

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT YOM KIPPUR

Objectives:

- To identify some of the main components of the Day of Atonement.
- To gain an understanding of how this feast was observed during the time of Christ.
- To gain an understanding of how this feast applies to believers today.
- To explore some of the possible prophetic fulfillments of this feast.

(approach)

"Paid in full," "retire your debt," "zero balance due," "no lien holder"--these are phrases that bring joy to our heart. Today's feast concerns the ultimate "paid in full" statement mankind could ever hope for. Today's feast declares that our sins are covered and put away forever.

I. GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

A. According to Lev. 23:26-32, there are **four specific requirements for the Day of Atonement**, the sixth holy day in the seven-feast cycle:

1. Hold a sacred assembly (23:27).
2. Deny yourselves (23:27).
3. Present an offering to the Lord (23:27).
4. Do no work (23:28).

B. **There were severe penalties for anyone who failed to comply** with God's instructions concerning this most holy day:

1. The person who failed to deny himself was to be cut off from his people. (23:29)
2. For those who worked on this most sacred holy day, God promised that He would destroy them. (23:30)

C. **Three separate Biblical passages outline the observance of this day for specific groups of Hebrews:**

1. Instructions for the High Priest were given in Lev. 16.
2. As we have just seen, four specific instructions were given for the people's observance of this holy day in Lev. 23.
3. Num. 29:7-11 gives instructions concerning the temple sacrifices that were to be offered on this day.

D. "The Day of Atonement" is the English equivalent for the Hebrew "Yom Kippur"

1. "Kippur" is "from the Hebrew work *kaphar* meaning 'to cover.' Therefore the word *atonement* simply means *a covering*."¹
2. Several other names are used to refer to this holy day: the Day of Atonement, the Day of Judgment, the Sabbath of Sabbaths, the Day of Redemption, the Day of the Fast or the Great Fast and Face to Face.
3. This is technically not a feast day, but rather a fast day.
4. "The same Hebrew word used to describe the Day of Atonement is used to describe Noah's action when he pitched the ark within and without with tar. Just as Noah covered the ark with a substance that would come between him and the judgment waters of the Flood, the blood of the Day of Atonement becomes the saving, sealing agent where sin is ritually covered for another year."²

E. Observance of this holy day during Bible times was meticulous and demanding for two groups: the Priests and the people.

1. The **High Priest** was entirely responsible for the activities on the Day of Atonement.
 - a. In order to prevent him from accidentally becoming unclean, he was required to leave his home and take up residence in the Temple one week before Yom Kippur. A substitute was also appointed to serve in case the High Priest was unable to do so.
 - b. Failure on the part of the High Priest to fulfill God's requirements would mean that Israel's sacrifices would be disqualified and their sins would remain uncovered for another year. This would be a monumental catastrophe.
 - c. The High Priest was required to bathe in the presence of the congregation (with a privacy curtain in place) no less than five times during the day.
 - d. Special white garments made of linen were reserved for the High Priest to wear on this holy day.
 - e. The High Priest was required to sacrifice a bull for his own sins and those of the priesthood.
 - f. Two goats were offered as a sin sacrifice for the people. One was slaughtered and the other was led into the wilderness as the "scapegoat" The two goats were to be identical. The one to be slaughtered was chosen by a lot which had "la Adonai" (to the Lord) written on it. The second lot had "La Azazel" written on it, which meant "to the scapegoat".

¹ Howard, p. 119.

² Hagee, p. 125.



Bethlehem shepherd girl, 1999

- g. The Day of Atonement was the only day of the year that the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies.
- h. The High Priest voiced the Holy Name of God, YHWH or Yahweh, ten times during the ceremonies in the Temple. Each time he voiced this covenant name of the Lord, the people and the priests fell on their faces in worship. Jewish Oral Law forbid the speaking of this name on any other occasion.
- 2. The **people of Israel** were required to "afflict their souls" or "deny themselves" on this most holy day. "By definition this was understood to mean fasting."³ Part of the "affliction of the soul" included five abstentions:
 - a. They were to abstain from food and drink.
 - b. They were to abstain from sexual relations.
 - c. They were not to wear leather shoes.
 - d. They were not allowed to wear cosmetics and lotions.
 - e. They were not permitted to wash any part of the body other than the fingers and eyes.

F. Modern observance of this holy day was drastically changed by the destruction of the Temple in 70 A. D.



Stones of Jerusalem (near temple mount)

³ Howard, p. 120.

1. Since a covering for sin cannot be obtained through the sacrificial system, emphasis is placed on achieving atonement through good deeds (mitzvot).
2. Among some Jewish groups a blood sacrifice is still observed through the slaughtering of a chicken. This is known as Kaparot and is observed only among very Orthodox groups.
3. Most groups still observe a total fast although pregnant women, young children and sick individuals are excused from the fast.
4. Synagogue worship focuses on our need for forgiveness--it involves confession of sin and a plea for the covering of sin by God.
5. Synagogues draw record crowds on Yom Kippur.

II. JESUS AND THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

A. While the sacrifices of the Old Covenant provided for a covering of sin, the Sacrifice of the New Covenant provided for the removal of sin.

1. Jeremiah foretold of the day when God would initiate a New Covenant and would "put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. . . For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." (Jere. 31:31-34)
2. The Messiah was not our atonement--He did not merely cover our sins; He did away with them. John said of Him, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)
3. A blood sacrifice was required by the Old Covenant for the covering of sin. "In the Talmud. . . it states 'There is no atonement but by blood' (Yoma 5a) The solution to the sin problem was always tied to the substitutionary shedding of blood.
4. "The Law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. . . because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." (Heb. 10:1, 4)

B. Two goats were required as a singular sin offering for the people on the Day of Atonement under the Old Covenant--one for slaughter and one to carry the sins of the people away. Jesus fulfilled both roles at Calvary.

1. Like the goat whose lot read "La Adonai", Jesus was offered up to the Father as a sin offering for the people.
2. The second goat whose lot read "la Azazel" bore the sins of the people and carried them far away. The priest laid his hands upon the head of this second goat--the scapegoat and figuratively placed

the sins of the people upon its' head. Jesus "bore our sins, after God, our High Priest, placed our sins upon His head."⁴

3. Jesus' death and resurrection is portrayed in the two goat offering. "How can resurrection be portrayed in a sacrifice? By using two animals, one killed, and the other set free, representing Jesus' death and resurrection."⁵

C. Jesus established a new avenue to God when He cried, "It is finished." At that moment, He became our High Priest and opened the Holy of Holies to allow us access directly to God.

1. Matt. 27:50-51 tells us that at the moment of His death the veil in the Temple that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was torn in two. Josephus tells us that this veil was four inches thick.

2. The veil was torn from top to bottom, as if an unseen hand reached down from heaven and removed the barrier separating sinful mankind from a holy God.

3. "The Old Testament tabernacle was designed, in part, to teach Israel that sin hindered access to the presence of God. Only the high priest, and he only once a year, could enter the Holy of Holies, and then not without taking blood offered to atone for sins."⁶

4. "Even at the altar of burnt offering the worshipper stood 'afar off,' unable to approach the Holy Presence of God, who was manifest between the cherubim in the Holy of Holies."⁷

5. No longer must we stand "afar off" but it is now possible for us to approach the throne room of God Almighty because of the blood of His Lamb.

D. Jesus' death marked the end of the covering effect of the Yom Kippur sacrifices. No longer was the blood of bulls and goats sufficient for the atonement of sin.

1. When the scapegoat was chosen by lot, a crimson cord was tied around his neck and a crimson cloth was attached to the outside door of the Temple. When the red cord and crimson cloth turned white, it was a sign that God had forgiven the people of their sins.

2. Isaiah 1:18 refers to this, "'Come now, let us reason together,' says the Lord. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.'"

3. According to tradition, the people believed it was a good omen if when the Priest drew the lot "for the Lord" it was drawn out by his right hand. "But from A.D. 30 to the destruction of the Temple in

⁴ Hagee, p. 126.

⁵ Scarlata, p. 330.

⁶ Ibid, p. 329.

⁷ Ibid, p. 319.

A.D. 70--and for those forty years only--the high priest drew the "for azazel" tablet with his right hand."⁸

4. "Jewish literature explains the Shekhina glory of God left the Temple forty years prior to its destruction. Three signs occurred to show evidence of this: 1) the western candle of the menorah refused to burn continually. 2) the doors of the Temple would open of themselves. 3) the red wool no longer turned white supernaturally."

5. These four "signs" occurred at the time of Jesus' ministry and death and stood as a witness to the Jewish community that the blood of bulls and goats were no longer sufficient for the atonement of sin.

E. Jesus first publicly professed to be the Messiah at a Yom Kippur service at the synagogue in Nazareth. Luke 4:14-30

1. He took the scroll of the prophets and read from Isaiah 61. First century synagogue services were on a three-year cycle of readings from the Torah and prophets. This was the proscribed reading for that particular day and since it is tied to Isaiah 58, which is read on Yom Kippur, some scholars have concluded that this particular service was a Yom Kippur service.

2. "Classical rabbis believed this passage would be the very words Messiah would speak to Israel when he came. . . The fact that this passage speaks of the Messiah as the liberator of the Jewish people led other rabbis to speculate that Messiah would appear on a very special Yom Kippur in the Year of Jubilee."⁹

III. THE DAY OF ATONEMENT FULFILLED

A. Scriptures concerning the second coming of Jesus back to earth, when according to Zech. 14:4 He will "set His foot upon the Mount of Olives," contain Yom Kippur terminology.

1. Isaiah 52:15 *"so will He sprinkle many nations and kings will shut their mouths because of Him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand."* The phrase *"so will He sprinkle many nations"* refers to the sprinkling of the blood by the priest on the mercy seat during Yom Kippur, the only time the High Priest was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies.

2. Joel 2:15-17 *"Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her*

⁸ Hagee, p. 129.

⁹ Kasdan, p. 83.

chamber. Let the priests, who minister before the Lord, weep between the temple porch and the altar. Let them say, 'Spare your people O Lord.'"

a. There are three primary times when the shofar is blown during the course of the religious year in Judaism: the first trump is blown and associated with Pentecost; the last trump is blown and associated with Rosh Hashanah; and the Great trump is blown and associated with Yom Kippur.

b. "It is on Yom Kippur when the Great Trumpet, known in Hebrew as the Shofar HaGadol is blown. This is referred to in Isaiah 27:13 and Matthew 24:31."¹⁰

c. As we saw in our study of Rosh Hashanah, we are the Bride of Christ and He will come "like a thief in the night" to take us away to our bridal chamber that He has prepared for us. Jewish wedding tradition dictates that the bride and groom remain in the wedding chamber for seven nights. Then the couple emerge for the wedding banquet. Joel 2:14 says "let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber". This may refer to the seven years of the tribulation so the picture we see here is of the Lord returning with His Bride for the marriage supper of the Lamb.



Wedding canopy in Jerusalem

d. This passage also calls for a holy fast and a sacred assembly, which occur nationally only on Yom Kippur.

e. "Let the priests, who minister before the Lord, weep between the temple porch and the altar." again this speaks of an event which took place annually when the priest ministered in the Holy of Holies.

¹⁰ Chumney

f. The phrase "Spare your people O Lord," hearkens back to Zechariah 12-14. These chapters tell of a time when Jerusalem's enemies will finally be destroyed, when the people of Judah will mourn for the one they pierced, when a fountain will be opened for the house of David to cleanse them from sin, and when the Lord will come and stand on the Mount of Olives to set up His reign.



Eastern Gate as seen from the Mount of Olives

B. Yom Kippur points to the time when the Jewish people will enter into the New Covenant through the atonement of the Lamb of God.

1. Romans 11:25-27 *"I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written 'The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.'"*
2. Only on Yom Kippur could the sins of the people be covered or taken away.
3. Rosh Hashanah's central theme is repentance. Yom Kippur's theme is regeneration. After repentance comes regeneration.
4. "We can rejoice in atonement now, yet pray for the realization of this blessed hope to come to Israel soon!" ¹¹

¹¹ Kasdan, p. 84.

C. Yom Kippur points to the time when God will judge the nations of the world according to how they treated the Jewish people.

1. The casting of the lots in order to choose the goat designated "for the Lord" and the goat to be designated "the scapegoat" is a picture of what Jesus taught in Matt. 25:31-46.
2. Down through history the Jewish people have been hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, imprisoned, and sick. They have been despised and rejected, thrust out of their land and eliminated by the millions in the holocaust. "The ancient meaning for the word holocaust is 'conflagration,' or burnt offering."¹²
3. One day soon, God will bring judgment on the nations of the world according to how they have treated His chosen people.

(conclusion)

During Yom Kippur, the High Priest laid aside his usual robe and colorful garments and clothed himself in special garments of linen. John the Revelator and Daniel the prophet both saw Yeshua wearing the same thing. John says of Him *"Among the lampstands was someone 'like a son of man,' dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white a snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. . . When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.'"*(Rev. 1:13-20 and Daniel 10:5-6)

One day, we too will behold our bridegroom, clothed in the garments of the High Priest, and we too will fall at His feet and worship. What a day to look forward to.



Western Wall of Temple Mount

¹² Hagee, p. 126.

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