

PARASHAH: Acharei Mot (After the death)
ADDRESS: Vayikra (Leviticus) 16:1-18:30
READING DATE: Shabbat
AUTHOR: Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman

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(Note: all quotations are taken from the **Complete Jewish Bible**, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

Let's begin with the opening blessing for the Torah:

**“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-‘Olam,
asher bachar banu m’kol ha-amim,
v’natan lanu eht Torah-to.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”**

(Blessed are you, O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have selected us from among all the peoples,
and have given us your Torah.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

Welcome to **Parashat Acharei Mot**. This particular commentary will represent the longest, most comprehensive article on the weekly portions that I have written to date. Be prepared for a long read! The following topics will be examined:

- **Kippur**
- **Apologetics Part One**
- **Apologetics Part Two**
- **Yeshua's Bloody Sacrifice**
- **There's Power in the Blood!**
- **Do the Torah**
- **Conclusions**

This particular parashah contains within it some of the single most impacting verses in the Torah. In theological studies, we call these passages "chair passages" as they have the power to change an entire theological argument, like a judge passing a sentence. In other words, sometimes a single passage can decide which direction in the proverbial fork in the road we should embark down!

A significant quote from my opening teachings on Leviticus is surely in order before we get too far:

Kippur

God's system of animal sacrifices, with their ability to cleanse or "wash" the flesh, was never intended to be a permanent one. Conversely, the animal sacrifices were not intended to be a "temporary fix" either. In fact the etymological background of the word Torah (the root word being an archery term meaning to "direct towards the goal") also suggests that the fullest measure of HaShem's atonement (Hebrew=kafar כָּפַר is usually translated "to atone," "to cover over," "make reconciliation," "pacify," "propitiate," "purge."¹) was not found in the earthly copies, but rather, in the heavenly originals. Yet, during the time period of the TaNaKH, the animal sacrifices were authentically God's system. In other words, if you were a citizen of this community of former slaves, and you wanted to operate within a covenant relationship with its Savior, then you had no choice but to participate in the sacrificial system when approaching the Holy Tabernacle/Temple where God concentrated his Glory. There was no room for circumvention. Why would HaShem require exclusivity? Because, in his established order of things, only the blood could make atonement for their lives (read Leviticus 17:11). Tim Hegg makes a case for the meaning of the word kafar כָּפַר as "wipe off, smear on" in this quote from a short paper available from his site at torahresource.com as of 3-20-07:

The root *kpr* is attested in the Akkadian base stem *kaparu*, meaning "wipe off, smear on." This is classified with *kaparu* II, "pour bitumen over" and *koper* II, "pitch, tar, bitumen" and with the so-called D stem *kuppuru*, "to wipe off, clean, rub, ritually purify."

The idea that כָּפַר has its base meaning "to cover" was strengthened by the fact that the same root is used one time in the Tanach to mean "to cover with pitch," Gen 6:14. In this case, the verb appears in the *Qal* stem. However, every other place the verb is found in the Tanach, it is in either the *Piel*, *Pual*, *Hitpiel*, or the rare *Nitpiel*. Averbek notes that "from a methodological point of view, linguistically the same root in a different stem is a different word."² As such, the *qal* should not necessarily be taken to indicate the meaning for the *piel* and other stems. Thus, the suggestion that כָּפַר has as its base meaning "to cover" has been discarded by many current scholars, including evangelical scholars.³

Presenting the notion that the blood of the animals did not so much cleanse the worshipper as it cleansed the Holy Sanctum, Tikvat David (Hope of David) writes in an article titled "*Understanding the Sacrifices of Isra'el, Past and Future*,"

¹ Brown, Driver, Briggs (BDB), כָּפַר.

² NIDOTTE, 2:692-93.

³ Tim Hegg, The Meaning of כָּפַר, torahresource.com (<http://www.torahresource.com/Parashpdfs/kafarstudy.pdf>), p.1.

Most importantly, burnt, purification, and reparation offerings were made to cleanse the sanctuary of the people's sin and impurity. The sins and ritual impurities of the people were like pollution that stuck to the tabernacle/ temple. God's holy presence would withdraw from the land, which was also holy, if the people did not constantly cleanse to allow his presence near. This is the theology of Leviticus 15:31, "Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst." This is also behind Numbers 5:3, "You shall put out both male and female, putting them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camp, in the midst of which I dwell." See also Num. 19:13, 20 and Ezekiel 5:11 and 23:38. Thus, the Levitical sacrifices were not for obtaining personal forgiveness or for making the worshipper clean. In this sense, they were not like the cross of Yeshua, which does bring forgiveness to the worshipper and makes him or her clean. They were to clean the sanctuary of the people's sins and impurities so God's presence could dwell in a clean place.⁴

Hegg seems to make reference to such cleansing of the Tabernacle/Temple as well:

If we accept Averbeck's viewpoint, that a primary meaning of כָּפַר (the *piel* stem) is to be found in those places where the verb has a clear direct object, then it's base meaning is to be found in connection with Yom Kippur, for the verb with direct object occurs only in Lev 16 and the comparable passages in Ezek 43 and 45. If this is the case, then the base meaning is "to wipe away," for in these contexts כָּפַר has a direct effect on *sancta*—it "wipes" *sancta* "clean," meaning it restores the status of *sanctum* to that which had been defiled. In this way, the *qal* meaning of the verb, "to cover with pitch" is connected to the meaning of the *piel*, "to wipe (with blood)."⁵

I can agree as a writer with both aspects of this word kafar כָּפַר "cover," and "wipe clean" with regards to the worshipper and the Sanctuary. For indeed, as the blood of the animals pointed towards the ultimate sacrifice of Yeshua, we (the cleansed worshipper) can now approach the Holy of Holies in Heaven without fear of contaminating God's Throne. Whether or not we could theoretically approach the earthly Mercy Seat as believers is altogether another issue. Suffice it to say, with the above-supplied information, we can now better understand that our God was teaching each and every participant an important aspect of his established spiritual laws.

⁴ <http://www.hopeofdavid.com/article1.htm>

⁵ Tim Hegg, The Meaning of כָּפַר, torahresource.com
(<http://www.torahresource.com/Parashpdfs/kafarstudy.pdf>), p 2.

Related to the word kafar is the Hebrew word kapporet כַּפֹּרֶת, 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). It is in this way, that the blood of the sacrifice "covered" the sin of the person bringing it while simultaneously "wiping clean" the Holy Sanctum. This type of atonement, while effectual, simply purified the flesh; it did not bring the sinner to the goal of becoming "saved." In a very true way, this type of atonement was of necessity repetitive, needing a year-after-year performance by the priests and the people whenever they approached a Holy God. After all, priests came and went and yet God's system remained functional right up through the First Century into the days of Yeshua. You might ask, "If HaShem knew the insufficient 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.

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 can 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. For more information about this, see Jewish Liturgy.

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."

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:

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."⁶

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

⁶ <http://urj.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=2750>

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 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)."⁷

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 can only be upon the Spotless Lamb offered for atonement, Yeshua our Yom Kippur! The Renewed Covenant will bear this out later as well.

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 affects 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.

⁷ <http://www.jewsforjudaism.org/web/faq/faq042.html>

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 (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.⁸

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 15:26-31

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 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

⁸ Jacob Neusner, *The Babylonian Talmud* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2005 CD-ROM).

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 16:16-24 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 fleshly 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.⁹

⁹ <http://www.panix.com/~jjbaker/MadaT.html>

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.¹⁰

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.

Apologetics – Part Two

Yeshua's Bloody Atonement Sacrifice

Obvious by now with the arrival of **Yom Kippur**, comes this central aspect 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, which would satisfy HaShem's righteous requirement. His nature demands that there be atonement for sin, for indeed, sin cannot exist in his sight.

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;

¹⁰ Ibid.

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 only served to cleanse the flesh, 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. To answer the question posed above, **if we take HaShem seriously, then we will accept his provision—no matter what means, or how inadequate that provision may seem! 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 did not bring the participant to the goal of attaining positional righteousness, what was his means of attaining positional righteousness then and what is his means of gaining such 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)

There's Power in the Blood! (Recalling the familiar old Baptist tune...)

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 permanent 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 either over-examination or blatant stubbornness to the Ruach HaKodesh. 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 expounded upon 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 [positionally] 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, Emphasis, mine)

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 David recognized the mercy of a God who covered (Heb=kasah) the transgressors' sin, in chapter thirty-two of the book of Psalms. This is also where we see a good example of the validity and necessity of the system used during those days, particularly when sinful individuals approached a Holy God. But the covenant spoken about by the prophet Jeremiah is surely a superior system. When HaShem says that he will remember our sins no more, he is teaching us that only through the "once and for all" sacrifice will the participant attain lasting, goal-reaching permanent forgiveness! That's something to rejoice about! Why would anyone attempt to pervert the former system into a means of reaching the goal reserved for Yeshua's Heavenly gift, as if it were possible? 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 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 purposes of God, Mashiach was sent at the ideal moment in man's history. Yeshua 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 hypothesize 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!

Do the Torah

Moving on into chapter 18, we find our second chair passage.

"You are to observe my laws and rulings; if a person does them, he will have life through them; I am ADONAI." (Leviticus 18:5)

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 hinting about eternal life, although the p'shat is surely teaching Isra'el that the covenant member will live his life according to the Torah, instead of seeking to become a covenant member by keeping a set of laws, something the teachers of Isra'el never taught outright in the first place, yet not uncommon among the "superstitious."

"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 these simplistic ladders to Heaven is that such legalism conveniently ignores the "rule" that trust must

underlie all rule-following which HaShem finds acceptable. But trust necessarily converts mere rule-following into something altogether different, in fact, into its opposite, genuine faithfulness to HaShem. Therefore, "legalistic obedience to Torah commands" is actually disobedience to the Torah! Moreover, "works of law" (the requirement of the Gentile to convert to Judaism as regulated by the prevailing halakhah of the Judaisms of the 1st century) is also disobedience to the 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 or reliance upon one's ethnic status - 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). Keeping the commandments will not save a person; being born Jewish (or converting to Judaism) will not guarantee a person a place in the World to Come.

"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 self-identification, legalism, and/or 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!"

Conclusions

The animal sacrifices conveyed both a temporal and an eternal message to the participants. The blood of bulls and goats is the shadow; Yeshua is the type. However, before we become so quick to look down on God's "temporal shadows," 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! (Hebrew for "covered"=kasah כָּסָה) 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 antitypes **pointed** towards that day when the corporate sins of all Isra'el 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 focused on the external:

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.¹¹

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 object of 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.

The thrust of this week's commentary has been presented in an effort to educate the two camps: 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 non-Jewish Christians struggle with this issue as well. By default, the world does

¹¹ Tim Hegg, The Meaning of כַּפַּר, torahresource.com (<http://www.torahresource.com/Parashpdfs/kafarstudy.pdf>), p 5.

not struggle with these issues since it has not accepted HaShem on his grounds in the first place.

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 has renewed 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 lasting impact, 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!**

The closing blessing is as follows:

**“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-‘Olam,
asher natan lanu Toraht-emet,
v’chay-yeh o’lam nata-b’tochenu.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”**

(Blessed are you O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have given us your Torah of truth,
and have planted everlasting life within our midst.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

Shabbat Shalom!"

Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman yeshua613@hotmail.com