

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT (YOM KIPPUR)

Text: Lev. 23:26-32

Additional Texts: Leviticus 16:1-34; Numbers 29:7-11

Historical and Thematic focus of the Feast: ‘Yom Kippur’ (“Day of Atonement”) is the most solemn and holy feast day on the Jewish calendar which takes place on the tenth day of the seventh month Tishri (September/October). For observant Jews it is a day spent in synagogue in the annual observance of fasting, prayer and repentance. This is the climax of the forty days of teshuvah (repentance) and/or the ten Days of Awe. The primary goal of the Day of Atonement is to cleanse the soul of sin before Adonai. It is on ‘Yom Kippur’ that many non-observant Jews make their annual appearance at the Synagogue.

According to legend, he [Moses] returned to Sinai, received a second set of tablets, then descended on the tenth of Tishrei to find the Jewish people fasting and repenting. The Midrash relates that God then forgave the people [for the sin of the golden calf] and established that day as a day of atonement for all generations.¹ The underlying biblical focus of this feast day is national repentance and cleansing of the nation of Israel (Lev. 16:1-34; Jeremiah 31:31ff; Ezekiel 20:30-44; 36:24-27).

Traditional Observance: “Yom Kippur” is observed as a day of complete fasting, spent in the synagogue in prayer and repentance. This is traditionally the one day that the majority of the Jewish community would attend synagogue at least for part of the day. Within a typical synagogue there are five services that are held on this most holy day. They are:

- 1) **Kol Nidre Service** (All Vows) – this service begins at sunset and its primary focus is community repentance from broken ‘vows’. It is believed that this tradition began during the Spanish Inquisition when many Jews were forcibly converted to Christianity.
- 2) **Torah Service** – This is a full length Torah Service that includes the reading of Leviticus 16 and Isaiah 57.
- 3) **Musaf Service** – This is the second full length Torah Service which includes a reenactment of the ‘Yom Kippur’ ceremony observed in the Temple.
- 4) **Minchah Service** – This service focuses upon defilement and rebirth which includes the reading of Leviticus 18 and the book of Jonah.
- 5) **Neilah Service (Closing of the gates)** – At this moment the gates of heaven are closed until next year on Rosh Hashanah, sealing the fate for each person for the year. This service concludes with the blowing of the Shofar.

It is a traditional practice to cloak the Torah scroll in white mantles and hang a white curtain in the ark in place of the usual curtain. This emphasis on ‘white’ is to convey the concept of purity.

¹David B. Syme. *The Jewish Home: A Guide for Jewish Living*. (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1989) 32.

A MESSIANIC INSIGHT!

THE TABLETS OF THE TEN WORDS A FORESHADOWING OF MESSIAH.

The first 'covenant' entered into by Adonai and the 'Children of Israel' after leaving Egypt (Exodus 19:1ff) was broken even before it could be properly implemented (Exodus 34:19). When Moses returned from the mountain he found that the camp of Israelites was involved in idolatry, worshiping the image of a golden calf as if it were 'Adonai'. The making of the 'golden calf' is a vivid picture of man's own way of faith or religious expression and the rejection of Adonai's absolute truth. It was through Moses' intercession (Exodus 32:11-14) that Adonai favoured the nation of Israel again to be given another opportunity to receive and implement the 'Covenant of Sinai'. According to tradition the *second set of tablets* of the law were presented by Moses on Yom Kippur.

How different was the 'sin of the golden calf' to the practice of the Northern Ten Tribes setting up Golden Calves in Bethel and Dan during the reign of King Jeroboam (I Kings 12:26-33)?

In John 1:1 Messiah is referred to as being the Word. How is Messiah's reception and acceptance any different than what we have seen attributed towards the 'torah'? Could we conclude that how Israel handled 'Torah' foreshadows how Israel will handle the issue of Messiah? Explain the relationship between Torah and Messiah?

It has been said that Yom Kippur is the feast which foreshadows the Second Coming or Return of our Messiah Yeshua. Is there any Scriptural foundation for this conclusion?

Reflect on the overtones of similarity between the Second Coming of Messiah and the Feast of Yom Kippur. Use the Scriptures listed below.
(Zechariah 3:9; 12:10-14; 13:1-2, 8-9; Matthew 24:29-31; Revelation 1:7; 19:11-16.)

THE CLOSING OF THE GATES (NEILAH):

It is believed that those who have not been good enough to be written in the Book of Life immediately on *Rosh Hashanah* are given ten days to repent, pray for forgiveness, and do good deeds until Yom Kippur, when their fate will be decided.

The gates are opened on *Rosh Hashanah* to let the righteous into Heaven and remain open until *Yom Kippur* when they close.

TALMUDIC HINTS OF 'COMPLETION'

The Talmud records four distinct 'warnings' or events which hinted at the 'completion' of the sacrificial system and/or the eventual destruction of the Temple. These all started to take place forty years before the destruction of the Temple, interestingly at the time of Yeshua's death. Jewish tradition teaches that these four signs did take place as recorded in Yoma 39a, b.

1. The high priest took the two golden lots; one marked *La Adonai* and the other marked *La Azazel*, and placed one upon the head of each animal, sealing their fate. It was considered a good omen if the lot marked *La Adonai* was drawn by the priest in the right hand, but for 40 years prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., the lot *La Adonai* was drawn by the priest on the left hand (Talmud, Yoma 39a).²
2. The scarlet cord tied to the door of the Temple on the Day of Atonement stopped turning white after the scapegoat had been cast over the precipice.
3. The westernmost light on the Temple candelabra [menorah] would not burn. It is believed that this light was used to light the other lights of the candelabra [menorah].
4. The Temple doors would open by themselves. The rabbis saw this as an ominous fulfillment of Zechariah 11:1, "Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that fire may devour thy cedars." The opening of the doors to let in the consuming fire foretold the destruction of the Temple itself by fire.³

These four warnings were meant to 'enlighten' both the Jewish community of that day and all believers today that the broken Body and the shed Blood of our Messiah Yeshua completed the required sacrificial price for sin once and for all. An affirmation of Hebrews 9:11-14; 23-25* - Messiah's blood applied in the heavenly tabernacle.

² Edward Chumney. *The Seven Festivals of the Messiah*. (Shippensburg, PA: Treasure House, 1994) 135.

³ Mitch and Zhava Glazer. *The Fall Feasts of Israel*. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1987) 105.

MUSING MOMENT:

When we consider the ‘Day of Atonement’ explain why we could realistically sum up the ideals that it teaches with the single word; Completion?

WHAT DOES THE WORD ‘COMPLETION’ MEAN?

Completion means the act of completing, or the state of being completed. Complete implies: wholly finished; ended; concluded.⁴

How would you explain the sense of ‘*completion*’ in the following statements related to the Day of Atonement?

- i) Take the traditional understanding of ‘Neilah’ and place it alongside the Christian teaching of the ‘Rapture’ and the Second Coming.
- ii) Take a look at the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) in light of the Feast of Yom Kippur.
- iii) How does this concept of ‘completion’ relate to the Judgement for Israel as a nation (Ezekiel 20:30-44) and the judgement of the nations in regards to their treatment of Israel (Matthew 25:31-46). What are their implications for today?
- iv) How are we to understand the Apostle Paul’s statement, “*And so all Israel will be saved...*” (Romans 11:26a) in light of Ezekiel 20:35-38?

⁴ Sidney I. Landau, ed. Funk & Wagnalls Standard Desk Dictionary: 1983 Edition. (Lippincott & Crowell Publishers, 1980) 129.