

# The Day of Atonement

In Biblical Hebrew it is the *Day of Atonements*, *Yom Kippurim* (יּוֹם כִּפּוּרִים), which is plural (Lev. 23:28). There is more than one kind of atonement related to Yom Kippur, a fact, that if not taken into due consideration will lead to confusion about the meaning of the day. So, to understand this day, it will be useful to make a distinction between two meanings of atonement based on the actual meaning of the Hebrew word.

The Hebrew root *kippur* means *to wipe off* or *to wipe away* and in the Piel stem “make to be wiped away.”<sup>11</sup> From this come derivative meanings like “cover” according to the idea that when something is wiped over or smeared over a surface that it covers it, and more theological meanings like “atone,” “ransom,” “cleanses” or “forgive.” These later senses are interpretive and are dependent on context. The only context independent sense appears to be “wipe off,” and here I will explain the two most basic and important senses of atonement which are derived from this.

To *forgive*. This comes from extending the root meaning “wipe away” to the idea of a penalty for sin being canceled. The penalty is literally wiped out.

To *cleanses*. The idea here is that some pollution or uncleanness is wiped away. In respect to sin, it means removal of the sin itself or its effect.

From these definitions we can see that there are two aspects to “atonement.” First there confession, repentance, and forgiveness, and then second there is removal of the sin or its effect. *Forgiveness* comes first, and then *cleansing* follows later. To properly understand *Yom Kippurim*, we have to understand the difference, inasmuch as the day has been thought to provide the ultimate forgiveness by Judaism, when in fact the theme is cleansing with a promise of ultimate

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<sup>11</sup> Page. 492, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Koehler & Baumgartner, Brill: 2001. See also page 452 *Lexicon In Veteris Testamenti Libros*, Brill: 1985. See also Jastrow’s *Aramaic dictionary*, “to wipe out,” pg. 661. The Piel stem is causative-intensive, the emphasis being conveyed by an infixed passive to emphasize the root idea.

cleansing.

The spring feast, Passover, relates to *forgiveness*. The Passover prevented the destroyer from punishing Israel along with the Egyptians. The destroyer that went through Egypt typifies the death penalty for sin, and the Passover is the sacrifice which “wipes away” this penalty. When the destroyer saw the blood wiped on the door posts, he did not go in to kill the firstborn. So, in this is a picture of what Messiah did when he died as the Passover lamb. He died so that the penalty for our sin could be wiped out.

The fall fast (not feast) Yom Kippur relates to *cleansing*. Forgiveness is a joyful release from guilt and expectation of everlasting life. *Cleansing* has to do with the hard work and traumatic experience of separating the repentant from their sinfulness. It should not escape our attention that the prophetic promise of this day has not yet been fulfilled. There are both subjective reasons, and prophetic reasons to believe this. The subjective reason is that no one thinks they are pure from sin or fault, so then it is equally clear that Yahweh has not given us the ultimate cleansing yet.

The promise of Yom Kippur is contained in the Torah:

For on this day he will make a wiping for you to cleanse you; from all your sins before Yahweh you will be clean. (Lev. 16:30).

בִּיבּוֹז הַזֶּה יִכַּפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם לְטָהֵר אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל חַטֹּאתֵיכֶם

לִפְנֵי יְהוָה תִּטְהָרוּ

This promises cleansing from “all your sins.” The Hebrew word *l'taheir* (לְטָהֵר) specifically means to “cleanse.” The promise is “from all your sins.” Surely we have been cleansed from some of our sins already, if we walk in faithfulness, but can we say “all”? Do we remember every commandment, or do we have faulty memories and bad habits. Are we always loving or do we get angry and the wrong times? Being clean “before Yahweh” requires the ultimate purity, and not just some purity. We should remember the words of Isaiah, when he was lifted up to the throne of Elohim in vision:

Woe to me! For I am silenced; for I am a man of unclean lips (Isa. 6:5).

How times did Isaiah observe Yom Kippur before this? Many, of course, but it was not sufficient for him to be cleansed from all sin. So there remains a future promise of ultimate cleansing on Yom kippurim. We have clearly established that it has not happened on a past Yom Kippur, but this does not mean we should dismiss the text or fail to understand it literally. It does say “on this day.” So this is the day, you the faithful are to be “cleansed from all your sins”

Now, I can hear the objection of the many that they feel they are already cleansed from all sins by Messiah at the cross. Does the Ruakh of Elohim witness in their heart that they are not yet pure before him? And what are they to make of the promise in Leviticus 16:30 that cleansing from “all your sins” is “on this day”? For it is one thing to think that the Torah has been suspended. It is quite another thing to think that Yahweh can cancelled His promise! But if the promise is not cancelled, then the Torah is not cancelled.

John bears witness to Yom Kippur this way:

But if we walk in the light, and he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Yeshua his Son cleanses us from all sin (1John 1:7).

Notice here that John uses the present tense, “cleanses”; also blood is a symbol for “life.” The “life” is in the blood. So to say that Messiah’s blood cleanses is the same as saying his divine life transforms us and is making us clean. But Messiah will keep on cleansing us with his life until we are perfected at the time of his return:

Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the shofar shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality (1 Cor. 15:51-53).

To “put on incorruption” as the emissary says, is the same as being cleansed from all one’s sins. Sin is unclean. The only way to be clean is to be sin free, and we will only be sin free when we no longer live in dying corruptible bodies.

But notice something about Paul’s timing here. He says “at the last trumpet; for the shofar shall sound.” Yeshua, referring to the

gathering of the holy ones in the end of days refers to the same event in like manner:

And he shall send his messengers with a great shofar and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. (Mat. 24:31).

We must ascertain that the “great shofar” is the same as a “loud shofar,” but Paul also calls it the last. Where and when is this trumpet in the Scripture? The day of Yom Teruah is on the first day of the seventh month. This however, is not the day of the Shofar Teruah:

You shall cause to pass over the Shofar Teruah in the tenth day of the seventh month; on Yom Kippurim you shall cause to pass over the Shofar in all your land.

I should point out that the word Teruah (תְּרוּעָה) means “shouting” or “making loud noise.” It is an alarm or signal that can be made with the voice or any instrument for making loud noises. Thus a “great Shofar” is the same as a Shofar Teruah.

This Shofar is the last of the last, because it is sounded only once in every fiftieth year on Yom Kippur (cf. Lev. 25:8), after which the cycle begins to count against inclusively from the fiftieth year. There is really no end of trumpets in Yahweh’s plan of time, so we must conclude that “last” simply means the last trumpet of the longest cycle.

Thus, we have a multi way correlation here. 1. The trumpet is last, 2. The day is Yom Kippur, 3. The day is for ultimate cleansing, 4. The year is the 50<sup>th</sup> year. 4. The trumpet is great or loud. If one wonders how the emissary Shaul (Paul) knew that the return of Messiah would be at the last trumpet, then we really have to look no further than the idea that he put two and two together. He must have had a deep and true appreciation for the promise of *Vayiqra* 16:30.

Remember that we already have the forgiveness of sins in Messiah’s fulfillment of the Passover. But for cleansing from sin, there remains a yet future promise to be fulfilled. This is the Yom Kippur promise of ultimate cleansing from all sins. In the divine order of things, forgiveness comes first, and then transformation comes second.

It is a tradition that Jews should wear white on Yom Kippur, which symbolizes cleansing from sin. The prophet Daniel refers to

this metaphorically:

Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand. And from the time that the regular offering is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1290 days. (Dan. 12:11).

What is the number 1290 days measuring to? The number is the answer to the question, “what is the end of these” (מָה אֶחָרִית אֵלֶּה) asked by the prophet, and he is referring to the resurrection of the dead in vs. 2, “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” So it appears that the 1290 days end with the resurrection of the dead. Can we correlate this with anything we know about the Biblical calendar. Yes.

If one starts counting in the first year of a seven year Sabbath cycle, in the seventh cycle of the Jubilee period, on the day of Yom Teruah, then one can count 1260 days to the half-way point, and from the half-way point one counts 1290 days to Yom Kippur at the end of the seventh year, and starting the year of Jubilee. The details are modeled on the next Jubilee here:

<http://www.torahtimes.org/book/page70.pdf>.

I am not here, or there, claiming that the Second Coming of Messiah must be on the next Yom Kippur that comes in the next year of Jubilee. For it is easy to show that the pattern repeats. It could be the next Jubilee after that, or however long the Almighty wishes to delay the matter. However, this Yom Kippur, and every Yom Kippur we should remember the promise of this day for the ultimate cleansing from sin, which requires the highest degree of change or transformation. Are we ready and waiting at the right time to have our soul renewed, to have all the sin rooted out and extinguished? Will the king find us waiting and expectant in the right season? Will we afflict our souls of the sin and imperfection we know about? Will we go a day without food to show how fleshly we are, and how influenced by this needy and mortal body we are? I hope we do so, and hope we ready ourselves to receive the blessing of Yom Kippur.