

How important is Yom Kippur for us today?

This weeks reading is for Yom Kippur (*Vayikra / Leviticus 16*) יום כיפור “Day of Atonement” (September 14th) Yom Kippur is observed on the 10th day of the month of Tishri which concludes 10 days of repentance that began with Rosh Hashanah. *Vayikra / Leviticus 16* describes the temple service and sacrificial ceremony the High Priest would perform on this day. Yom Kippur is marked by fasting and prayer to seek forgiveness before God and others. In the Torah, Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the year and illustrates our need for repentance and forgiveness of sins before a Holy God. Judaism teaches that it was during the month of Elul the sin of the golden calf had occurred in Parashat Ki Tisa (*Shemot / Exodus 32-33*). Following the sin of the golden calf, Moshe went up the Mountain of Sinai to receive the second set of Tablets on Rosh Chodesh Elul. On that day, the children of Israel sounded the shofar to remind themselves to stray no more after idol worship. In addition to this, the sound of the shofar strikes awe into one’s heart and inspires us to return to the ways of God according to the Torah. (see *Mishna Berura and Aruch Hashulchan Orach Chaim 581*) The phrase “Day of Atonement” is written in Hebrew as “Yom Kippurim” (יום הכּפּוּרִים) in *Vayikra / Leviticus 23:27* and literally means “Day of the covering or atoning.” This is the one time a year the High Priest was allowed to enter into the Holy of Holies, to call upon the Name of the Lord, and to offer blood upon the Kaporet (*Mercy Seat*). It is believed that on the 10th of Tishri Moshe came down from the Mountain of Sinai bearing the second set of tablets following the forgiveness of Israel in their sin of Chet Ha’egel (*the golden calf*). At this time Moshe went before God to see if he could make atonement for the people for their sin in *Shemot / Exodus 32:31-33*, saying וַעֲתָה אִם-תִּשָּׂא הַטָּאֵתָם וְעָתָה אִם-תִּשָּׂא הַטָּאֵתָם “if you will carry, lift, bear, endure, or suffer” “their sin.” Moshe was not certain if he could appease God following the great sin of the children of Israel at the foot of the mountain.

שדוקה יבתכ / The Holy Scriptures

ספר ויקרא פרק טז

[פרשת אחרי מות] א וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה אַחֲרֵי מוֹת שְׁנֵי בְנֵי אַהֲרֹן בְּקִרְבָּתָם לִפְנֵי-יְהוָה וַיִּמָּתוּ: ב וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה דַּבֵּר אֶל-אַהֲרֹן אַחִיד וְאֵל-יָבָא בְּכָל-עֵת אֶל-הַקֹּדֶשׁ מִבֵּית לְפָרֶכֶת אֶל-פְּנֵי הַכַּפֹּרֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל-הָאָרֶן וְלֹא יָמוּת כִּי בָעֵנָן אֶרְאֶה עַל-הַכַּפֹּרֶת:

Vayikra / Leviticus 16:1-2

16:1 The Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the Lord. 16:2 The Lord said to Moses: “Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die. For I will appear in the cloud over the atonement cover. (NASB)

Tishri is the first month in the modern Jewish calendar and it corresponds to the seventh month in the biblical calendar. In the Torah, the Lord tells the nation of Israel that this is a day of affliction and self-denial (see *Vayikra / Leviticus 16:29-31, 23:27-32*). In the Scriptures, the Lord provides a summary of instructions for Israel concerning the observance of Yom Kippur (see *Vayikra / Leviticus 23:26-32 and Bamidbar / Numbers 29:7-11*). In ancient Israel, the observance of Yom Kippur centered around the Temple service. During this time, the High Priest woke up early for ritual purification and preparation of his heart for the holiday. After the initial preparation, the priest offered a bull as a sacrifice both for himself and his family (*Vayikra / Leviticus 16:6*). He then selected and consecrated two separate male goats. One goat is selected by lot as a sacrifice for God and the other to bear the sin of the people which would later be lead into the desert to die (*Vayikra / Leviticus 16:7-10*). The priest would take the blood of the bull which he had sacrificed as a sin offering for himself and his family, and placed it upon the altar before entering into the inner room of the temple to sprinkle the blood upon the Ark of the Covenant (*Vayikra / Leviticus 16:11-14*). The High Priest would sacrifice the goat selected by lot to die on behalf of the nation before entering into the Holy of Holies to sprinkle the goat’s blood upon the Mercy Seat (*Vayikra / Leviticus 16:15*). The priest would then place some of the blood from the goat that was sacrificed onto the second goat. At this point the High Priest confessed the sins of the nation over the second goat and then the goat was lead into the wilderness to die (*Vayikra / Leviticus 16:21-22*). The removal of the goat from the camp symbolized the removal of sins from Israel. The essential lesson from the Temple sacrifice for this Holy Day is that God provided a means for atonement, the only method of atonement for sins is through the offering of a living sacrifice. The most significant aspect of this day is that this is the day one man would enter in before God and make atonement on behalf of an entire nation. Does this sound familiar? In our remembrance we have the freedom to observe this holy day and to celebrate the day in a way that draws attention to God’s Messiah. The followers of Yeshua the Messiah recognize that atonement is available to God’s people through the death and resurrection of Yeshua. The Lord God Almighty provided atonement in and through the sacrifice of His Messiah just like the offering of the living sacrifice that is illustrated in the Temple ritual. Therefore, for believers, Yom Kippur does not represent a time of apprehension and fear or of worrying about one’s position before the Lord God; rather, we can with confidence recognize that our salvation is Yes and Amen in Yeshua. This is the time of the year the sin of the golden calf had occurred and Moshe went before God saying וַעֲתָה אִם-תִּשָּׂא הַטָּאֵתָם וְעָתָה אִם-תִּשָּׂא הַטָּאֵתָם “if you will carry, lift, bear, endure, or suffer their sin,” not knowing what the Lord was going to do. Moshe also said וְאִם-אֵין מָחָנִי נָא מִסְפָּרָה אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתָּ “and if not” “erase/destroy me from your book that you have written.” Here Moshe was unsure about forgiveness without a living sacrifice; Moshe suggested that he might take their place. Today we don’t have to be unsure and we don’t have to give our own lives as an offering for atonement; the Lord did this for us, sending His only Son Yeshua to make atonement on our behalf. Yom Kippur is important for us today to contemplate and to ponder its deep spiritual meaning. A reminder of the great sacrifice of one man, the Messiah who made atonement for all of those who would believe in His Name!