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Yom Kippur

from the September 21, 2015 eNews issue

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The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of Aaron's two sons when they had approached the LORD and died. The LORD told Moses. Remind your brother Aaron that at no time is he to enter the sacred place from the room that contains the curtain into the presence of the Mercy Seat on top of the ark. Otherwise, he'll die, because I will appear in a cloud at the Mercy Seat. Aaron is to enter the sacred place with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a whole burnt offering... He is to take two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a whole burnt offering from the assembly of the Israelis. Then Aaron is to bring the bull as a sin offering for himself and make atonement for himself and his household... Aaron is to cast lots over the two male goats—one lot for the LORD and the other one for the scapegoat. Aaron then is to bring the male goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and offer it as a sin offering. The male goat on which the lot fell for the scapegoat is to be brought alive into the LORD's presence to make atonement for himself. Then he is to send it into the wilderness. Aaron is then to bring the bull for a sin offering for him, thus making atonement for himself and his household... Then he is to make atonement on the sacred place on account of the uncleanness of the Israelis, their transgressions and all their sins... This will be a perpetual statute for you as you make atonement once a year for the Israelis on account of all their sins. So Moses did just as the LORD had commanded him.

— Leviticus 16:1–34, (ISV)

This year Yom Kippur begins in the evening of Tuesday, Sept. 22, and ends in the evening of Wednesday, Sept. 23. Yom Kippur [yôm hakkippurim “day of the covering over (or propitiation)"] is also known as the Day of Atonement.

From [Leviticus 16](#) it appears that even the high priest could not enter the Holy of Holies at all times and without special ceremonies; he and his household needed reconciliation as did the people of Israel and even the sanctuary itself. The Day of Atonement was proclaimed a fast, reminding the Israelites of Yahweh's holiness and their own sinfulness (including the most holy persons). A number of sacrifices were offered, 15 altogether (16 counting the [goat of Azazel](#)): 12 burnt offerings and three sin offerings ([Lev. 16:5–29](#); [Num. 29:7–11](#)). Including the ram (mentioned separately at [Num. 28:8](#)), there were 13 burnt offerings and four sin offerings. The Israelite sacrifices of reconciliation were similar in function to the purification ceremonies of the ancient Babylonians, Greeks and Romans.

The Atonement

The Day of Atonement was “a Sabbath of solemn rest” ([Lev. 16:31](#)), which included a purification ceremony in the tabernacle as well as a general fast. After the high priest had bathed and had put on his linen clothes (rather than his sacred vestments; [v. 4](#)), he chose for himself and his house a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. From the congregation he took two goats as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt offering. He then had the two goats placed at the entrance of the tent of meeting where he cast a lot, assigning one goat for Yahweh and “one for Azazel.” The goat assigned by lot to Yahweh was to be sacrificed as a sin offering, but the other goat was placed before the Lord

alive in order to reconcile, i.e., to be dedicated as a scapegoat (vv. 20–22) and subsequently to be driven into the desert, bearing the guilt of Israel's sins.

After lots were cast between the two goats, Aaron killed the bull of the sin offering for himself and his house. Taking next a pan of glowing coals from the altar of burnt offering, he placed ground up incense on the fire before the face of Yahweh—inside the veil while a cloud of smoke from the incense covered the mercy seat. Then with his finger he sprinkled blood of the bull seven times on the front side of the mercy seat and seven times in front of it, killed the goat of the sin offering, and added the blood of that animal to that of the killed bull, sprinkling the holy place and the horns of the altar of burnt offering.

An indispensable detail of the ceremony was the placing of the live goat before the altar of burnt offering. Leaning with his two hands on the head of the animal, Aaron confessed all the iniquity of the Israelites as well as their transgressions, symbolically placing them on the head of the goat. After this act an appointed person took the animal to the wilderness outside of the camp where he was to free it (cf. [Ps. 103:12](#)). (In later years the person customarily threw the goat from the cliffs so that it died.)

Finally, the high priest went to the tent of meeting, took off his linen clothes, bathed himself, put on his regular vestments, and offered the two rams as a burnt offering in the court, thus reconciling himself and the people. The bull and the goat of the sin offering were placed outside the camp, to be burned totally, including skin, flesh and dung ([Lev. 16:27](#); see [Heb. 13:11](#)). Like the person who had sent the live goat to the wilderness, the one who burned the animal had to wash his clothes and bathe himself. It may have been that the feast offering prescribed at [Num. 29:7–11](#) was given.

The only fast day prescribed in Mosaic law, the Day of Atonement (cf. [Exod. 30:10](#)) gained particular importance in postexilic times (cf. [Neh. 9:1](#)). Although the fast retained significance in New Testament times (cf. [Acts 27:9](#)), the event came to be reinterpreted among Christians in terms of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the Great High Priest ([Heb. 9:11](#)).

The End of the Ritual

Since the loss of the Temple in A.D. 70, the God-centered observances of the Torah have tragically been replaced with a man-centered, good works system of appeasement through prayer, charity and penitence.

The story of [Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai](#) and [Rabbi Joshua Ben Hananiah](#) illustrates the void left by the destruction:

[T]hey beheld the Temple ruins. "Woe is us!" cried Rabbi Joshua, "that the place where the iniquities of Israel were atoned for is now laid waste!" "My son," replied Rabbi Yohanan, "do not be grieved. We have another atonement as effective as this. And what is it? Acts of loving-kindness."

Ritually, the power of atonement was now vested in the Day of Atonement itself. As always, *teshuvah* (repentance) was required before any sin could be atoned, but for the most severe sins atonement was "suspended until the Day of Atonement which then atones." But it was now made clear that sins between human beings could only be atoned if "one pacified one's fellow" first.

It was during this post-destruction period that the liturgy of Yom Kippur was developed, including the recitation of five daily services, something that was done on other fast days and that may reflect practices already in existence before the destruction ([Mishnah Taanit 4.1](#)). Rabbinic teaching also spelled out the specific prohibitions of Yom Kippur for each individual. Although fasting remained the basic method of "afflicting one's soul," prohibitions were added against washing, anointing with oil, wearing shoes and having sexual relations ([Mishnah Yoma 8.1](#))—prohibitions that are also associated with mourning practices. Thus, the Sages were attempting to eliminate all pleasures on that day, for Yom Kippur, like all fasts, is considered a time of mourning.

Even though the temple has not been used in over 2,000 years for Yom Kippur sacrifices, it appears that a return to the traditional ways is on the horizon with the plans to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. Last March a news report came out of Jerusalem from the [Temple Institute](#) that the Altar of the Lord has been reconstructed.

The Institute, based in the Old City of Jerusalem, announced it has finished building an altar that is essentially "ready for use" in sacrificial services. The altar is the most ambitious project to date toward the goal of rebuilding the Jewish Temple. The massive outdoor altar, which took several years to build, can be operational at little more than a moment's notice, [reported the Israeli magazine Matzav Haruach](#).

Bible scholars say the rebuilding of the ancient temple is predicted throughout Scripture, starting with Daniel's vision in [Daniel 9:27](#). Jesus echoed Daniel's warning about an abomination standing in "the holy place" in the last days in [Matthew 24:15](#), followed by the Apostle John's vision of the Temple in [Revelation 11:1–2](#). Paul mentioned it in [2 Thessalonians 2:3–4](#).

A Yom Kippur of Great Significance?

There has been a lot of speculation that this year's Yom Kippur will be one of great significance. Some even claim that the Rapture has to occur this year Wednesday, Sept. 23.

These types of predictions are not new:

- [Harold Camping](#) predicted that the Rapture and devastating earthquakes would occur May 21, 2011, with God taking approximately 3 percent of the world's population into heaven, and that the end of the world would occur five months later Oct. 21. When his original date failed to come about, Camping revised his prediction and said that May 21, a "Spiritual Judgment" took place, and that both the physical

Rapture and the end of the world would occur Oct. 21, 2011.

- [Ronald Weinland](#) stated Jesus Christ would return Sept. 29, 2011. He prophesied nuclear explosions in U.S. port cities by July 2008 as the blowing of the Second Trumpet of Revelation. After his prophecy failed to come true he changed the date for the return of Jesus Christ to May 27, 2012.
- A writer, using the pen name "Ted," in *Deadline 1981, Mockers Beware*, Vol. 1, declared that the rapture was about to arrive in August 1980, or at the latest by June 20, 1981.
- According to Dr. Charles Taylor, the rapture was to take place Sept. 25, 1975.
- Oct. 28, 1992, was the predicted date for the rapture, according to an undated tract, not attributed to a named author, titled *Mission For The Coming Days*, Orange County Division, Orange County, CA.
- The founder of the Mormons, Joseph Smith, predicted that the second coming of Jesus would take place before the end of 1891.
- The Seventh Day Adventist, William Miller, predicted that Jesus would finally return between March 21, 1843, and March 21, 1844.

To our best estimation, these predictions have not come true.

It is easy to be taken in by the enthusiasm of false prophets. Paul once described the misplaced enthusiasm of the Jews: "For I can testify on their behalf that they have a zeal for God, but it is not in keeping with full knowledge." (Romans 10:2, ISV)

Jesus said, "At that time, if anyone says to you, 'Look! Here is the Messiah!' or 'There he is!', don't believe it," (Matthew 24:23, ISV)

Jesus went on to say and made it very clear, "No one knows when that day or hour will come—not the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father," (Matthew 24:36, ISV)

We are not to be date setters; we are not to put God in a box. Rather, we should follow Peter's advice:

Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep a clear head, and set your hope completely on the grace to be given you when Jesus, the Messiah, is revealed.

— 1 Peter 1:13, ISV

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