely based on **Psalm 100:4. ADONAI has sworn and will not change His mind, "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek."** In relation to **the Day of Atonement, Jesus** is a superior **priest** in five areas. First, as to position, **Jesus** functions in Heaven and not on earth (**Hebrews 4:14-16**). Secondly, as to the priestly order, **Jesus** is after **the Order of Melchizedek** and not the Order of **Aaron**, or the Levitical order (**Hebrews 5:1 to 7:28**). Thirdly, as to covenant, the priesthood of **Jesus** is based upon the eternal New Covenant and not on the temporary Mosaic Covenant (**Hebrews 8:1-13**). Fourthly, as to sanctuary, the sanctuary where **Jesus** offered **His blood** was the heavenly one and not the earthly sanctuary that was merely a replica of the Heavenly one (**Hebrews 9:1-10**). Fifthly, as to sacrifice, it is better blood because it is **Christ's blood** and not the blood of animals (**Hebrews 9:11 to 10:18**).⁶⁵⁶