

The Hebrew Corner

This month we will consider a ritual in the Torah prescribed by God for the removal of sins, known as the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur (יום כפור, YOHEM kihp-POOR). The entire event is described in Leviticus 16, with an overview of what is to take place in the following passage from the chapter (Leviticus 16:3-10):

“Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place: with a young bullock for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering. He shall put on the holy linen coat, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired: these are holy garments; therefore shall he wash his flesh in water, and so put them on. And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. And Aaron shall offer his bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make an atonement for himself, and for his house. And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat. And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the LORD's lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering. But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness.”

The word translated as goat in the passage is sair (שעיר, sah-EER), or specifically, a male goat. One goat was to be a sacrifice to the Lord, the other to be what has become known as the scapegoat. The term

scapegoat has become part of the English language, and has come to mean a person out of a group or organization, that is blamed and often takes the consequences for all the faults or crimes of the group. As an example, a baseball player claimed he was being made a scapegoat for his team's troubles, and demanded to be traded. The true Hebrew translation is the goat for azazel (עִזָּאֵזֶל, ah-zah-ZEHL). Azazel in English means entire removal, so the sense is that the goat is to be entirely removed from the presence of the Lord.

The details of the atonement ritual is given in Leviticus 16:11-28. This was an elaborate ritual, in which a threefold atonement was to be made: for the priest (Aaron was the first), the tabernacle, and the people, which consisted of the following:

Atonement for the priest:

1. Kill the bull of the sin offering.
2. Take a censer of burning coals of fire from the altar.
3. Fill both hands with incense.
4. Bring the censer and incense within the veil.
5. Put the incense on the fire to cover the mercy seat (so that the priest does not die).
6. Take the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with the finger on the east side of the mercy seat, and seven times in front of the mercy seat.

Atonement for the tabernacle:

1. Kill the goat of the sin offering.
2. Sprinkle the blood of it upon and in front of the mercy seat.
3. Take the blood of the bull and goat, and put it on the horns of the altar.

4. Sprinkle the blood upon the altar seven times.

Atonement for the people:

1. Lay both hands upon the head of the goat for azazel.
2. Confess the sins of the people of Israel.
3. Give the goat to a strong man of the congregation.
4. The strong man is to lead the goat into the wilderness where no one lives, and let it go.

Completion of the ritual:

1. Take off the linen garments.
2. Bathe with water.
3. Put on regular garments.
4. Offer up the ram for the priest, and the ram for the congregation, on the altar for burnt offerings.
5. Offer up the fat of the sacrificial goat on the altar for a sin offering.
6. The strong man that led the goat for Azazel washes his clothes and bathes, then comes back to the camp.
7. A man from the congregation takes the remains of the bull and goat for the sin offerings outside the camp and burns them.
8. The man who burns the remains washes his clothes, bathes, and comes back to the camp.

This entire practice was repeated once a year in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month. However this was a foreshadowing of a better plan that God had for us.

Hebrews 10:1-4 points out the inadequacy of these yearly sacrifices:

“For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the

very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.”

God demonstrated that he had a better plan, by giving us the perfect sacrifice, in his son Yeshua (Hebrews 10:9-17):

“Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”

No longer is there any need for a yearly ritual of bull, ram, and goat sacrifices, because Jesus, our Yeshua, provided the perfect sacrifice, an acceptable sacrifice, in that he committed no sin. And as God laid the sins of all mankind upon him, and separated himself from Yeshua for a time on the cross, he was given up to azazel, and thus

removed our sins away from God permanently. All that we need to do is to accept his sacrifice as a free gift, receive the Holy Spirit, and follow his lead in becoming the person that God wants us to be.

Once again, I write to you on Saturday before sundown, so Shabbat Shalom to you and your family! Have a great month.