

HOLY CONVOICATIONS (MAJOR FESTIVALS)



Author: Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy

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“ADONAI said to Moshe, “Tell the people of Isra’el: ‘The designated times of ADONAI which you are to proclaim as holy convocations are my designated times.” (Leviticus 23:1, 2)

יּוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים Yom Kippur - Day of Atonement

“ADONAI said to Moshe, “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. 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.” (Leviticus 23:26-28)

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Introduction

With the arrival of **Yom Kippur**, comes another one of the central aspects of our relationship with our Holy God: **atonement**. Why is atonement so important to HaShem? Apparently, ever since the incident in the Garden of Eden, mankind has carried within himself the sinful propensity of that first act of disobedience, and consequently, the sinful results as well. Our sin nature is in direct conflict with the holy nature of HaShem. As a result, we cannot fathom approaching him without first making some sort of restitution that would satisfy HaShem's righteous requirement. His nature demands that there be atonement for sin, for indeed, sin cannot exist in his sight.

The word kippur connotes "atonement" or "expiation." Related to this word is the Hebrew word kapporet, which is what we call the cover to the Ark of the Covenant. It is a fitting connection, since the lid of the Ark (Mercy Seat) is where HaShem spoke to Moshe face to face. This was also where the blood of the atoning animal was offered once a year during Yom Kippur (Leviticus 16:14-16). Most students of the Bible have been taught that it was in this way the blood of the sacrifice "covered" the sin of the person bringing it. Popular Christian theology regularly teaches that this type of atonement only covers the sin; it doesn't allow it to be completely erased. In a very true way, this practice was temporary, awaiting its fullness when Messiah arrived. We shall examine these details at length later on.

You might ask, "If HaShem knew the temporal aspect of this sacrificial system, why did he institute it in the first place? Why not just send the Messiah from the beginning, and skip all of those elaborate "middle steps"? This is a good and valid question, not entirely unlike those that I hear from most non-Jewish believers and a few Jewish folks as well.

In order to gain a fuller appreciation for the Yom Kippur rituals, we should do a short study on the other types of sacrifices that took place in and around the **Mishkan** of that time. I shall go backward in the book of Leviticus and briefly study these korbanot (offerings).

These five are the types of offerings introduced in the opening pages of Leviticus:

'Olah (Burnt Offering) – Lev. 1:1-17

Minchah (Grain Offering) – Lev. 2:1-16

Sh'lamim (Peace Offering) – Lev. 3:1-17

Chata'at (Sin Offering) – Lev. 4:1-35; 5:1-13

'Asham (Guilt Offering) – Lev. 5:14-26

The first three could easily be considered "freewill sacrifices," brought before HaShem by anyone at various times in the life of anyone in the community. The last two were required to make restitution for various sins. Such korbanot (chata'at and 'asham) are referred to as "expiatory sacrifices." The expiatory korbanot shall occupy the bulk of the

latter part of this commentary. Chabad.org will supply us with our standard descriptions of the first three korbanot.¹

Freewill Sacrifices

'Olah (Burnt Offering)

The first korban to be described is the olah, the "ascending" offering (commonly referred to as the "burnt offering"), whose distinguishing feature is that it is raised to G-d, in its entirety, by the fire atop the Altar.

The olah can also be a male sheep or goat, in which case the same procedure is followed.

A turtledove or young pigeon can also be brought as an "ascending offering." Instead of being slaughtered through shechitah (cutting of the throat), the bird is killed by melikah--nipping off the head from the back of the neck. The blood is applied to the wall of the Altar, and the bird's crop and its adjoining feathers are removed and discarded; then the bird's body is burned upon the Altar.²

Upon analysis, we see that the daily 'olah service involved three different locations, in descending holiness:

- On top of the altar.
- Next to the altar.
- A ritually clean place outside the camp.

For Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), first Chief Rabbi of the Land of Isra'el, the completely burnt offering was a metaphor for the very highest level of contact between man and God. The fire on the altar reflects sublime experiences of inspiration and prophecy. At this level, the material world is of no consequence. The fire totally consumes the flesh of the offering, freeing man from the shackles of his physical reality.

The kindling of the holy flames on man's soul is outside the framework of normal life. Such Divine interaction is beyond the ordinary structures of human existence, both individual and collective. The 'olah offering burns on the altar itself.

Minchah (Grain Offering)

And a soul who shall offer a meal offering to G-d...

Meal offerings, called menachot ("gifts"), are prepared of fine flour, with olive oil and frankincense. The priest removes a kometz ("handful"--actually the amount grasped by his three middle fingers), to be burned on the Altar; the remainder is eaten by the priests.

¹ http://www.chabad.org/parshah/in-depth/default_cdo/aid/39682/jewish/In-Depth.htm

² Ibid.

There are five types of donated meal offerings: 1) the standard "meal offering" whose kometz is removed before it is baked; 2) the "baked meal offering," which came in two forms: loaves or 3) flat matzot; 4) the "pan-fried" meal offering; 5) the minchat marcheshet, deep-fried in a pot.

The following rule applies to all the meal offerings (including the "loaves"):

No meal offering, which you shall bring to G-d, shall be made leavened; for you shall burn no leaven, nor any honey, in any offering of G-d made by fire...

Another rule is that,

Your every meal offering shall you season with salt; never shall you suspend the salt covenant of your G-d.

This latter rule applies to all korbanot: "With all your offerings you shall offer salt."

Another meal offering mentioned here is the minchat bikkurim (also called the "omer") brought on the second day of Passover from the year's very first barley harvest. In this minchah, the kernels are roasted by fire before they are ground into flour.

(In addition, a meal offering accompanied all animal offerings.)³

Sh'lamim (Peace Offering)

The shelamim, or "peace offering," could be either male or female, and either from "the herd" (i.e., an ox or a cow), a sheep or a goat.

Like the olah, its blood was sprinkled upon the Altar; but unlike the olah, which "ascended" in its entirety upon the Altar, the meat of the shelamim was eaten by the "owner"--the one who brought the offering (two portions of the animal, the breast and the right thigh, were eaten by the priests). Only certain parts of the animal were burned on the fire atop the Altar:

The fat that covers the inwards, and all the fat that is upon the inwards, and the two kidneys and the fat that is on them, which is by the flanks, and the appendage of the liver which he shall remove with the kidneys.

If the peace offering is a sheep, "the whole fat tail, up to the backbone" was added to these.

And the priest shall burn it on the Altar; it is [divine] food, a fire-offering, a sweet savor to G-d.

Because they are offered to G-d on the Altar, these specified veins of fat, which the Torah calls cheilev, are forbidden for consumption in all animals: "It shall be a perpetual

³ Ibid.

statute for your generations throughout all your habitations: all cheilev and all blood, you shall not eat."⁴

Expiatory Sacrifices

A quote from the JPS Commentary to Leviticus is in order before we study the last two types of korbanot:

Chapters 4 and 5 contain the laws governing expiatory sacrifices, the purpose of which is to secure atonement and forgiveness from God. These offerings are efficacious only when offenses are inadvertent or unwitting. They do not apply to defiant or premeditated crimes. Whenever an individual Isra'elite, a tribal leader, a priest, or even the chief priest, or the Isra'elite community at large is guilty of an inadvertent offense or of failing to do what the law requires, expiation through such sacrifice is required.

The laws of chapters 4-5 do not specify all the offenses for which such sacrifices are mandated. We may assume, as did the rabbinic sages, that there is a correspondence between those offenses requiring the expiatory offerings and those punishable by the penalty known as karet, the "cutting off" of the offender from the community: The expiatory sacrifices are required for inadvertent transgressions that, if committed defiantly, would bring upon the offender the penalty of karet.⁵

It is important that we understand that the Torah does not clearly describe sins of "intent" in overly simplistic terms. To be sure, "unintentional sins" are represented by a very technical term known in Hebrew as "bishgagah" (בִּשְׁגָגָה), a word only found 6 times in Leviticus altogether.⁶ Tim Hegg remarks on bishgagah in this short commentary on the topic of "forgiveness:"

...A study of the words "unintentional" and "intentional" when describing sin reveals something different, however. In Leviticus 6:1-7, the sins for which a person may bring a guilt offering (אֲשָׁם, 'asham) include lying, theft, fraud, perjury, and debauchery. Yet in Leviticus 4, the sins of a leader or a common person for which a guilt offering may atone are called "unintentional" (בִּשְׁגָגָה, bishgagah). That is actually not a very good translation, however, for it makes it appear as though one can lie, steal, defraud, perjure oneself, and engage in all manner of debauchery without direct intent to do so! Actually, this word does not describe one's attitude or intentions in the matter, but simply the class of sins for which there existed a prescribed sacrifice. The basic meaning of the word is "mistake" (and thus the English translators' "unintentional") but also simply means "unacceptable behavior." What is striking is that nowhere in the Torah are "intentional sins" described. Rather, the opposite of so-called "unintentional" sin is the sin "of a high hand" (בְּיַד רָמָה, b'yad ramah) as in Numbers 15:30. This describes rebellion, a sin for which there is no expiation. Thus, as long as a person persists in his rebellion, there is no means of forgiveness. Only when he turns from his rebellion and seeks atonement through the prescribed sacrifices is he forgiven. There are therefore only two classes of

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Baruch A. Levine, *The JPS Torah Commentary to Leviticus* (Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 18.

⁶ Leviticus 4:2, 22, 27; 5:15, 18; 22:14.

sins described in the Torah: *bishgagah* (usually translated “unintentional”) for which there is expiation, and *b'yad ramah*, the “high hand” for which there is no expiation.⁷

Levine continues in his commentary to Leviticus to explain 'asham and chata'at:

In substance, chapters 4-5 prescribe two principle sacrifices: the [chata'at] and 'asham. The object of the [chata'at], usually translated “sin offering,” was to remove the culpability borne by the offender, that is, to purify the offender of his guilt (4:1-5:13). The “'asham” usually translated “guilt offering,” was actually a penalty paid in the form of a sacrificial offering to God. It applied when one had unintentionally misappropriated property that belonged to the sanctuary or had been contributed to it; or, in certain cases, when one had sworn falsely concerning his responsibility toward the property of others. A false oath brings God into the picture directly. The sacrifice did not relieve the offender of his duty to make full restitution for the loss he had caused another. In fact, the offender was fined 20 percent of the lost value. The 'asham merely squared the offender with his God, whose name he had taken in vain (5:14-26).⁸

Having provided the necessary framework to understand the last two offerings of Leviticus 4 and 5, we can now observe these brief descriptions of the expiatory sacrifices, viz, the chata'at and the 'asham respectively:

Chata'at (Sin Offering)

The sin offering proper is a sacrifice consisting of either a beast or a fowl and offered on the altar to atone for a sin committed unwittingly. The rules concerning the sin offering are as follows: If the anointed priest or the whole congregation commits a sin through ignorance, the sin offering is a young bullock without blemish. Should the ruler so sin, his offering is a male kid without blemish. But when a private individual sins, his offering must be either a female kid or a female lamb without blemish, or, if he is too poor to provide one of these, a turtledove.

Sin offerings were brought on other occasions also. On the Day of Atonement the high priest inaugurated the festival with two sin offerings—a bullock as his own offering, and a male kid for the congregation. The flesh of these was not eaten, but after the fat had been removed the carcasses were burned outside the camp (Lev. 26:3, 5, 10-11, 25, 27). A woman, after the days of her purification had been fulfilled, was required to bring a dove for a sin offering, in addition to a burnt offering. A leper, on the day of his cleansing, was required to bring, besides other offerings, a female lamb or, if he were too poor, a dove for a sin offering (Lev. 12:6; 14:10, 19, 22).

'Asham (Guilt Offering)

Torah.org makes this note concerning the 'asham:

⁷ <http://torahresource.com/EnglishArticles/ForgivenessTRNL.pdf>

⁸ Baruch A. Levine, *The JPS Torah Commentary to Leviticus* (Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 18.

The Asham offering has many applications. Like the Chatas, it is a sin offering, however, the Asham atones for intentional sinning. Swearing falsely is one such example. "G-d is the unseen Third Party Who is present wherever and whenever one man has dealings with another, even if no other witnesses are on hand. G-d Himself is the Guarantor for the honest dealings between men. If therefore this guarantor is invoked as a witness when any factor in these dealings has been disavowed, it is not merely an act of ordinary faithlessness. For in this case the offender has pledged his priestly character, his relationship to G-d, as surety for his honesty."⁹

A standard Judaic definition of the 'asham might read something like this: *A guilt offering is an offering to atone for sins of stealing things from the altar, for when you are not sure whether you have committed a sin or what sin you have committed, or for breach of trust. The Hebrew word for a guilt offering is 'asham. When there was doubt as to whether a person committed a sin, the person would bring an 'asham, rather than a chata'at, because bringing a chata'at would constitute admission of the sin, and the person would have to be punished for it. If a person brought an 'asham and later discovered that he had in fact committed the sin, he would have to bring a chata'at at that time. An 'asham was eaten by the cohanim.*¹⁰

Apologetics – Part One

Let us turn now to a discussion of the expiatory offerings and their bearing on Jews and Christians today. To be sure, this will be the central topic of my commentary. For the sake of this next apologetic section I would like to create two imaginary groups: the Missionary and the Anti-missionary. In reality both of these groups really exist but my commentary will of necessity be structuring their respective arguments for my readers. I would like to start by citing some somewhat "standard answers" to a few "Christian" objections, here presented as the "missionaries," concerning the sacrifices and atonement. A sample missionary question will appear first with a "standard Jewish" answer, here read as the "anti-missionaries," following. Later in the commentary I will take my own shot at refuting the "standard" anti-missionary answers.

First we shall list two questions from the missionaries and allow the anti-missionaries to answer:

Q: How do Jews obtain forgiveness without sacrifices?

A: Forgiveness is obtained through repentance, prayer and good deeds.

In Jewish practice, prayer has taken the place of sacrifices. In accordance with the words of Hosea, we render instead of bullocks the offering of our lips (Hosea 14:3) (please note: the KJV translates this somewhat differently). While dedicating the Temple, King Solomon also indicated that prayer could be used to obtain forgiveness (I Kings 8:46-50). Our prayer services are in many ways designed to parallel the sacrificial practices. For example, we have an extra service on Shabbat, to parallel the extra Shabbat offering (cite tamid example from ArtScroll Siddur, Sefard version, page 45). A

⁹ <http://www.torah.org/learning/rabbis-notebook/5762/tzav.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.jewfaq.org/gorbanot.htm>

short quote from OU.org (Orthodox Union) is also telling. Commenting on Leviticus 6:1-11:

The portion from the beginning of Tzav until this point is one of the daily readings of the Korbanot section of the Shacharit service. It is very important to recite the portions of Korbanot, based on the concept of "And our lips will substitute for the bulls." The Gemara relates the following: Avraham Avinu asked G-d "what method will my descendants have to pursue atonement for their sins?" G-d told him that sacrifices will help bring atonement. Avraham then asked what will be during the time that the Beit HaMikdash will not stand and sacrifices will not be practiced. G-d's answer: "I have already prepared for that eventuality. As long as they read the Torah portions about sacrifices, I will consider it as if they actually offered the sacrifices, and I will forgive them their iniquities." This idea is hinted at by the words in the opening pasuk of the sedra: ZOT TORAT HA'OLAH - This Torah (portion) of the Olah - HEE HA'OLAH... - It (the passage) is (equal to) the Olah (itself).¹¹

It is important to note that in Judaism, sacrifice was never the exclusive means of obtaining forgiveness, was not in and of itself sufficient to obtain forgiveness, and in certain circumstances was not even effective to obtain forgiveness. This will be discussed further below.

Q: But isn't a blood sacrifice required in order to obtain forgiveness?

A: No. Although animal sacrifice is one means of obtaining forgiveness, there are non-animal offerings as well, and there are other means for obtaining forgiveness that do not involve sacrifices at all.

The passage that people ordinarily cite for the notion that blood is required is Leviticus 17:11: "For the soul of the flesh is in the blood and I have assigned it for you upon the altar to provide atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that atones for the soul." But the passage that this verse comes from is not about atonement; it is about dietary laws, and the passage says only that blood is used to obtain atonement; not that blood is the only means for obtaining atonement. Leviticus 17:10-12 could be paraphrased as "Don't eat blood, because blood is used in atonement rituals; therefore, don't eat blood."

Apologetics – Part Two

Now I would like to supply some Messianic answers to these issues posed by my imaginary missionary and his imaginary anti-missionary opponent. This time the question could feasibly be posed by either a missionary or an anti-missionary, but the answers are definitely my [missionary] answer.

Q: Is there atonement without the sacrifices? And if there is atonement, is such atonement offered for both intentional and unintentional sins?

A: First of all, what are intentional and unintentional sins? Renni S. Altman of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) says this about such sins:

¹¹ <http://www.ou.org/torah/tt/5760/tzav60/aliya.htm>

In Leviticus 4 we read about the chatat, the sin offering, that the Israelites were required to bring when they had transgressed a known commandment as well as when they had committed an unintentional sin, either because of their ignorance of the commandments or through carelessness or oversight. In the latter instance, everyone in the Israelite community was obligated to bring a sin offering, even the High Priest.

In contrast to many of us today, our ancestors understood that they were responsible for all their actions, whether intentional or not. In his commentary on Leviticus, Baruch Levine explains that according to ancient cultic belief systems, guilt exists regardless of the perpetrator's awareness of having committed a sin. Guilt, as it were, has a life of its own, and only an act of expiation can wipe it away. Thus we learn in Sefer Hachinuch, a thirteenth-century work that discusses the commandments and their purpose, "When a man [sic] sins, he cannot cleanse his heart merely by uttering, between himself and the wall, 'I have sinned and will never repeat it.' Only by doing an overt act to atone for his sin, by taking rams from his enclosures and troubling himself to bring them to the Temple, give them to the priest, and perform the entire rite as prescribed for sin offerings, only then will he impress upon his soul the extent of the evil of his sin and take measures to avoid it in the future."¹²

Let us now turn to a discussion about the efficacy of the animal sacrifices themselves, comparing popular Christian theology against the Torah. For this section I will provide the readers with an extended quote from a work by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. His book 'Toward Rediscovering The Old Testament' has proven to be invaluable in helping to uncover the truth behind this crucial topic of discussion.

Were the Old Testament sacrifices personally and objectively effective?

The repeated statement of the Law of Moses on the effects of the sacrifices offered for sin in the Levitical law is "and he shall be forgiven" (Lev 1:4; 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5: 10, 16). So effective and so all-embracing was this forgiveness that it availed for such sins as lying, theft, fraud, perjury, and debauchery (Lev 6:1-7). In David's case the list extended to adultery and complicity in murder (Pss 32 and 51). In fact, in connection with the Day of Atonement, what is implicit in these other lists is clearly stated: "all their sins" were atoned (Lev 16:21, 22; my emphasis). Thus, instead of limiting the efficacy of this forgiveness to ceremonial sins, all the sins of all the people who were truly repentant were included. It is important to note that the qualification of a proper heart attitude is clearly stated in Leviticus 16:29 and 31 where the people are asked to "afflict ('anah) their souls" (KJV). Accordingly, only those who had inwardly prepared their hearts were eligible to receive the gracious gift of God's forgiveness (cf. also 1 Sam 15:22).

Nevertheless, a major problem appears whenever the Christian introduces the argument of Hebrews 9-10 into this discussion. The writer of Hebrews states in no uncertain terms that:

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices

¹² <http://urj.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=2750>

repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. . . because it impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Heb 10: 1, 4).

This surely seems to diminish the high claims that we just finished attributing to the writer of Leviticus. In fact, Hebrews 9:9 adds that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper." What shall we say then about the forgiveness offered in the Torah? It would be too much to contend that the O[ld] T[estament] offer of forgiveness repeated so often in the Levitical institution of the sacrifices was only symbolic and offered no actual cleansing from or removal of sin.

The only solution is to take both the O[ld] T[estament] and N[ew] T[estament] statements seriously. We conclude then, with Hobart Freeman, that the O[ld] T[estament] sacrifices were subjectively efficacious, in that the sinner did receive full relief based on the clear declaration of God's appointed servant. But it is just as clear that the sacrifices of bulls and goats were not in themselves expiatory and efficacious. The most these sacrifices could do was to point to the need for a perfect, living substitute who would, in the timing of God, ransom and deliver all from the debt, guilt, and effects of their sin. Thus, the O[ld] T[estament] sacrifices were not objectively efficacious; but then neither did the O[ld] T[estament] ever claim that the blood of these bulls and goats was inherently effective.

Geoffrey Grogan would not solve the problem by using the distinction Freeman has used here; in fact, he believes that the O[ld] T[estament] sacrifices were ineffective both objectively and subjectively. He cites two reasons for the ineffectiveness of the sacrifices: (1) they had to be repeated, and (2) they were animal sacrifices and thus could not truly act as substitutes for humans. But when the natural question is put to Grogan, "Did they effect nothing then?" he answers that their true function was provisional, "imposed until the time of reformation" (Heb 9:9-10 RSV). In the meantime, the O[ld] T[estament] sacrifices typified the sacrifice that was to come in Christ, and thus they were a means of grace by which the sacrifice of Christ could be channeled even to O[ld] T[estament] worshippers.

We believe that both Freeman and Grogan end up with the same position, though Freeman has the advantage in treating the fact that real forgiveness was effected in connection with a proper use of the sacrifices and with a declaration that their sins were gone and remembered against them no more.

The efficacy of the O[ld] T[estament] sacrifices, then, rested in the Word of God, who boldly announced that sacrifices done in this manner and with this heart attitude (Ps 50:8, 14; 51: 16 [Heb 10:8]; Prov 15:8, 21:3; Isa 1:11-18; 66:3; Jer 7:21-23; Hos 6:6; Amos 5:21; Mic 6:6-8) would receive from God a genuine experience of full forgiveness. Of course, everything depended on the perfect payment for this release, a payment that would occur sometime in the future. Therefore, not the blood of bulls and goats but the "blood" (Le., the life rendered up in violent death) of a perfect sacrifice finally made possible all the forgiveness proleptically enjoyed in the O[ld] T[estament] and retrospectively appreciated in the N[ew] T[estament]. Only the lamb of God could have provided objective efficacy, even though the subjective efficacy that had preceded it was grounded on the authority and promised work of Christ.

Until the death of Christ happened, the sins of the O[ld] T[estament] saints were both

forgiven and "passed over" (*paresis*, Rom 3:25) in the merciful grace of God until the expiatory death of Christ provided what no animal ever could do and what no O[ld] T[estament] text ever claimed it could do.

During the O[ld] T[estament] period, sins were forgiven and remembered against men and women no more (Ps 103:3, 10-12)-in fact, removed as far from the O[ld] T[estament] confessor as the east is from the west! Thus, the O[ld] T[estament] saint experienced sins forgiven on the basis of God's Word and sins forgotten (i.e., "remembered against him no more," (Ezek 18:22, my translation) on the same basis.¹³

I think it is safe to say that both missionaries and anti-missionaries would agree that atonement is made available for sin in general, but would simply (and sharply) disagree on the methods of procuring such atonement. So what exactly is the big issue at stake here? Perhaps at least two issues: Exactly which sins are atoned for? And by what method are they atoned?

Since our parashah centers on the Yom Kippur ritual, it is there that I shall turn first for support of my detailed answer on these issues. I firmly believe that the Torah clearly teaches that the Yom Kippur ritual was intended for both intentional and unintentional sins. Before I show my answer, let me show you another anti-missionary answer.

Some anti-missionaries would readily disagree with my above statement about Yom Kippur, teaching that there is no atonement for intentional sins. A well-known anti-missionary organization by the name of Jews for Judaism agrees with the notion of atonement for intentional and unintentional sins, but the means of such atonement is radically different than the accepted missionary approach.

Observe their answer:

"Biblically, the optimum means for attaining atonement consists of both animal sacrifices and sincere confessionary repentant prayer used in conjunction with each other. Traditional Judaism looks forward to the restoration of the dual system working simultaneously--animal sacrifice and contrite prayer.

"The rabbis under the leadership of Yohanan ben Zakkai did not make an unscriptural substitution when they emphasized sincere confessionary repentant prayer as a means of obtaining atonement. The Bible already mandated sincere confessionary repentant prayer, as a proper vehicle for attaining forgiveness. In the biblical period atonement prayer was used with full divine sanction, with or without animal offerings (even for non-Jews--Jonah 3:5-10).

"Sincere confessionary repentant prayer is the primary biblical prescription for obtaining atonement when animal sacrifices cannot be offered concurrently. Animal sacrifices are only prescribed for unwitting or unintentional sin (*shogeg*)--Leviticus 4:2, 13, 22, 27; 5:5, 15 (cf. Numbers 15:30). The one exception is if an individual swore falsely to acquit himself of the accusation of having committed theft (Leviticus 5:24-26). Intentional sin

¹³ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Rediscovering The Old Testament* (Zondervan, 1991), pp. 133-135.

can only be atoned for through repentance, unaccompanied by a blood sacrifice- Psalms 32:5, 51:16-19.

"Giving charity is a material expression of this inner repentance that is articulated in the rabbinic formula: "Prayer, repentance, and charity avert the evil decree" (T.J. Ta'anit 2:1, 65b). This is based on the verse: "If My people, upon whom My name is called, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways; then will I hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin, and I will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14)."¹⁴

Firstly it must be recognized that HaShem's forgiveness, as enacted in the korbanot, are reserved for those whose hearts are pure, that is, for those with the intention of turning from their sin and making restitution for sinning against God. The anti-missionaries correctly quoted 2 Chronicles in an effort to demonstrate this, but again I will disagree that the focus of such "t'shuvah" (repentance) is the prayers, charity, and repentance alone (more on these three later in this commentary). I maintain that our focus today can only be upon the Spotless Lamb offered for atonement, Yeshua our Yom Kippur! The Renewed Covenant will bear this out later as well.

Talmudic Quotes

The ancient Rabbis agreed that sacrifice without true repentance invalidates the sacrifice itself! The Talmud in **Tractate Yoma** clearly teaches this:

MISHNA: Sin-offerings and trespass-offerings atone. Death and the Day of Atonement, if one is penitent, atone. Penitence atones for slight breaches of positive or negative commandments; for grave sins, it effects a suspension, till the Day of Atonement completes the atonement. To him who says: "I will sin, repent, sin again, and repent again," is not given the opportunity to repent. For him who thinks, "I will sin; the Day of Atonement will atone for my sins," the Day of Atonement does not atone. A sin towards God, the Day of Atonement atones for; but a sin towards his fellowman is not atoned for by the Day of Atonement so long as the wronged fellowman is not righted. R. Eliezer b. Azariah lectured: It is written [Lev. xvi. 30]: "From all your sins before the Lord shall ye be clean." (This is our tradition.) The sin towards God, the Day of Atonement atones for; but sins toward man, the Day of Atonement cannot atone for till the neighbor has been appeased.

Said R. Aqiba: Happy are ye, O Israel. Before whom do ye cleanse yourselves, and who cleanses you? Your Father who is in Heaven. For it is written [Ezek. xxxvi. 25]: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean "; and it is also written: "The Migveh (hope, or legal bath) of Israel is the Lord." As a legal diving-bath purifies the unclean, so does the Holy One, blessed be He, cleanse Israel.

GEMARA: "Death and the Day of Atonement," etc. Only when one is penitent, but otherwise they do not atone? Shall we assume that the Mishna is not in accordance with Rabbi, in the following Boraitha: "Rabbi says: All sins mentioned in the Bible, whether one is penitent or not, are atoned by the Day of Atonement, except throwing off the yoke

¹⁴ <http://www.jewsforjudaism.org/web/faq/faq042.html>

(of God), expounding the Torah falsely, and abolition of circumcision (and mocking a fellowman). These sins are atoned for by the Day of Atonement, if one is penitent, but not otherwise." It may be said even that the Mishna is in accordance with Rabbi: Penitence is supplemented by the Day of Atonement or Death, but the Day of Atonement does atone alone.

"Penitence atones for slight breaches, if positive or negative," etc. Why has it to be told, positive? If negative, so much the more positive? Said R. Jehudah: The Mishna meant to say, a positive commandment, or a negative commandment inferred from a positive. But a real negative commandment is not atoned? There is a contradiction from the following Boraitha: What are called slight sins? A breach of a positive and negative commandment, except the negative commandment [Ex. xx. 7]: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain"; and all things equal to this: since this, which is a real negative commandment, is excepted, the other negative commandments are atoned for? Come and hear another contradiction: It is written [Ex. xxxiv. 7]: "And he will clear of sins." We might think, from this sin, the breach of the negative commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord," etc., he will also clear. Therefore it is further written, "by no means." Shall we assume, that from the breaches of all negative commandments he will not clear? Therefore it is written [Ex. xx. 7]: "For the Lord will not hold him guiltless (the Hebrew term is the same) that taketh His name in vain." Infer from this, that breaches of other negative commandments he does atone for? (How, then, does Jehudah say that the breaches of real negative commandments are not atoned for?) There is a difference of opinion among the Tanaim, as we have learned in the following Boraitha: "What does penitence atone for? For breaches of positive, and negative inferred from positive, commandments. And for which does penitence only gain a suspension, and the Day of Atonement atones? The sins for which the penalties are Karoth, death by Beth Din, and real negative commandments."

The Master has said: Because it is written [Ex. xxxiv. 7]: "He will clear of sins," how is it to be understood? That is as we have learned in the following Boraitha: R. Elazar said: We cannot say it means, He clears of sins, because it is written further, "by no means" does He clear. We cannot say, He does not, because it is written "clear of sins." We must therefore explain the verse: He clears of sins those who do penance; and does not, those who are not penitent.¹⁵

Scriptural Quotes

This concept of intentional and unintentional sin and of penitence and rebellion is touched upon in the Torah at **Sefer B'midbar** (the Book of Numbers):

Version: KJV

Num 15:26 - Num 15:36

26. And it shall be forgiven all the congregation of the children of Israel, and the stranger that sojourneth among them; seeing all the people [were] in ignorance. 27. And if any soul sin through ignorance, then he shall bring a she goat of the first year for a sin offering. 28. And the priest shall make an atonement for the soul

¹⁵ Jacob Neusner, *The Babylonian Talmud* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2005 CD-ROM).

that sinneth ignorantly, when he sinneth by ignorance before the Lord, to make an atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him. 29. Ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance, [both for] him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them. 30. But the soul that doeth [ought] presumptuously, [whether he be] born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. 31. Because he hath despised the word of the Lord, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity [shall be] upon him.

The very same concept is taught in the **B'rit Chadashah** (the Renewed Covenant, i.e., the New Testament) in the book of Hebrews!

Version: RSV
Heb 10:26-31

26. For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27. but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries. 28. A man who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy at the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace? 30. For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." 31. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Thus we see that atonement for sins, both intentional and unintentional, must be accompanied by a penitent heart. Now does Leviticus teach that the Yom Kippur atones for all of these sins? Let us quote the text of Leviticus 16:17-24 from the 1917 JPS version:

16

And he shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleannesses of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, even all their sins; and so shall he do for the tent of meeting, that dwelleth with them in the midst of their uncleannesses.

17

And there shall be no man in the tent of meeting when he goeth in to make atonement in the holy place, until he come out, and have made atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the assembly of Israel.

18

And he shall go out unto the altar that is before HaShem, and make atonement for it; and shall take of the blood of the bullock, and of the blood of the goat, and put it upon the horns of the altar round about.

19

And he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleannesses of the children of Israel.

20

And when he hath made an end of atoning for the holy place, and the tent of meeting, and the altar, he shall present the live goat.

21

And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, even all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of an appointed man into the wilderness.

22

And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land which is cut off; and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.

23

And Aaron shall come into the tent of meeting, and shall put off the linen garments, which he put on when he went into the holy place, and shall leave them there.

24

And he shall bathe his flesh in water in a holy place and put on his other vestments, and come forth, and offer his burnt-offering and the burnt-offering of the people, and make atonement for himself and for the people.

Look again at verse 16!

“And he shall make **atonement** for the holy place, because of the uncleannesses of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, **even all their sins**; and so shall he do for the tent of meeting, that dwelleth with them in the midst of their uncleannesses” (emphasis mine).

And again at verse 21!

“And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him **all the iniquities** of the children of Israel, and **all their transgressions**, even **all their sins**; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of an appointed man into the wilderness” (emphasis mine).

It is not difficult to understand the import of the passages quoted. “All” means “all”! The Yom Kippur sacrifice, if presented by the priest with a right heart on behalf of the people with right hearts atoned for all of their sins.

Again I cite the RaMBaM (Rabbi Moshe ben-Maimon, a.k.a., Maimonides) for ancient support. In his Mishneh Torah chapter one deals with the Laws of Repentance:

The goat sent to Azazel on the Day of Atonement is an atonement for all of Israel. The High Priest confesses verbally over it for all Jews, as it is written, “..and confesses over it all the iniquities of the Children of Israel.” This goat atones for all transgressions of whatever severity of any of the Torah's commandments, whether they were committed

deliberately or accidentally, whether the transgressor had confessed or not, provided that the guilty parties had repented, for without repentance the goat sent to Azazel repents only for the less-severe transgressions. Severe transgressions are those which a Court of Law can punish by death, or which carry a penalty of excision, and also false oaths and falsehood, even though they do not bear a penalty of excision. Transgressions of negative commandments or other transgressions the transgression of which does not carry a penalty of excision are considered less severe.¹⁶

Of course any good Jew can go on to read that in section three immediately following section two he clarifies his position on repentance by teaching:

In this day and age we have only repentance, for we don't have the Temple and Altar. This repentance [that we have to do nowadays] can atone for all sins.¹⁷

This is where the RaMBaM and I part ways.

In chapter 16 of our portion, we find the divine instructions for the sacred day of assembly known as Yom Kippur. HaShem has very explicit and important details that he expects Aharon the cohen gadol (high priest) to carry out. To be sure, as we shall find out, they had a very significant and far-reaching impact not just on the physical offspring of Avraham, but as the fullness of God's timetable would demonstrate, on the rest of humanity as well.

Yeshua's Bloody Atonement Sacrifice and Leviticus 17:11

In an attempt to continue explain the matter, we need to understand the plans and purposes of HaShem as expressed in the **whole** of the Torah. From our vantage point and using twenty-first century hindsight, it makes perfect sense to send the Messiah to atone for our sinful nature. After all, if God left things in the hands of mankind, each individual man would have to atone for his own personal sins and consequently every man would eventually have to die for such a payment. But what does the Torah say?

"Here is how it works: it was through one individual that sin entered into the world, and through sin, death; and in this way death passed through to the whole human race, inasmuch as everyone sinned." (Romans 5:12)

With the entrance of sin came the punishment for sin—death. So we see that HaShem is perfectly righteous when he says that the wages for our sin is death; every man does deserve to die. But here is where the mercy of HaShem comes in! He has lovingly provided a means by which mankind can redeem himself. In the period of the TaNaKH, the sacrificial system was that means! Even though it pointed towards something greater, it was authentically God's solution. No Jew living in that time period was able to circumvent this system, and remain officially within the community. **If we take HaShem**

¹⁶ <http://www.panix.com/~jibaker/MadaT.html>

¹⁷ Ibid.

seriously, them we will accept his provision—no matter what means, or how temporal that provision is! This is our first lesson in "Torah logic."

This brings us to the current situation facing every man and woman and child, Jew or non-Jew, living today: "Since the sacrificial system used in the TaNaKH has been dissolved, what is his means of atonement today?"

As we have already observed from the anti-missionary's position above, the modern rabbis would have us to believe that the three ways by which we appease HaShem today are "**T'shuvah**" (repentance), "**T'fillah**" (prayer), and "**Tzedekah**" (righteous acts). To be sure, all of these principles are found in the teachings of the Torah! And each and every one of them has valid merit. For our God is highly interested in our **repentance from sin**, and he is very supportive of a **prayer time**, and he is enthusiastic of our **righteous acts** done in his name! But what does our Torah portion say?

"For the life of the creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for yourselves; for it is the blood that makes atonement because of the life." (Leviticus 17:11)

Moving into chapter 17, we encounter one of our chair passages. This single verse of the Torah has caused no small disagreement between Christian missionaries and anti-missionaries. The missionaries use this verse as a launching point by which to propagate the necessity of the atonement of Yeshua the Messiah for the forgiveness of sin. The rabbis teach that according to further insight (usually provided for them by the **Talmud**, this verse is not exclusively addressing the issue of sin atonement. Since we are studying the arguments and responses of both camps, we should not be ashamed to provide an authoritative answer.

First of all, the rabbis have a somewhat valid point to make; the Torah does address the issue of atonement in other sections. Likewise, HaShem did use the blood of animals in other types of sacrificial requirements, where sin is not the primary issue. But what the rabbis seem to misunderstand is that the above quoted verse was not intended to confuse the average reader! Citing the rules of standard grammatical-historical exegesis: **When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise.** In other words, did the average unlearned reader, living in the time period of the TaNaKH, understand what HaShem was asking of him? Of course he did. If he did not, I imagine we would have read about the difference in interpretation somewhere else in the Torah. But our verse here in Leviticus contains little or no ambiguity. The immediate recipients of the context of chapter 17 are as given: to Moshe (vs. 1), to Aharon and his sons (vs. 1), to 'Am Isra'el (vs. 1), and finally someone from the community of Isra'el or one of the foreigners living with you (vs. 8, 10). The chapter even leaves off addressing "anyone" in verse 15.

Were all of these individuals learned people? Did they study in the most brilliant theological schools of their day? Was HaShem secretly cloaking this important information in mystery only to be understood by the future rabbis and Torah teachers of the people of Isra'el? I am not reluctant to place the blame on over-examination. Because of this, we sometimes miss the simple explanation that the Torah is trying to teach us. To use modern language "We miss the forest for the trees!" Another rather obvious cause for the disagreement here is the fact that most non-Messianic rabbis don't consider the New Covenant Scriptures authoritative, and therefore, they usually ignore it's teaching. Woe unto those unfaithful teachers during the coming day of reckoning (Yom haDin)!

But the Torah, as revealed by the Messiah and his first century followers, is authoritative concerning this issue, so it is there that we will settle the issue:

"But God demonstrated his own love for us in that the Messiah died on our behalf while we were still sinners. Therefore, since we have now come to be considered righteous by means of his bloody sacrificial death, how much more will we be delivered through him from the anger of God's judgment!" (Romans 5:8, 9)

Yeshua has now become the means by which all men must satisfy the righteous atoning requirement of the Holy One! This type of atonement does not merely provide a cleansing of the flesh and a wiping clean of the Sanctuary! Our sins are not merely atoned for spanning the space of another year, only to be revisited this same time a year later at Yom Kippur by a priest who will eventually taste death himself. This type of atonement—Yeshua's Priestly atonement—is a permanent one! What does the Torah say?

"No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, 'Know ADONAI'; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:34)

Even righteous King Dah-vid, in Psalm 32, recognized the mercy of a God who "covers" and "forgives" the transgressors' sin using the substitute blood of animals (in this passage the Hebrew word for "cover" is "*kasah*" [literally "conceal," "hide"], while the Hebrew word for "forgive" is "*nassa*" [literally "carry," "bear," "take"]). Interestingly, in the first few p'sukim the words "cover" and "forgive" function as synonyms in poetic parallelism! This is also where we see a good example of the validity and necessity of the system used during those days.

Before we become so quick to look down on God's temporary solution, let's look at what the sacrificial system of those days could accomplish. In Psalms chapters 32 and 51 we see the heart of man who genuinely experienced the forgiveness of HaShem. In Psalm 32:1 he stated that the man whose sin is covered is blessed! In verse 5 he clearly states that his acknowledgement of his sin brought about true forgiveness from HaShem. Because of unmerited favor, this man could rejoice in the mercies of HaShem (verses 10, 11)!

Psalm 51 was written after Dah-vid had committed the gross sin with Bat-Sheva, the mother of Melekh Shlomo (King Solomon). In this passage we again see a man who, knowing the true goal of the Torah—salvation of his eternal soul through the Promised One to come—sought the genuine forgiveness of his Maker.

Verses 16-19 of this Psalm explain to us readers that a heart given to genuine trusting faithfulness—the very same heart required of us today!—is what rendered the sacrifices of the TaNaKH effective. Simply performing the rituals perfunctorily did not please our Heavenly Abba (verse 16, 17). Rather, it was a heart broken in genuine submission to the Ruach Elohim (Spirit of God) that moved HaShem to forgiveness! This same heart gave the sacrifices validity (verse 19).

Did Dah-vid, as of yet, know the name of his future descendant Yeshua? We have no evidence to support that he explicitly knew the name “Yeshua.” What he **did** know is that through Moshe, the Torah promised that one day a “Prophet” would arise and that the people were to obey him (read Deuteronomy 18:15-19)! What he **did** have was a glimpse of the intended function and nature of the Torah (the “**goal**”), in that, these temporary sacrifices **pointed** towards that day when his sins would be forgiven, never again to be brought to HaShem’s mind. This is the day spoken about in Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) 31:34,

“...for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (KJV)

And just in case you’ve forgotten, this is a “New Testament” feature (read Hebrews 8:12)! According to the book of Hebrews, the sacrifices of Dah-vid’s day could cleanse the flesh, but not the conscience, that is to say, I understand Hebrews to be teaching that only the eternal blood of a Sinless Sacrifice can regenerate the mind of an individual. By comparison, the blood of bulls and goats was temporal:

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:13, 14, KJV)

Moreover, the writer of Hebrews makes his point explicit in this additional passage:

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (Hebrews 10:1-4, NIV)

The "Old Testament" saints were not "saved" by a different system than the one in which we rely on. If they were, then this would suggest that there were really two separate ways unto righteousness—a theory, which we know, cannot be true. Hegg's conclusion is fitting for our study:

The older idea that "atonement" was only a "temporary fix" for sins for those who lived in the time before the coming of our Messiah must be abandoned. The idea of atonement as portrayed in the Scriptures encompasses both a temporal aspect as well as an eternal one.¹⁸

To be sure, Yeshua himself stated emphatically that he was THE way, and that NO man can come unto the Father except through HIM.

The sacrifices, performed with a genuine heart of repentance, afforded real-life forgiveness, but only to the purification of the flesh! However, the mortal blood of the animals in and of themselves—and by themselves—could not even take away sin; only the eternal blood of the Perfect Sacrifice—to which the animals pointed—could purify both flesh and soul.

Thus, the blood of the animals restored ritual purity and "washed, wiped clean" the Holy Place where God "manifestly dwelt." The objective faith of the individual still remained dependent upon God's Promised Word to Come, namely Yeshua himself, yet his obedience was demonstrated by adherence to explicit Torah commands where sacrifices were concerned. What is more, the salvation of the eternal soul of an individual was always dependent upon a circumcised heart, exactly as it is today.

In summary then, the sacrificial system was not designed to bring the participant to the goal, namely a purged conscience and salvation of the individual. Sacrifices were for dealing with sin in the flesh. Only genuine faith in the Promised One could move God's heart to reckon to one's account "righteousness" as was done for Avraham. The Torah was weak in that it could not bring to the goal of salvation the heart of an individual. Only the Spirit's supernatural work could—and always will be able to—do that.

There is only ONE path to positional righteousness. There is only ONE way to attain lasting salvation.

Thus we see that the covenant spoken about by the prophet Jeremiah is surely a superior system. When HaShem says that he will remember our sins no more, that's something to rejoice about! Why would anyone want to attempt to revert back to the former system (if it were possible to forfeit one's salvation)? Unfortunately, today, many of my brothers according to the flesh are doing something similar to this. **When a person rejects Yeshua HaMashiach as the final atonement for their sin, they are**

¹⁸ Tim Hegg, The Meaning of כַּפַּר, torahresource.com
(<http://www.torahresource.com/Parashpdfs/kafarstudy.pdf>), p 5.

really rejecting the One who sent the Messiah in the first place! In other words, to reject Yeshua is to reject HaShem! This is where the corporate blindness of my people lies.

The second important aspect of the sending of Yeshua at the appointed time has to do with order. HaShem has a perfect plan for everything. According to the purpose of God, sin seems to have had to run its course until the ideal time for sending the Messiah into the world came. Yeshua therefore demonstrated his obedience to the Father by surrendering his life as a sacrifice only when the time set by his Father was perfect. Not sooner. Not later. We must accept this Biblical truth and live by it. In a way, you could say that if Messiah Yeshua had provided himself for atonement at a much earlier time, then, because of community dynamics, the majority of Am Yisra'el would have accepted him, yet the majority of the surrounding Gentile Nations would have missed out. Of course this is speculative, yet it does contain an element of truth. Read Romans chapter eleven, specifically verse twenty-five sometime, and you'll notice that the Torah is hinting at this very aspect!

Leviticus 18:5 - Torah Observance Equals Eternal Life?

Leviticus 18:1-5,

1 The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'I am the LORD your God. 3 You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. 4 You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the LORD your God. 5 Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD.

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:

דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

כַּמַּעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ-מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבַתֶּם-בָּהּ לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ וְכַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ-כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְבִיא אֶתְכֶם שָׁמָּה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ וּבַחֲקֵיתֶהֶם לֹא תִלְכוּ:

אֶת-מִשְׁפָּטַי תַעֲשׂוּ וְאֶת-חֻקֹּתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ לְלַכֵּת בָּהֶם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת-חֻקֹּתַי וְאֶת-מִשְׁפָּטַי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אִתְּכֶם הָאָדָם וְתִי בָהֶם אֲנִי יְהוָה:

Here the writer, Moshe, describes the lifestyle of an existing covenant member as characterized by obeying the laws spelled out by the Torah. Paul, quoting Moshe, refers to such a position as "clearly" described in Galatians 3:11. In other words, Paul

expects his readers and opponents alike to come to the same conclusion as he: genuine Torah submission does not precede genuine faith; genuine Torah submission is the natural, expected result of genuine faith. Stated another way: genuine and lasting obedience flows from the heart that has been circumcised by the Spirit of God himself. The order of procession is vitally important for Paul's argument: faith comes first; obedience follows faith. Such a processional order is also implied in the historical order to which the covenants in question were given: the Avrahamic Covenant, typified by faith, preceded the Mosaic Covenant, typified by obedience. By comparison, the Influencers of the 1st century Judaisms had the sequence reversed, suggesting that faith came as a result of following after the teachings of Torah, as indicated by their preoccupation with the ritual of circumcision.

A few years ago I had the unique opportunity of engaging in a lengthy debate with a non-Messianic rabbi over the important implications behind this single verse. Since the debate was via the medium of e-mail, I have decided to share a selected portion with you here in this commentary. A word of caution: my apologetics (Scriptural defensive reasoning) were aimed at the gross error that exists within the scholarship of the Jewish learned. My comments were intended to expose that error in an effort to showcase the Truth of the Torah to a man whose eyes were blinded by defensive (not passive) unbelief, as well as a man bent on ill-feelings towards the Christian community of which he believes is in serious disobedience to the Torah of the very God that they claim to serve. My comments should not be understood as being applied to the Jewish people as a whole, nor am I singling out any particular Christian group. Truth cuts to the heart of the issue for those who walk in disobedience. To use modern vernacular "If the shoe fits...then wear it!"

I have not posted any of his comments, as I do not have permission to do so. Mixing only my own comments with those of noted author and translator David H. Stern, as found in his Jewish New Testament Commentary, I wrote:

"Moshe spoke of the righteousness that is grounded in trust, in Vayikra 18:5, "That the person who does these things will attain life through them." Rashi (quoting the Sifra) comments: "It refers to the world to come; for if you say it refers to this world, doesn't everyone die sooner or later?" I understand the Torah then to be talking about eternal life.

"That many Christians don't believe that the Torah teaches eternal life through the Teachings of the Mitzvot is irrelevant! If they have made a serious error in their theology, they must answer to HaShem for misunderstanding His Torah. Why do we become so "caught up in the middle" over false teaching? Is it because of the fence that we have built around Torah, that we defend it so fervently? In any case, they are wrong about Torah.... it is to be kept, not disregarded. It is the goal of the Torah to lead its followers to the righteousness grounded in trust. But have you ever stopped to think that they (the minim) may have understood a central part that our people, the Jewish community, miss?

"The lesson in logic goes like this: the person who practices "the righteousness grounded in the Torah will necessarily have the trust in Yeshua the Messiah that the B'rit Chadashah proclaims. Why? Because legalism is the exact opposite of trust! The heresy of legalism, when applied to the Torah, says that anyone who does these things, that is, anyone who mechanically follows the rules for Shabbat, kashrut, etc., will attain life through them, will be saved, will enter the Kingdom of HaShem, will obtain eternal life. No need to trust HaShem, just obey the rules! What is more to the point concerning historic and modern Judaism is the heresy of ethnicity (being born Jewish or following after conversion) which supposedly automatically guarantees the Jewish person a place at the table with Avraham! The problem with this simplistic ladder to Heaven is that legalism conveniently ignores the "rule" that trust must underlie all rules following which HaShem finds acceptable. But trust necessarily converts mere rule-following into something altogether different, in fact, into it's opposite, genuine faithfulness to HaShem. Therefore, "legalistic obedience to Torah commands" as well as "ethnic-driven corporate identity" (that is, "works of the Law" as expressed by a rabbinical conversion policy for Gentiles wishing to enter into Isra'el) is actually disobedience to the Torah! Sha'ul clearly taught in Galatians that "circumcision" (often used by the Apostle as shorthand for "proselyte conversion") as a prerequisite for covenant inclusion runs contrary to the genuine Good News of Yeshua, and consequently sets itself at odds with God's True Torah.

"As a Jew, who follows the Torah as given by Him, through Moshe Rabbenu, I challenge you once again: legalism - that is, legalistic obedience to Torah commands - is disobedience to the Torah! One could be obeying every single mitzvah (except, by assumption, the mitzvah of trust), but if these things are being done without heartfelt trust in the God who is there, the only God there is, the God who sent his Son Yeshua to be the atonement for sin, then all this outward "obedience" is hateful to HaShem (Yesha'yahu 1:14), and the person doing it, the legalist, "lives under a curse," because he is not "doing everything written in the Scroll of the Torah" (D'varim 27:26).

"Now here's the sad truth! The evidence that non-Messianic Jews "have not submitted themselves to HaShem's way of making people righteous," which itself shows that their "zeal for HaShem" is "not based on correct understanding," is that they have not grasped the central point of the Torah and acted on it. Had they seen that trust in HaShem - as opposed to "being born Jewish," self-effort, legalism, and mechanical obedience to the rules - is the route to the righteousness which the Torah itself not only requires but offers, then they would see that, "the goal at which the Torah aims is [acknowledging and trusting in] the Messiah, who offers [on the ground of this trusting the very] righteousness (they are seeking). They would see that the righteousness, which the Torah offers, is offered through him and only through him. They would also see that he offers it to everyone who trusts - to them and to the Goyim as well, without having to convert to Judaism first!"

Conclusions

The thrust of this week's commentary, in the form of an apologetic, has been presented in an effort to educate the two camps, both Jews and Gentile Christians. Many Messianic as well as non-Messianic Jews still struggle with the intended meaning of "what it means to be a new creation in Messiah, walking out his Torah in our lives"; moreover, many Gentile Christians struggle with this issue as well. By default, the world does not struggle with these issues since it has not accepted HaShem on his grounds in the first place.

Messianic Symbolism in Yom Kippur

The high priest had to enter every year with a new sacrifice. The sacrifice of Yeshua "a high priest forever" (Hebrews 5:6) is good forever. The old high priest entered a symbolic Holy of Holies, made with human hands. Yeshua entered the real Holy of Holies -- the very throne of God in Heaven. (Hebrews 9:11) The scapegoat carried away the sins of the people. In Yeshua all our sins are carried away "as far as east is from west" (Psalm 103:12). Once all the expiatory (sin-forgiving) sacrifices are done, the priest puts on his priestly robes again. When Yeshua had accomplished his sacrificial mission, he put back on the glory of his divinity. When the priest returned from the tabernacle (as Yeshua will return from Heaven), he offered the festival sacrifice. When Yeshua returns, it will be for the full and final redemption of his people Israel. (Ezekiel 16:63)

Now, I am Jewish and Yom Kippur is a part of my heritage, so let me say an encouraging word to my fellow Messianic Jews in hopes of also encouraging my fellow Gentile believers in Messiah. The beauty of Messianic Judaism is the fact that when one accepts Yeshua and is Jewish, he or she stays fully and completely a Jew! You don't "convert" to another religion or become something that you are not. Rather, the richness and fullness of your Jewish heritage is incorporated with your faith in Messiah.

This becomes extremely evident during the cycle of Feasts; in other words, the "Jewish" Holidays. What better way to live and celebrate as a Messianic Jew than to observe the same feasts and holidays, just like Yeshua? After all, Yeshua was and is an observant Jew who fasted on Yom Kippur, ate matzah on Pesach, and tabernacled during Sukkot (Feast of Booths).

As a Jew, Yeshua also kept the Sabbath (Shabbat). Shabbat is the center of Messianic Jewish life, as it is often the day we go to fellowship with our brothers and sisters in the LORD, the day we take as a day of rest from work and worry, and a time of prayer and worship. If the goal of any serious Messianic Jew is to live a Godly life as Yeshua did, then keeping the Shabbat and Feasts is a good way to start.

However, many Messianic Jews are not sure what to do with regards to Yom Kippur. Traditionally, those of us with Jewish backgrounds were raised to believe that on that day we atone for our sins against God, through prayer and fasting. However, since the

LORD has revealed to us that Yeshua was and is the atonement for our sins, what is the purpose of observing Yom Kippur?

Yom Kippur is a High Holy Day that reminds us that we are still indeed Jews, and which brings us closer together in that way. It is a solemn, holy day of prayer, prayer being a central aspect of Messianic Judaism. Fasting is an excellent way to get closer to God – many prayer warriors who are speaking to God about serious issues will take a day or two to fast and pray. Anything that brings us closer to God is definitely positive, and something that also affirms our Jewish identity is even more important.

God created us as Jews and wants us to continue to act and live as Jews. This is one of the ways we can remain “a light among the Nations.” The Feasts of the LORD provide obvious and familiar opportunities to rejoice in our Messianic faith, while continuing to be as Jewish as ever.

Introspection

In addition to identifying with our people, we need another, more intimate reason for what we do. Yom Kippur is a good occasion to look inside and take a spiritual inventory. With its central themes of sin, atonement and forgiveness, the holiday naturally lends itself to this kind of spiritual introspection. Though we are made righteous in Messiah, we still sin. We are told to flee from sin and pursue righteousness, yet at the same time John bluntly reminds us, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8) Yom Kippur focuses on the need to confess sin and receive God's forgiveness. It's not only tailor-made to promote our witness to others (as it gives occasion to discuss these spiritual issues), but it is also a holiday for us to take stock of our own lives before God. The litany of sins we confess in the Al Chet (Yom Kippur liturgy) acts as a mirror so we can see ourselves honestly and come clean.

Nevertheless, if you attend traditional Yom Kippur services, stay alert as you progress through the liturgy. The system that traditional Judaism has built to address the reality of sin and the need for forgiveness is not altogether theologically consistent with our faith. We do not believe that three books are opened at Rosh Hashanah and that we have ten days to make everything right before the books are closed and our fate sealed. We do not believe that repentance, prayer and charity (or good deeds) can secure God's forgiveness for sin.

If you are Jewish and join our non-messianic brethren in prayer, to retain your spiritual integrity, consider remaining silent during the prayers that contradict your faith. This is no different than what your family members would do if they were to attend a church service. Having said that, I believe most of the traditional Yom Kippur prayers are fine for us and we can fully take part in them, messianic or not. Of course, most messianic congregations have solved these problems for us by modifying or eliminating some of the traditional prayers to make the entire worship service consistent with our faith in Yeshua. It's powerful to remember, especially on Yom Kippur, "If we confess our sins,

he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Intercession

One of the most central features of Yom Kippur is the fast. At its core, fasting is seen as fulfilling the biblical commandment to "deny yourselves" or "afflict your souls" (Leviticus 23:27). The fast enables us to put aside our physical desires and concentrate on our spiritual needs.

In Nehemiah fasting is used to deeply express the people's repentance (9:1). Later, God speaks through the prophet Joel and declares, "Even now, return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning" (Joel 2:12). In other instances fasting is a means of intensifying prayer in the face of dire need. This was often true when the enemies of Israel came against us (cf. Esther 4:3; II Chronicles 20:3) and our survival was on the line. So it is on Yom Kippur, when it is believed that our individual fate hangs in the balance.

As believers we can certainly fast as an expression of repentance and as an intensification of prayer. But there is another reason to fast on Yom Kippur. That reason is intercession. When Ezra wanted to pray for the people leaving Babylon he called a fast (Ezra 8:21). When Esther was about to take a big risk she asked the community to pray for her, accompanied by fasting (Esther 4:16). Daniel fasted as he prayed on behalf of the exiled Jewish nation (Daniel 9:3).

Yom Kippur is a very fitting time to intercede on behalf of our Jewish family and friends who don't know the Messiah and the atonement He has accomplished. Our fast can be a time of intensifying and deepening our prayer for others. As weeks, months and years go by, we need help and encouragement to continue praying for those who haven't shown positive interest in the Gospel. Yom Kippur can provide the boost we need to intercede for our family members.

As believers in Yeshua, those who know the joy of salvation, many of us approach Yom Kippur with mixed emotions. Do we rejoice—knowing that to be uncharacteristic for the holiday, yet in keeping with our faith and experience? Or do we take this day to examine our lives and confess our own sins to God? Without doubt, there is room for both. A framework of identification, introspection and intercession provides plenty of occasions to repent and rejoice and remember what is important.

Yom Kippur is a holy day that allows us to come to God and express what is on our hearts. May God be with you as you use the occasion to His glory.

While my heart reaches out to non-Jewish believers with these important instructions concerning the Torah of HaShem, it is my desire to make a heartfelt plea to the Jewish Community to consider accepting HaShem on his terms alone! **This is our second lesson in "Torah-logic": if HaShem renews the terms of his original covenant, we**

as partners must agree with his improved establishment, especially since it was faithlessness on our part that necessitated the renewal! Apart from being superior to the sacrificial system because of its Guarantor, Yeshua's atonement also brought about the power to maintain a change of heart. To be sure, the famous passage quoted from Jeremiah contains in it, a promise from HaShem to put the Torah in the inward parts of the people—i.e. on the heart. This means a change in the spiritual makeup of the individual. A change that transforms the sinner into the status of righteous heir! Now because of Yeshua's death, HaShem no longer considers death as our wage (Romans 8:1)! Even if not corporately, each individual Jewish person can now proclaim: **Our Yom Kippur has come! Our final Day of Atonement has already arrived! Our effectual sacrifice has been offered once and for all!**

For further study, read: Leviticus chs. 16, 17; Numbers 29:7-11; Isaiah 57:14-58:14; Jonah 1-4; Micah 7:18-20; Romans 3:21-26; Hebrews chs. 7-10.

Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy yeshua613@hotmail.com