

Remembering The Fall Feasts of the Lord Part 2, The Day of Atonement

Last time, we learned that the first of the three Fall Feasts of the Lord, the Feast of Trumpets, is called Yom Teruah in Hebrew, or Rosh Hashanah in modern Judaism. It occurs on the first day of the seventh month, known as Tishri, at the sighting of the New Moon (Lev. 23:23-25).

This two-day celebration was observed by Jews this year last week, from sundown on the 6th of September until sundown on the 8th.

Yom Kippur – The Day of Atonement

The second of the three Fall Feasts is called in Hebrew Yom Kippur and is observed in the same month as the first feast or remembrance but nine days afterward. In English, it is called the Day of Atonement and was scripturally focused on humbling people's spirits and afflicting their souls for righteous purposes, while making prescribed sacrifices to "make atonement for you before the Lord, your God" (Lev. 23:26-28).

Some would deny the inherent sinfulness of mankind and the wicked nature of the human soul (Jer. 17:9). However, the apostle Paul declares that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23) and that we earned "wages of sin is death [eternal separation from God], but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). It was this dire reality and desperate need which the Old Covenant responded – temporarily – with the annual Day of Atonement.

This special remembrance and observance was to occur "on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening"

(Lev. 23:29-32). In our current calendar (2021), this Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) will be remembered, beginning in the evening of Wednesday, the 15th, and continuing until sundown on the 16th.

The initial instructions to the Israelites in Leviticus 16 and 17 involved blood sacrifices poured out on the altar in the Holy Place, in the traveling tabernacle and eventually in Jerusalem's temple.

On this Day of Atonement, the high priest would annually carry the blood of the sacrificed bull and goat through the thick veil and into the most holy place in the tabernacle – the Holy of Holies. (You can read the detailed processes in Leviticus 16, as well as Leviticus 23:26-32 and Numbers 29:7-11.)

There, the high priest's practices were to make atonement or attain reconciliation for the sins of the people of God for the prior year. Later, this same righteous ritual would be done in the permanent replica in the temple. In doing this, the Scripture says God made "atonement" for the children of Israel (Lev. 17:11):

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood."

Have you ever gone to the doctor and he or she is not quite sure what is wrong with you nor how to treat you? If so, the doctor probably called for a blood test to help identify any variant from the normal ranges. The blood workup can reveal the problem and the blood can receive and distribute medical treatment or corrective nutrients.

Likewise, the blood represents the life force of the living soul (Gen. 4:10; 9:4-6; Deut. 12:23). Leviticus 17:11 shares how Moses first explained it, quoting God Himself:

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your lives; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul."

Later, after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D., rabbis focused these practices of personal piety on doing good acts and dedicated service to others, since they could no longer offer the appropriate sacrifices and trust them to “atone” for their sins individually or as a family or nation.

No Blood, No Atonement

As we read above, the Old Covenant teaches that without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins (Lev. 17:11). However, under the New Covenant, Christ’s shed-blood fulfilled the Old Covenant’s requirements for redemption. Hebrews 9:22 explains,

“According to the law almost everything must be cleansed with blood; without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”

Christ’s blood is seen as eternally satisfying the holy requirements of a holy God. The Mosaic Covenant offered temporary relief to the problem of mankind’s sin and guilt, and this Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) had to be repeated annually.

Yom Kippur and Yeshua

But Christ Jesus stepped into mankind’s history, shed His holy blood on the cross and provided the permanent sacrifice and ultimate bond between God and mankind (Heb. 9:11-15).

For the Messianic and Christian believers, this Jewish Day of Atonement is a foreshadowing of the Day of Crucifixion, when our Jewish Savior shed His precious blood “to make atonement for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17).

Evangelist Billy Graham explained the term “atonement” by saying that we, who were far off from God and separated from His holy presence, purposes and plans, were brought close by Christ’s holy blood and made “at-one-ment” with Him. By the

shed blood of Yeshua (Jesus) of Nazareth, we are made “one” with God Almighty!

Hebrews 9:23-28 teaches that Christ’s sacrifice on the cross takes away sin by bearing our sins in Himself. Then it shares insights about our eternal security, “He will appear a second time, not to bear sin but to save those who eagerly wait for Him” (Heb. 9:28).

Peter says that our eager “waiting” is to be lived out in righteousness (1 Pet. 2:24) as servants of God, abstaining from fleshly lusts, “which wage war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11). Evildoers around us should “see your good works and thereby glorify God, in the day of visitation,” at the glorious return of Christ (1 Pet. 2:12).

First John 1:7 says,

“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

This promised cleansing requires that we keep short accounts with God. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” But “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9).

Our regular confessing brings our present-tense cleansing as it applies Christ’s atoning work on the cross, assuring our continued fellowship with our Creator God and His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord! {eo}

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