

YOM KIPPUR, OR: THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

After the celebration of Yom Teruah (the Day of the Trumpets, or Rosh Hashanah), follow ten days (called "the Days of Awe") to the most holy day on the calendar of Israel: Yom Kippur, translated as the Day of Atonement. "On exactly the tenth day of the seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you, and you shall humble your souls and present an offering by fire to the Lord. Neither shall you do any work on this same day, for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the Lord your God. If there is any person who will not humble himself on this same day, he shall be cut off from his people." (Lev. 23:26-29). (The Scriptures do not refer to these days as the Days of Awe; it is called that through Jewish tradition, mostly because the principle of repentance and waiting in awe before God is implied in the Scriptures for this particular time. It is a time of reflection on the past year and a preparation for the atonement to be made on their behalf.)

For many Christians the Day of Atonement has a relative importance because they believe that it was fulfilled and terminated at the Cross. For example, David Baron writes: "Every Christian who is at all instructed in the Word of God knows that the true Day of Atonement is the Day of Calvary." But it is very interesting that Paul refers to it as "the Fast" (Acts 27:9), which he as a New Testament believer still celebrated as a holy day, even when he was on a Roman prison ship in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea! Luke portrays Paul as eager to observe the law in general (Acts 21:24) and the annual holy days of Israel in particular. About the last feast, Luke says that Paul bade farewell to the believers in Ephesus, saying: "I must by all means keep this feast [Pentecost] that cometh in Jerusalem." (Acts 18:21). In the light of Luke's aim to show the continuity in the Christian's use of the Jewish religious calendar, it seems plausible to conclude that Luke's incidental reference to "the Fast" presupposes that the Christians also observed the Day of Atonement as a day of fasting and prayer.

Pesach, or the Feast of Passover, is associated with a sacrificed lamb for personal redemption, while the Feast of Atonement was associated with a sacrificed goat providing corporate cleansing for Israel. In other words, Passover teaches us about salvation and Atonement teaches us about sanctification, spiritual purity and maturity.

The original rites and practices for the Day of Atonement are explained in Lev 16 (also compare Ex 30:10; Lev 23:27-31, 25:9; Num 29:7-11). The first of the two goats is a prophetic indicator of Jesus, and the second of the two goats (also referred to as the Azazel goat) is a prophetic indicator of Satan. Jesus does get killed, but that Satan does not. The slain goat represents Christ who actually died for our sins. Note Lev 16:15-19. Christ's sacrifice is an atonement sacrifice to reconcile us to God. Notice what Paul wrote in 2 Cor 5:18-19: "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

Note what happens immediately after the atoning from the death of the first goat: "And he who released the goat as the scapegoat shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp." (Lev 16:26). The atonement is over after the first goat is sacrificed. The atonement is not part of the symbolism of the second goat. The "fit man" that takes the goat into the wilderness has to wash himself after he has released the azazel goat. The live goat in Leviticus 16 is clearly symbolic of Satan if you take into account that the term scapegoat is an inappropriate translation into English, as it implies that blame is being placed where blame is not due. The Hebrew term is actually aza'zel, a term that in Jewish thought have historically a link to a Satanic adversary. What happens with the Azazel goat and what happens to Satan is quite similar, if one compares Lev 16:20-22 & 26 to Rev 20:1-3: "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and

Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished.”

Satan, the "Azazel" or adversary, is removed from humanity so he is unable to deceive mankind during the one thousand year reign of Christ! That is why humanity will quickly become "at one" with God's ways - no more Satanic influence. That is why, during the glorious reign of Christ, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (Isa 11:9). And Isa 25:7-8 further explains how at the time the blindness of humanity is fully removed, "He will destroy on this mountain the surface of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken.”

Spiritually speaking then Yom Kippur also ushers in the Feast of Tabernacles, which celebrates the forthcoming 1000 year reign of Christ on the Earth. The Day of Atonement is significant for Christians. It pictures Christ's sacrifice for our sins and that Satan has a role and will be sent away (and not killed). While others professing Christianity somewhat understand this, because they do not keep this and the other Christian Holy Days, they often do not have a proper view of God's plan of salvation, such as the role of Satan and Christ.

This Day of Atonement pictures not only what has happened, but some of what will happen with Satan (while the holy days that follow show other events that will happen later). This is information that believers living in these latter days should value. The cleansing accomplished by Christ at His Return makes it possible to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles which foreshadows the rejoicing of the saints at the inauguration of a new life in the new earth.

In the New Testament, the Day of Atonement is a generator of hope and confidence because it reassures us that Christ has opened for us a free and direct access to God when He entered into the presence of God. In the Levitical Day of Atonement, only once a year the High Priest had access to the presence of God manifested in the Most Holy Place above the ark of the covenant. Now, all Christians have direct access to God because of Christ's entry into God's presence.

At a time when many are experiencing the crushing isolation of sin, the Day of Atonement has a message of hope. It reassures Christians that Christ will soon appear the second time, like the High Priest on the Day of Atonement, to punish unbelievers, to bind Satan, to cleanse believers and restore them to an harmonious relationship with Him. Such a hope gives us reasons to encourage "one another, and all the more as . . . [we] see the Day drawing near" (Heb 10:25).