

THE FEASTS OF ISRAEL  
SESSION 9 | THE FEAST OF ATONEMENT

THE BIBLICAL INSTRUCTION FOR THE FEAST

LEVITICUS 23:26-32

- The 10<sup>th</sup> day of the Seventh month is to be a **day of atonement**.
  - The Hebrew **atonement** used in v. 27 is כִּפּוּרִים [kippurim], the plural of *kippur*. It means “covering.”
  - The English illustration of at-one-ment is completely fabricated and removes from understanding the real meaning of *covering*.
- Like the other feasts, it is to be a **holy convocation** (v. 27).
- Unlike the others, it is to be a day in which **ye shall afflict your souls** (v. 27). The Hebrew word translated **afflict** has at its root the idea of *humility*.
  - Isaiah 58:5 has been used as the basis for interpretation of the phrase **afflict your souls**.
- During this day they were to do **no work** (v. 28).
- The day would be **to make an atonement for you before the Lord your God** (v. 28).
  - I see no reason whatsoever not to believe that the activities of the day would accomplish their purpose.
  - Leviticus 16:30 gives additional insight, that the activities of the day, faithfully executed, would be used **that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord**.
- Those Israelites who would not cooperate were to be separated from Israel because God was going to destroy them (vv. 29-30).
- This is the only day where any day other than the seventh is called a **sabbath of rest** (v. 32).

LEVITICUS 16:7-31

- There was a selection of two goats. The “Lord’s” goat would be sacrificed. The “scapegoat” would represent the casting away of the sins of the people (vv. 7-10).
  - Note that *scapegoat* is an English translation that is likely the best that we can do. The actual Hebrew *Azazel* could literally be translated, *the sent-away-goat*.
- The High Priest would (in his priestly garments) offer a bullock for the priests, and take incense into the Holy of Holies, along with several other measures to make atonement for the Temple and its servants (vv. 11-19)
- The High Priest would take the Lord’s goat and the scapegoat, change clothes, sacrifice the Lord’s goat, and confess the sins of the people on the scapegoat. The scapegoat would be sent into the wilderness (vv. 20-22).
- Various other regulations for the day are given in verses 23-31.

THE PROPHETIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE FEAST

Many have pointed out that these feasts appear to be *types* with a future fulfillment. Sadly, much of the interpretation has been removed from Israel and placed on the church. I believe that the feasts are prophetic, but also that all Hebrew prophecy relates to Israel alone. The Feast of Atonement likely relates to Zechariah 12:10-13:1, when Israel **shall mourn for him** and **shall be in bitterness for him** (Zech. 12:10), and ultimately **in that day there shall be a fountain opened...for sin and uncleanness** (Zech. 13:1).

## YOM KIPPUR IN JEWISH EXPERIENCE

The rabbinical interpretation of the feast is that it was originally to forgive the people of the making of the golden calf, but later was broadened to cover the breaking of any of the commandments.

Because of the emphasis on *affliction* (three times in the seven verses of Lev. 23:26-32), the Jewish people “refrain for twenty-five hours from all food and drink, bathing, wearing leather shoes, anointing themselves with skin creams and lotions, and sexual relations.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, despite this, it is considered of the “most joyous days in the Jewish calendar.”<sup>2</sup> In addition, there is not to be any fire prepared (Ex. 35:3). Furthermore, the doing of any work is prohibited, more so than any of the other feasts, and even more than a weekly sabbath.

The rabbinical teaching is that these particular things are chosen because these were the things that were done in the making of the golden calf, and restricting these activities was a method of displaying their repentance.

Some of these prohibitions and their connection with the calf are easy to see. For example, Aaron worked to gather the gold and create the calf, using fire. The people celebrated with festive dancing, eating, and likely illicit sexual relations (Ex. 25:25). Others, like not bathing or wearing leather shoes are more subtle. The tradition is based on Exodus 33:1-6, which follows the golden calf narrative, and in which God refuses to go personally with the children of Israel on the journey. To show their contrition, the people rid themselves of their **ornaments** (Ex. 33:4, 5, 6). The Jewish people continue, on the day of atonement, to display this contrition, *ornament free*.

There is an alternate reading of the word **ornaments** in these verses. The same letters can spell *edyam* (jewelry/finery) and *eidim*, (testament/witness). Some, like Rabbi Nathan Laufer, contend that the people had made *edyam* out of the *eidim*, and when they realized God’s disappointment and anger, they removed them.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the people would, like the High Priest (in later custom), wear simple clothing on that day. This is because the priest was representing the people and it would not be appropriate for him to wear golden clothing in his role of standing in for the people. The Talmud describes this by saying, “The prosecuting attorney cannot at one and the same time be the defense attorney.”<sup>4</sup>

But why is the holiday considered such a joyous day? Because after the Exodus event of the golden calf, when God departed from them, He quickly returned in Exodus 33:7-10, and the people bowed down to the one true God. Yom Kippur is a day for Israel to remember her sin, to repent, and to discover the return of God’s presence.

## DID THE DAY OF ATONEMENT ATONE FOR SIN?

Leviticus 16:30 is clear that the *works* of the day of atonement would cause the nation to be **clean from all your sins**. But since this was an annual event, clearly there was no permanent cleansing. Furthermore, Hebrews 10:4 states that **it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins**. But it would be foolishness to say that God instituted a *Day of Atonement* that would not both *atone* (cover) and *cleans*, for the Word of God is clear.

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<sup>1</sup> *Rendezvous With God*. Rabbi Nathan Laufer. New Milford, CT: Maggid Books. 2016. Pg. 114.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*. Pg. 115.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*. pg. 121.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*. pg. 121.