

Celebrating the Lord's *Day of Atonement*

The Day of Atonement follows the Feast of Trumpets and ends what is known as the “Days of Awe” during which the repentant humble themselves before the Lord...“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24). It is a time for making things right with others if needed (Matthew 18:21-35). It is a day of prayer and fasting for the individual and their nation. It is also a celebration of the Atonement made for our sins by our Lord Jesus Christ. We would like to share with you some of this Festival’s deeply meaningful symbolism. In God’s instructions to His people concerning His Feasts, He called them “holy convocations.” The Hebrew word means “*a rehearsal.*” They are also called: “The Feasts of the LORD,” meaning *to move in a sacred procession, to observe a festival.*¹ Under the New Covenant in Christ, we don’t celebrate these Festivals as rituals, or only just as Holidays on God’s Calendar. In Exodus 23:15, God made a reference to them as *appointed* times, which in the Hebrew understanding means: *divine appointments.* So they are like appointments that God has put on His Calendar to have a *special* meeting with us. God said, *Every year on this date, I want to meet with you, because there are some special ways I want to bless you.* They’re not just for the Jewish people anymore. As God’s people, *we* get to be included now too! Zechariah 14 reveals that they are for “all the nations,” and that there are promised blessings for the *Gentiles* who observe the Feasts! We must remember that our Lord—the Man, Jesus Christ—is Jewish—and He will be forever. They are celebrations *of our LORD.* (See Handout: “Celebrating the Feasts of the Lord” for more information.)

The Original Meaning of the Day of Atonement and How it Revealed Jesus:

God’s set celebrations are recorded in Exodus chapters 12 and 23, Leviticus 23, and Deuteronomy 16. Day of Atonement has further instructions in Leviticus 16 and Numbers 29, and taught God’s people that sin can only be atoned for by blood. On this day the high priest of ancient Israel went into the Holy of Holies. There he sprinkled blood of the sacrifice on the Mercy Seat and on the ground seven times. Atonement was made for the high priest himself, his family, as well as for all Israel. It represented ongoing cleansing and entering into a deeper and more intimate relationship with God, *Yahweh.* Passover and Day of Atonement are related though different: Passover (*Pesach*) was the time of the sacrifice for personal sin and remembrance of the initial repentance and cleansing from sins. Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) was the time of the atonement of the individual’s as well as the corporate sins of the nation during the past year. On-going repentance by Believers and the community of Believers is a part of our relationship with the Lord too (1 John 1:7-9; Psalm 32:5).

There is important symbolism in the Old Testament (OT) Tabernacle for Passover and Day of Atonement. The altar outside the door of the Tabernacle points to the cross of Christ where He sacrificed His own body and blood, so Believers can be saved and cleansed from sin, in order for them to enter into the Tabernacle. However, just because one has entered the “Tabernacle” by the Blood of the Lamb and has had their past sins washed away, having entered into right relationship with God, it doesn’t mean the newly redeemed Believer is to stop at this point in their spiritual journey of growing in intimacy with the Lord. From the Outer Court of the Tabernacle one is invited to enter into the Holy Place, and eventually into the inner most part of the Tabernacle, the Holy of Holies, where the very manifest Presence of God abides. The writer of Hebrews encourages Believers not just to stay in the Outer Courtyard where they have entered by the blood of the Lamb, but to boldly enter into the holiest place by the Blood of Jesus as well (Hebrews 10:19). What we learn from this is that not only do we enter the Tabernacle (our redemption or salvation) by the Blood of the Lamb by having our past sins atoned for, but we continue onward into the deepest place of intimacy and relationship with our Heavenly Father by the Blood of the same Lamb. Parallels between the work of the high priest and Jesus are revealed in Day of Atonement. Jesus is our High Priest to Whom the work of the high priest in Israel pointed (Leviticus 16:30, Hebrews 2:17; 3:1; 4:14; 9:11-12). Hebrews 9:11-28 describes the importance of blood in the OT sacrifices of ancient Israel, how it relates to the remission of sins, and how it pointed to Jesus’ shedding of His Blood on the cross for the atoning of peoples’ sins.²

The purpose of Day of Atonement was twofold. Leviticus 16:30 says: “For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the LORD.” The first purpose was to “be clean.” The second was to be “before the Lord.” Here is where we find a difference

from other religions. Rather than having a God that simply needs to be appeased, our God Jehovah requires cleansing for the purpose of relationship, because He wants to be with us. God wants us to be clean, because He wants to enjoy our company.³

The ceremony began with the high priest preparing himself. Then two goats were selected. One became a sacrificial sin offering and the other a “scapegoat.” The blood of the sacrifice was brought into the most holy place of the Tabernacle, which atoned for and cleansed the priest, the people, and the nation. Then the high priest placed both hands upon the head of the “scapegoat” and confessed aloud the sins of the nation, transferring them to the goat. The goat was then taken deep into the wilderness and released in a barren place to die. It took both of the goats to depict the One Final Sacrifice that Jesus the Messiah would make for us; one whose blood covered their sins, and one that would *take the sins away*. The OT blood of sacrifices could only cover sin—and it was a temporary covering. They had to repeat the sacrifices year after year. What the people really needed was a complete and permanent taking away of their sin. It revealed the need for a *Savior—a Redeemer*. But there was a problem—only perfect sinless blood could accomplish this—it would require the blood of a *sinless human* to *permanently* take away the sins of humans. God had devised the plan from the beginning. He had to send His Son, Jesus, to come in human flesh and blood to provide the perfect sacrifice that was needed. The perfect Blood of Jesus didn’t just cover sin—it *took it away!* In Psalms 103:12 it says the Lord removes our sins from us as far as the east is from the west.

The Day of Atonement is a holy day of remembrance, of focusing on the Lord, and of setting our hearts in expressing to God how grateful we are for the incredible sacrifice Christ made and the radical forgiveness of sin it provided. It is also a day to fast and pray for the salvation of your nation and of Israel. “*Prepare the way for the LORD*” (Isaiah 40:3). But in Leviticus 16:29, the Hebrew word translated as, “You shall afflict your souls,” referring to fasting, holds an interesting other element.⁴ Its root word means: *You shall enable your soul to sing and rejoice, to testify and announce*.⁵ The fasting and not doing any work on that day can free us up, allowing our souls to be rid of all of the usual needs and obligations, and dedicate an entire day to the Lord! Within the embrace of a God of love and forgiveness on *Day of Atonement*, normal duties and needs becomes of almost no account as our spirit soars, and our soul sings and speaks of our wondrous Lord and Savior. It is truly joyous day!

“Rehearsal” of Things Yet to Come:

If “holy convocations” are “a rehearsal,” what is the Day of Atonement a rehearsal for? The Apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 2:16-17: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a *holy day*, or of the *new moon*, or of the *Sabbath days*: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.” Paul wrote this AFTER Jesus had already come, died, and rose again, so those special celebration days were *not* only a shadow of His first coming. They are also a shadow ***of things still yet to come!*** This is one reason why we should *still be* observing them. The Apostle Paul obviously was; and so was the early Church for hundreds of years.

So, the Day of Atonement must hold prophetic aspects as well. Jesus fulfilled the first part of Day of Atonement when He came the first time. He sacrificed Himself on the cross and then carried His own Blood into the Holy of Holies in Heaven to make atonement for us. The final part of the ceremonies on the Day of Atonement was when the high priest came out from the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle to bless the people. This will be fulfilled at the time of the Lord Jesus Christ’s physical return for His people. Our Messiah was sacrificed once to take away peoples’ sins, but when He appears the second time, it will not be to bear sins, but as Lord and King (1 Timothy 6:14-15; Revelation 17:14). God has given us the observance of the Day of Atonement as part of the preparation for “*thing yet to come*” when the Lord returns. We must go through *Yom Kippur* in order to reach the final festival, Feast of Tabernacles, which foreshadows the Lord’s 1000 year reign on earth.

¹ *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1982, #2287.

² Excerpt from article: “The Historical Roots of Our Faith, Present Relevance for Believers & Prophetic End Time Implications,” www.HoshanaRabbah.org

³ Excerpt from article: “The Ultimate Scapegoat,” by Josh Sofaer, on www.jewsforjesus.org

⁴ *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1982, #6031.

⁵ *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1982, #6030.