

Ron Cantor: Televangelists Abusing the 'Day of Atonement'

On Friday afternoon, just before we ate our last meal before Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, I was doing something that I rarely do: watching Christian TV. Don't get me wrong; I love the Word of God, but I have come to the place where I can rarely get through a Christian television program without feeling like I am being manipulated.

Far be it from me to throw out the baby with the bathwater. I know there are many godly men and women using television and media to advance the kingdom of God. But there are also many who abuse their audience, twisting God's Word, offering false promises of blessing in exchange for sending in a financial offering.

As I sat there dumbfounded, the host was interviewing a megachurch pastor on the meaning of the Day of Atonement. Because there is the mention of trumpets and fasting, he connected Joel 2 to Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

To be clear, it is not my calling to police ministries around the world. It is enough to keep our own house in order. But as the leader of a Messianic Israeli ministry, I felt that this was one case in which I had to speak up—a case where the most sacred day of the Hebrew calendar has been turned into a Madison Avenue money-making scheme.

Not in the Bible.

The guest teacher opened up to Joel 2:1 and said it referred to the Feast of Tabernacles. He began to read the passage, "Blow the trumpet in Zion," but quickly continued as if he was still reading it—*but he was not*. He merely implied the prophet

was saying, "Repent for 10 days."

He was referring to the nonbiblical, rabbinic tradition, which did not exist in the time of Joel, of the "10 days of awe." These are the 10 days between Yom Teruah (Rosh Hashana, or *russiahashana*, as this teacher called it) and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. As the teacher continued to pretend this passage actually teaches that those who honor Yom Teruah will receive a sevenfold blessing in 10 more days, the host was visibly overwhelmed by the revelation—which is nowhere in the Bible!

The preacher then said the believer can rejoice for eight days after Yom Kippur. I can only assume he meant the eight days of the Feast of Tabernacles, but it only begins five days after Yom Kippur, on the 15th. I hate to be nitpicky, but the Ph.D. taught with such authority on this new revelation that I would assume he'd know his dates better.

But it gets worse.

Get Your Months Right

Next, he quoted Joel 2:23 to prove his point:

"Be glad then, you children of Zion,
And rejoice in the Lord your God;
For He has given you the former rain faithfully,
And He will cause the rain to come down for you—
The former rain,
And the latter rain in the first month."

He claimed the meaning of this prophetic passage is that you will receive a double blessing (former and latter rains together) on the Day of Atonement. There is only one problem: The Day of Atonement is on the 10th day of the seventh month, and this prophecy is referring to the first month!

The teacher assumed that Yom Teruah comes in the first month,

because it is now referred to in Jewish tradition as the New Year. However, the Bible clearly states, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation.' ... 'Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement'" (Lev. 23:24, 27).

After butchering the Scriptures, the teacher got to his main point: The key to getting this nonexistent sevenfold double portion was to give to the television ministry upon which he was appearing.

What Year Is It?

What's more, after giving this extensive teaching about the significance of the Hebrew calendar, the teacher then suggested viewers give a gift—like he was—based on the Western calendar, of \$213 because it is 2013.

It is not 2013 in the Hebrew calendar but rather 5,774 (or, in his terms, \$5,774).

But why did they not ask, then, for \$2,013, as it is not 213 but 2013? Because they knew the average viewer could not afford it. (I can guarantee you that it was discussed beforehand.)

I've learned, after doing a few Internet searches, that this particular preacher has asked for similar gifts in 2008 and 2009 and probably other years.

I would be far more inclined to give if the gift didn't have to go to their television ministry. Why not encourage people to give to missions? Or local outreach? Or their local congregation? I think you know the answer.

God Needs Your Agreement

At this point, the host jumped in—after all, it was his show

and this was the climax. He shared that all God's blessings are conditional: "God says, 'I will do this if you will do that.'"

He then said the toupee-wearing Ph.D was about to lead them through the doorway into the double blessing. "God needs your agreement," he said. "He needs a signal that it is all right for Him to do what He has said in His Word, because He forever surrendered His right to act independently in your life."

What? God needs my agreement? He has surrendered His right?

Again, I am a Spirit-filled, faith-preaching believer in all the miracles of God—including His abundant blessings. But this, my friends, was just good, old-fashioned manipulation to get your money.

Such a Deal

The preacher went on to say over and over again, "This could be your last offering on earth"—meaning the rapture could take place on Yom Kippur, just as he was saying, "Reach for your credit card or checkbook."

Now, I can't tell you what his heart's motivation was, but it sure felt like he was saying, "Make a big donation, because even if you can't afford it, you might get raptured and therefore never have to pay it. Or God will bless you with His double-portion, sevenfold blessing."

I decided to watch the five-minute Internet bonus clip (bonus for who?). In it, the wig-wearing pastor told the story of Marsha, a woman from his church who gave him her Atonement offering in hopes that doctors would find her eligible to give her husband, Kevin, a kidney. When the doctors at the Mayo Clinic opened her up, they found three kidneys inside her.

Now, I love the supernatural. I believe in healing and miracles. In Africa, I have seen blind eyes opened. But after

hearing this man's teaching, I was not inclined to believe this story. I searched for Marsha and her three kidneys and found out the same preacher told the same story on a famous Christian network, only it was Passover—because he was encouraging people to give their Passover gifts (in the spring), not their Atonement gifts (in the fall). (I have scoured the Internet and can find no conformation of this three-kidney miracle.)

Next, with deep emotion and conviction, the teacher promised that by midnight on Sept. 15, when the pastor would place all the gifts on the altar, God will restore “what has been stolen” from those who gave. I was stunned at the lack of fear of God in this teacher in making this promise.

They Are Not Alone—Sadly

As I searched the Internet, I found two more high-profile ministries begging for money on the Jewish Day of Atonement.

One plea was from two years ago, saying, “Here is what I am asking you to do: Pray about what seed-offering God is directing you to give toward the many outreaches of this worldwide ministry. Plant your best seed-gift; then begin trusting God for a double blessing during this sacred season.

“Send us your most important prayer needs. As the Day of Atonement (October 7–8) approaches, my staff, mighty prayer warriors around the globe, and I will be standing in agreement with you.

“The season that occurs in October 2011 (the Jewish year 5772) is extremely significant and can be life-changing for you and your loved ones.

“Whether or not you have observed this season in the past, look toward this New Year on God's calendar by joining with other believers.”

Again, you had to give to his ministry, and it was not a New Year in the Bible, only in Jewish tradition (but let's not let a good ruse go to waste).

The next appeal came from the divorced leader of one of the largest ministries in the country—although she added a blessing, totaling eight (so if you were debating, I would go with her).

She said, "I want you to give your very Best Day of Atonement offering, along with your prayer request right away. Just like the high priest did once a year, I will take your offering and needs before the Lord as a sweet savor, believing for a release of HIS EIGHT PROMISES OF ATONEMENT into your life."

The problem is, I can't give both of them my "very best" offering.

This teacher had the audacity to compare herself (though she has been involved in numerous scandals) to the high priest.

There are no eight (or seven) promises of atonement. *This is a scam.*

Jewish Outreach

What is most sad about this to me, a Jewish believer living in Israel trying to reach my people, is that this garbage will do far more harm than good. Paul said to the Romans, "because of [Israel's] transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious."

This con will do nothing to provoke Israel to jealousy. But if unbelieving Jews see it, they will be further convinced that the Jesus these preach is not for them. Sad.

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Jewish roots of the New Testament. He serves on the pastoral team of Tiferet Yeshua, a Hebrew-speaking congregation in Tel Aviv. His newest book, Identity Theft, was released April 16. Follow him at @RonSCantor on Twitter.