

Atonement Outside of Sacrifice?

How can we find atonement without a blood sacrifice?

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Yom Kippur is coming up here in a few months and is the most important holiday of the Jewish year. The name “Yom Kippur” means “Day of Atonement,” which is a day set aside where one is to atone for the sins of the past year. Many Jews who do not observe any other custom will upon Yom Kippur refrain from work, fast, and attend synagogue services on this day. Yom Kippur occurs on the 10th day of the month of Tishri where Yom Kippur was instituted by God in Leviticus 23:26.

Leviticus 23:26-29

23:26 ADONAI said to Moshe, 23:27 "The tenth day of this seventh month is Yom-Kippur; you are to have a holy convocation, you are to deny yourselves, and you are to bring an offering made by fire to ADONAI. 23:28 You are not to do any kind of work on that day, because it is Yom-Kippur, to make atonement for you before ADONAI your God. 23:29 Anyone who does not deny himself on that day is to be cut off from his people; (CJB)

There are three major elements of the Day of Atonement (i) fasting for 24 hours, (ii) the high priest would go once per year and enter into the Most Holy Place to sprinkle blood upon the mercy seat to make atonement for the people, and (iii) the scapegoat was sent into the wilderness after having all the sins of the Israelites ceremonially placed upon it (*Leviticus 16:10, 21-22*). During this period of fasting we embark upon personal reflection and repentance before the Most High God while we realize our need for His forgiveness. During ancient times, we would have thought about the korban which was offered on our behalf. Today Messianic believers understand that our atonement is made in Yeshua Hamoshiach. However, if you are someone who does not believe Yeshua has made atonement for your sins, you may have wondered how you possibly could make atonement before God according to His Torah.

After the destruction of the second temple a rabbinical teaching sprang up to help answer the question of atonement. So, let us look at the rabbinical teaching on this difficult topic of atonement. What is taught in Judaism concerning the temple sacrifice today and how one can be forgiven by God without offering a korban before the Most High God?

Rabbinical Teaching on Our Atonement

To examine the rabbinical teaching of atonement, I thought it would be good to directly quote what is taught in the rabbinic literature on the topic:

“With the fall of the Temple and the cessation of the atonement offerings, the importance of repentance as a means of expiation became inevitably enhanced.

This is also true of the efficacy of the Day of Atonement. Even when the sacrificial system was in operation, the Rabbis assert, contrition was essential before an offering could prove acceptable to God. There is the explicit teaching: ‘Neither sin-offering nor trespass-offering nor death nor the Day of Atonement can bring expiation without repentance’ (Tosifta Joma V. 9). When the sacrifices could no longer be offered the people needed to be reminded that their hope for atonement was not in the least affected; and so they were told: ‘whence is it derived that if one repents, it is imputed to him as if he had gone up to Jerusalem, built the Temple, erected an altar and offered upon it all the sacrifices enumerated in the Torah? From the text, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit” (Ps. Li. 17)’ (Lev. R. vii. 2) ‘I do not want of you sacrifices and offerings, but words (of contrition); as it is said, “Take with you words and turn to the Lord” (Hos. Xiv. 2)’ (Exod. R. xxxviii. 4).” [1]

“A conspicuous feature of the Day of Atonement was the rigorous fast in which it was spent. Even the religious leaders attached importance to the fast as an act of penance. It is reported that a certain Rabbi used to say this prayer on a fast-day: ‘Lord of the Universe! It is revealed before thee that when the Sanctuary was in existence, a man sinned and brought an offering, of which they sacrificed only the fat and the blood, and atonement was made for him. But now, I observe a fast, and my fat and blood are diminished. May it be Thy will, that my fat and blood which have been diminished may be accounted as though I had offered them before Thee upon the altar, and do though favour me’ (Ber. 17a).” [1, 2]

After the destruction of the second temple there was a dilemma. There had to be some kind of answer for those who believed in God, His Torah, and had the desire to make atonement for their sins while not being able to perform the required temple sacrifices. Therefore, the Rabbis devised an answer. The answer was that repentance is all one needs to receive forgiveness of sins; where one Rabbi said (quoted above) as his fat and blood diminish during the fast “May it be thy will ...” that my blood and fat account as an offering before the Lord upon the altar. At face value this presents several difficulties:

Difficulties with Rabbinic Teaching

- (i) This goes against what Moshe taught in the Torah the requirement for atonement is to have a sacrifice which then results in spiritual atonement by faith. (*Leviticus 22:21, 23:26-29*)
- (ii) In personal reflection, we know we are sinners in need of forgiveness, is it possible then to offer our own fat and blood upon the altar even if it is in a spiritual or conceptual sense as the Rabbi suggests?
- (iii) Other Rabbi’s have stated and it is written in the Siddur [3] (Shacharis/Morning Service in the Korbanot section) that we can offer the bulls of our lips in praise as a sacrifice (*Hosea 6:6, 14:2*). But can we, being

men and women of unclean lips, offer that which is unclean and impure to God as a substitute for the clean/innocent bull/lamb? (*Isaiah 6:5*)

- (iv) Is it ok to give God a command? “May it be thy will ...” Can we give God a command that what we pray for be his will? We already know what God’s will is and that is to offer a sacrifice upon the altar for our atonement according to the scriptures.

Clearly presented here are some serious difficulties found within the rabbinic teaching on atonement. We are discussing the sacrifice for atonement of sin; another example comes from the scriptures on peace offerings to the Lord in fulfillment of a vow or as a voluntary offering:

Leviticus 22:21 [4]

22:21 Whoever brings a sacrifice of peace offerings to ADONAI in fulfillment of a vow or as a voluntary offering, whether it come from the herd or from the flock, it must be unblemished and without defect in order to be accepted. (CJB)

Vayikra 22:21 [5]

ואיש כי יקריב זבח שלמים ליהוה לפלא נדר או לגדבה בבקר או בצאן תמים יהיה לרצון כל מום לא יהיה בו:

Here we see under the completion of a vow an offering must be made before the Lord. This peace offering/korban unto the Lord must be unblemished, innocent (תמים). In the Hebrew language, the bull or lamb needed to be clean/innocent and without any physical defects before it could be offered to the Lord.

תמים

adj. naive, innocent, guileless, harmless, ingenuous, inoffensive, lamblike

Rabbinic teaching states that we have an inclination to do evil and that inclination is from our youth (*“from his youth” Genesis 8:21*). We know that when sin enters ones life, such as in the case of touching a dead body, it spreads like a virus and infects everyone that it comes in contact with. The very idea of our having a need to be forgiven of sin demonstrates we are deprived in sin. How then is it possible to offer our own fat and blood to make atonement for our sins? How can we offer our lips as bulls when we are a people of unclean lips? Clearly the rabbinical teaching that the sacrifice has moved to one of **“repentance only”** teaches against Moshe and the 5 books of the Torah.

Throughout the Torah we see how God has taken the first steps towards our receiving forgiveness of sins. With Adam and Eve God provided the first sacrifice and made skins to cover the nakedness of their bodies. For our father Abraham, God provided a ram for him to offer in place of his son Isaac. And in these last days God has provided his only son Yeshua Hamoshiach to make atonement in his blood upon the cross for our sins. This last thing God did on our behalf is what enables us to receive forgiveness while yet maintaining the truth of God’s Torah.

Hebrews 9:14 [4]

9:14 then how much more the blood of the Messiah, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself to God as a sacrifice without blemish, will purify our conscience from works that lead to death, so that we can serve the living God! (CJB)

Hebrews 9:14 [5]

אף כי דם המשיח אשר הקריב את עצמו לאלהים ברוח נצחי ובלי מום יטהר לבבכם ממעשי מות לעבד את אלהים חיים:

As messianic believers we believe that it is impossible to make atonement and receive forgiveness before God without a sacrifice. We also believe God has provided us a way to both receive atonement and forgiveness which is found in the Messiah. Furthermore, God using his Messiah enables us not only to fulfill Torah in our lives, but to also love others as God has loved us by setting up his kingdom in our hearts. God has set up his kingdom in our hearts as a way to bring peace to the earth in His Messiah.

In [Parashat Devarim](#) we find this very concept which demonstrates God's love for us and how he deals with sinful mankind. God takes the first step by calling us to Himself. We see this in the Torah how God called Abraham from the Chaldeans and made a nation of special people through whom he would reveal Himself. God initiated His kingdom by first calling His people through Abraham. Today, we see Yeshua has initiated God's kingdom here on earth in the communities which are established amidst a world of prejudice, violence, and greed. The way Yeshua brought peace onto this earth, especially amidst the pagan nations, was to start in our hearts. The kingdom of God is deposited within the hearts of men/women and it is only then that true peace can come upon the earth. If you think logically about this, is it practical that the Messiah would come and force people to stop their prejudice, violence, and greed by any other way? There has to be a heart change in order for real change to occur.

Clearly we can see how the rabbinical teaching on atonement has certain difficulties in light of the scriptures. The Torah is not fulfilled with respect to the rabbinical teaching; however, as messianic believers we do have atonement for our sins. Believers in Yeshua have atonement according to the requirement in the Torah actual **blood** atonement. If you want to receive blood atonement for your sins today, and become a part of God's kingdom here on earth, follow along in this simple prayer.

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank you for the amazing love that you have for me by providing for me a way to receive forgiveness of my sins according to your Torah. I confess that I am a sinner and I am in need of your forgiveness and salvation. Please Lord, have mercy upon my soul. I believe that Yeshua Hamoshiach is your Messiah, savior, king, and I want him to become Lord of my life. Please Lord; forgive me of my sins because of the atonement you have made for me in heaven in Yeshua's blood. Yeshua I ask that you would come into my heart to be Lord of my life. Help me to be a light unto the world and thank you for making me a part of your eternal family. In Yeshua's name I pray. Amen.

Shalom and be blessed in the Messiah Yeshua!

References

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4. Stern, D.H., *Complete Jewish Bible : An English Version of the Tanakh (Old Testament) and B'Rit Hadashah (New Testament)*. 1st ed. 1998: Messianic Jewish Resources International.
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הללויה לאדוננו מורנו ורבינו ישוע מלך המשיח לעולם ועד:

Hallelujah for our Lord, our Teacher, our Rabbi,
"Yeshua" King Messiah for ever and ever