

Yom Kippur

How many people here know someone who celebrated Yom Kippur this past week? Of those people, how many took the day off? Did anyone here speak to those people to ask what the holiday meant to them?

One of my co-workers took off this past week for Yom Kippur. He'll be the first person to tell you that he really doesn't understand why. He knows that Yom Kippur is about the forgiveness of sins. He just didn't understand the importance of it. Jokingly, he told me, "I don't need to have my sins forgiven because I don't have any." His idea of Yom Kippur is: this is a holiday of tradition. It's what my people have done for the past thousands of years and it's something we still do today.

I didn't ask him if he knew that what they do today is very different than what they did 3-thousand years ago. I didn't think I needed to. I'm not so sure that the typical Jewish person on Long Island is very concerned about what they did on Yom Kippur 3-thousand years ago. That's too bad, because if they did, they might be more aware of their need for a way back to God. They might be more aware of their need for a savior.

Their thinking today is that they are OK. They have their prayers and they do their fasting and this is all that God requires. They have taken the words of the prophets and have found them to mean that prayer is sufficient and sacrifice is not necessary.

Isaiah 1:11

*"The multitude of your sacrifices—
what are they to me?" says the LORD.
"I have more than enough of burnt offerings,
of rams and the fat of fattened animals;
I have no pleasure
in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.*

Jeremiah 6:20

What do I care about incense from Sheba or sweet calamus from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable; your sacrifices do not please me."

Jeremiah 7:22-23

For when I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not just give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices,²³ but I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you.

Hosea 6:6

For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.

They say that they no longer need to sacrifice because the Prophets have told us that God does not want their sacrifice any more:

Hosea 14:2

Bring your petitions, and return to the LORD. Say to him, "Forgive all our sins and graciously receive us, so that we may offer you the sacrifice of praise.

From this, they believe it is sufficient to pray for forgiveness and it will be given. So the Jewish person today is not concerned that they are not following the ways of their ancestors 3-thousand years ago because they have come to accept that God no longer requires it. What they have failed to understand is that God does not hate sacrifice, but that God hates sacrifice that is given for the wrong reason, without pure motives, from a misguided heart. All the sacrifices that the Prophets put down are sacrifices of a people whose heart was not with God but with the gods of the surrounding nations, the gods of their captors, tier own gods that they made up. As they sacrificed to the True God on one day, they sacrificed to some other false god on another day. The Prophets cried out with disgust at the fact that the Jewish nation was sacrificing their children to appease the gods of their captors! God was not saying that sacrifice was not good. He was saying THEIR sacrifice was not good because they gave a sacrifice without understanding what they were doing.

Besides all that, we recognize that throughout scripture, each time that God told them He did not want their (unacceptable) sacrifice, He tells them the importance of sacrificing:

Jeremiah 46:10

But that day belongs to the LORD, the Lord Almighty— a day of vengeance, for vengeance on his foes. The sword will devour till it is satisfied, till it has quenched its thirst with blood. For the Lord, the LORD Almighty, will offer sacrifice in the land of the north by the River Euphrates.

Ezekiel 20:40

For on my holy mountain, the high mountain of Israel, declares the Sovereign LORD, there in the land the entire house of Israel will serve me, and there I will accept them. There I will require your offerings and your choice gifts, along with all your holy sacrifices.

Isaiah 56:7

these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."

We must not forget that there is a reason for the sacrifices:

Leviticus 17:11

¹¹*for the life of any creature is in its blood. I have given you the blood so you can make atonement for your sins. It is the blood, representing life, that brings you atonement.*

And we should not pretend to think that God changes. He never changes and He warns us not to think that He does:

Deuteronomy 4:2

²*Do not add to or subtract from these commands I am giving you from the LORD your God. Just obey them.*

So recognizing that the sacrifices are still valid, even today, let's take a look at what happened on the Day of Atonement, what we today call Yom Kippur. Let's see what occurred and let's see why the Jewish nation needs to continue to offer the sacrifice and why the Christian Church does not.

Exodus 30:10

¹⁰*"Once a year Aaron must purify the altar by placing on its horns the blood from the offering made for the atonement of sin. This will be a regular, annual event from generation to generation, for this is the LORD's supremely holy altar."*

This is something that God has ordained us to do forever – from generation to generation. The high priest must offer the blood for the atonement of sin annually.

Let's see what God prescribed for that particular day:
Leviticus 16:1-18

Notice that the person who is going to do all this is Aaron. Aaron is the High Priest. It is important to note that the only person who could do this was the High Priest. Recognize also that no one, not even the High Priest is allowed into the Most Holy Place, the holy place inside the veil. If anyone entered this place, they would die. Why? Because that is where God was. Although God is omnipresent, He chose to have a palpable presence at the Ark of the Covenant. We read in other places of the Bible that His Shekinah Glory was at the Ark of the Covenant. His Shekinah Glory is His physical manifestation here on Earth.

On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would enter the temple with a bull and a ram. These would be given up as an offering for his own sins. Before the High Priest could perform the sacrifice which would bring forgiveness to the entire nation of Israel, *he first had to be sinless himself*. Therefore, he had to offer up a sacrifice for himself prior to doing anything else. The next thing we will see is that on this one day, the high Priest does not wear his normal High Priestly clothing. On this day, he will perform the sacrifices wearing white. White is the symbol for purity, for sinlessness. They were also simple clothes. Simpler than even those of the regular priests. This simplicity was to denote *the humbleness of the High Priest and make him the status of a servant*. In this act, the High Priest was a servant of the people, doing the work that would bring forgiveness to them as well as being a servant of God. Notice that before he can perform the sacrifices, he must wash himself. He washed himself ceremoniously, religiously and completely because he needed to be presenting spotlessly. Now he is ready to present himself and his offerings to God. He will also take two goats and a ram as an offering for the entire nation.

The acts of the High Priest are as follows: He takes the two goats and casts lots to determine which goat will be offered to God as a sacrifice and which goat will be use as the scapegoat. Next, the High Priest will offer the bull as a sacrifice. He will put coals and incense in a pan and carry that into the Most Holy Place. The reason for this is because he must not be able to see the mercy seat, where God lives, or he will die. The incense and smoke would hide the Ark behind a smoke screen, allowing the High Priest to live. Then he will take the blood of the bull and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. This is the offering of blood for the forgiveness of his own sins.

Next, he will offer the goat for the sins of the people. Again, he will bring the blood of the goat into the Most Holy Place, also known as the Holy of Holies, and will again sprinkle the blood with his fingers, first on the mercy seat and then in front of it. This is for the forgiveness of sins for the people. Interesting that this sacrifice is sufficient for all people. There is no need for each person or each family to have a separate sacrifice for themselves. *This single sacrifice is sufficient for the forgiveness of sins for all the people.*

Once the sacrifices were given to God, the next thing was to transfer all the sins of all the people onto the scapegoat. By laying both hands upon the head of the scapegoat and confessing all the sins of the nation, it transferred all the sins of the people onto the goat. Then the goat was taken away into the wilderness and released. At this point, the sins of the people have been forgiven, the blood of the sacrifices has atoned for their sins and the nation would go on its way until next year, when they could have their sins forgiven again.

Here we get to see the wonder that is God. This Day of Atonement was instituted by God almost 1500 years before the birth of Christ. Here we see the faithfulness of God in His dealings with man. For He knew that there would come a time that the sacrifices would not be needed, but not because of a loophole or a change of heart, but because of the fulfillment of them. In Jesus Christ, we have the fulfillment of the sacrifices and we have the fulfillment of the High Priest.

Hebrews 10:9-10

⁹Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. ¹⁰And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

It is the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ that fulfills the sacrifice. In Jesus, we see the blood that was shed for the forgiveness of sins. The one who had never sinned now becomes our sin. As the sins of the people are laid upon the head of the scapegoat, the sins of all mankind are laid upon the shoulders of Christ. And as those sins are sent away into the desert, never to be dealt with again, so are our sins sent away from us, never to be dealt with again. Jesus is our sacrifice that allows us to be clean of all our sins. Jesus is our sacrifice with whose shed blood, our sins are forgiven. Jesus is the last acceptable

sacrifice to God that He has accepted and it is the last acceptable sacrifice that He will ever receive.

And Jesus is now our High Priest. He is the one who needs not be washed to become clean for he has always been clean. Clean of any sin. He is the only one who is able to come to the Father on our behalf now.

Hebrews 7:26-27

²⁶Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. ²⁷Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

Acts 5:31

God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.

Romans 8:34

Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Jesus is such a high priest. He is at the right hand of the Father and it is now he who intercedes for us. We no longer need the sacrifice and we no longer need the high priest. The Jewish people have come to the conclusion that they do not need the sacrifices. They are wrong – it is only by the shedding of blood that we can have our sins forgiven. We have had our Prince and Savior sacrifice himself for that forgiveness of sins.