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A Study of *Yom Kippur* with Special Attention to the
Hebrew Root *K-ph-r* and its Old Testament Occurrences

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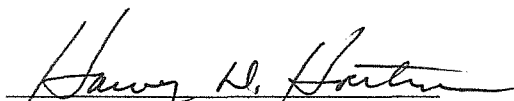
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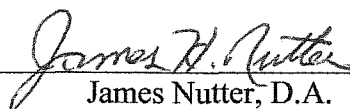
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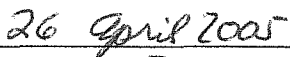
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Abstract

Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement is a Jewish feast first given in Leviticus 16. While the concept of atonement in the Old Testament means, “to cover,” this feast has not ceased in meaning. In fact, the Day of Atonement is relevant for today’s society and is highly important for serious study by the biblical scholar as well as for personal devotion by any Christian. This feast reveals important details about the character of God as well as the nature of sin. It also is important because the New Testament itself makes a connection to the Day of Atonement in the book of Hebrews. The writer of Hebrews believed, as did Jesus, that He did not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it. Also, the person and work of Christ may be clearly identified within the boundaries of this feast, making it important for Christological study.

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Hebrew Root *K-ph-r* and its Old Testament Occurrences

There is a problem that exists in many churches today and among many believers. This problem can be stated in the form of a question: “Is the Old Testament relevant for today?” Now, perhaps argumentation continues over certain passages from Genesis, Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, and certain of the other major prophets. However, such books as Leviticus and Numbers are seemingly forgotten when clergymen prepare their sermons. Yet, there is much to be learned from Leviticus, in particular the feast of *Yom Kippur* or the Day of Atonement.

If even a part of the Old Testament that is usually considered irrelevant is shown to be relevant to today’s culture, then a small-sized chunk of Scripture is redeemed from the pile of Old Testament writings that are seen as unimportant and are overlooked. For the purposes of this thesis, only the feast of *Yom Kippur* or the Day of Atonement will be examined. A single feast can be more easily analyzed and examined thoroughly to see if it indeed holds any theological significance for application for the modern Christian. If it does not hold any significance, then it may be discarded as unimportant. If, however, as is the contention of the author, this feast does hold some significance for study and sermon alike, then it should be studied for the benefit of all Christians. In fact, the Day of Atonement is relevant for today’s society and is highly important for serious study by the biblical scholar as well as for personal devotion by any Christian. This feast reveals important details about the character of God as well as the nature of sin. It also is important because the New Testament itself makes a connection to the Old Testament Day of Atonement in the book of Hebrews. Also, the person and work of Christ may be

clearly distinguished within the boundaries of this feast, making it important for Christological study.

Paul lends his support to recognition of the festivals as being prophetic of the coming Christ. In Colossians 6:17, he wrote: “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These were a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.” In these verses Paul says that the festivals were symbolic of the coming reality found in Christ. In other words, if one looks at and studies the festivals of the Jewish nation, one should find Christ (Glaser, 1987). Glaser (1987) goes on to contend that the feasts of Israel are important for Jewish and non-Jewish believers alike. He writes that Jewish believers can find a fuller appreciation for their heritage in the feasts since they have found the Messiah of the feasts. Also, non-Jewish believers can obtain a greater breadth and depth to their own faith after a study of the feasts.

The Old Testament idea of atonement transcends the Old Testament into the New. In the Old Testament, the word atonement (*k-ph-r*) carried more of the idea of a covering of sins (Gustafson, 1958). The Levitical priests would cover the sins of the people daily with sacrificial offerings brought by the people. *Yom Kippur* or the Day of Atonement, the annual feast and sacrifice, covered or made atonement for the sins of the people once a year for the year. However, this only allowed God to “pass over” the sins of the people; it did not wipe them clean (Gustafson, 1958).

The subject of *Yom Kippur* will be treated from the basic Hebrew root (*k-ph-r*) behind the idea of atonement in the Old Testament. Without a treatment of the Hebrew root, the basic idea of atonement from an Old Testament mindset cannot be attained. The

feast itself will then be examined along with some practical applications for today, the connection of atonement within the ceremony of *Yom Kippur* to the New Testament in Hebrews, and some observations on the character of God and the nature of sin.

The Hebrew root k-ph-r as a noun in the Old Testament

In order to more fully obtain a correct idea of the dynamics and the idea behind the word *atonement*, it is necessary to study the background of the Hebrew word. Thus by comparison of the different uses of these Hebrew words within their proper contexts, one is able to arrive at a more complete idea and/or definition. There is one Hebrew root for *atonement*—*k-ph-r* (*kippur* in the noun form). *Kippur* is the word used in the name for the feast day called *Yom Hapkippurim* or *Yom Kippur*. This form functions as a noun and carries with it the idea of coverings (Brown, Driver, & Briggs, 1997). It is found in eight verses throughout the Pentateuch and nowhere else in Scripture. Exodus 29:36 has one usage of this word: “And thou shalt offer every day a bullock for a sin offering for atonement: and thou shalt cleanse the altar, when thou hast made an atonement for it, and thou shalt anoint it, to sanctify it.” Averbeck (1997) notes that as the object of the preposition, *kippur* indicates a sort of covering for the sins and iniquities perpetrated against the altar by the presence of the people. This form is also used again in Exodus 30:10 and 16.

In chapter 23 of Leviticus, in which the Day of Atonement is laid out by God as a feast day, this word is used in verses 27 and 28. These verses specify the day of the month that would be known as a “day of *kippur* (or coverings)”:

Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of

atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD. And ye shall do no work in that same day: for it is a day of atonement, to make an atonement for you before the LORD your God.

Twice in as many verses, the Israelites are told that this day would be known as a day of *kippur*. This indicates that the Israelites were to know that these days were not specifically days in which all their sins would be completely taken away. After the ceremony of the Day of Atonement, their sin would still remain in a very real form. However, after this ritual was completed, their sin would be covered, provided the ritual was completed in the manner prescribed by God.

In Numbers 5:8, the form *kippur* is used in an entirely different scenario from the actual Day of Atonement. Here is given a situation in which a person commits a sin and wrongs another. He is commanded to make restitution of plus one-fifth to the person whom he has wronged. If, for example, the wrong was stealing, then the thief would be obliged to return what was stolen or something equivalent or the value in money plus one-fifth of the value in addition. If there is no way to make the restitution to the person or to a close relative of that person, then he is commanded to make the restitution to God. This is to be done along with offering the “ram of *kippur* (or covering)” as an offering to the Lord. Only upon the offering of the ram of atonement could the man have his sins atoned for or covered over. Again, in Numbers 29:11, a sin offering is named as an offering for atonement. The sin offering was designed to cover over the sin of the one who gave it. It was never designated by God to take away sin, but merely to cover it in

the sight of God, so the person could be accepted into the nation of Israel.

The Hebrew root k-ph-r as a passive voice verb in the Old Testament

The remaining form used to signify atonement has two differing verb stems. In both cases, strong emotion is supposed to accompany the word but the voice varies. The Hebrew stem Piel is used to signify active voice in which the subject is actually doing the action or in this case making the atonement or atoning. The Hebrew stem Pual is used for passive voice in which the subject is receiving the action, receiving the atonement made by someone else (Brown, Driver, & Briggs, 1997). The passive voice root is used in only one place to mean atonement—Exodus 29:33. This verse talks about the portion of the priests and is used to signify the sacrifice that made atonement or the offering from which the priests could eat a portion. Significantly, the offering does not do the atoning for the person: “And they shall eat those things *wherewith the atonement was made*, to consecrate and to sanctify them: but a stranger shall not eat thereof, because they are holy” (italics added). Instead, the offering is the vessel whereby atonement was made. The work of atonement was either performed by the priest or by God Himself.

Elsewhere, *k-ph-r* in the passive voice is used with three different meanings, all of which have a common thread. In Numbers 35 Moses is teaching on the cities of refuge. He lays out the basic format for the cities, stating that God will appoint the cities in the land. Moses provides the basic guidelines for each city concerning a killer who kills accidentally. He was allowed to flee to one of the cities of refuge and be safe there from the avenger of blood, who was a near relative of the dead person. If, however, the avenger of blood caught the killer outside of one of the cities, he was allowed to kill him

without consequence. The killer was to stay within the city of refuge until the high priest currently serving died. In verse 33 Moses addressed the issue of premeditated murder. In this case there was no refuge for the murderer, and he was not safe from the avenger of blood anywhere, even in the city of refuge. In such a case the people of Israel were commanded to kill the murderer to purge the iniquity from the land because the land could not be cleansed (*k-ph-r*) until the murderer was killed.

In Isaiah 28:18 the prophet is speaking concerning the coming Messiah. At that time, he writes, the people's covenant with death will be disannulled (*k-ph-r*). The idea conveyed by this verse indicates a complete break; however, death is still present today even after the coming of the Messiah and his finished work of salvation. Instead, the prophet more likely refers to a time when the covenant with death has been weakened. In support of this, the apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:55-57, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." The Messiah did not do away with death but rather took away the sting or power of death over the believer.

The next usage of *k-ph-r*, occurring four times in the Scriptures, means "to be purged." In Proverbs 16:6 iniquity is purged by mercy and truth. In Isaiah 6:7 we are given the example of Isaiah when he saw the Lord in all His glory. Isaiah was struck with the immensity of his own sin and cried out that he was a man of unclean lips, living among the people of a perverse generation. He fell to his face before the awesome holiness of almighty God. An angel brought a live coal from the altar in the temple of heaven and touched it to Isaiah's lips. He proclaimed to Isaiah that his sins were purged

(*k-ph-r*). In order to stand before the Lord, Isaiah required a purging or pardoning of his sins. A similar idea of pardoning is found in the other two uses of the passive voice of *k-ph-r* in Isaiah 22:14 and 27:9.

The Hebrew root k-ph-r as an active voice verb in the Old Testament

Probably the most extensively used Hebrew word for atonement during the ceremonies with *Yom Kippur* is the word *k-ph-r* in the active voice in the Piel stem. Not only is it used 12 times within the description of the actual ceremony in Leviticus 16, but it is also used about 65 times in the Old Testament with a translation of “to make atonement.” In Leviticus 16 it is used in verses 6, 11, 16, 17, 18, 24, 27, 30, 32, 33, and 34 with reference to Aaron making atonement for something or someone. In each reference during the ceremony, the Bible speaks of Aaron offering the blood from the sacrifice of either a bull or goat for himself or the people or the tent of meeting and its various articles. As many times as *k-ph-r* is used in the active voice (Piel) to mean “to make atonement,” it is used 21 more times to be translated in different ways. However, each time it is used, there is the common theme of “covering.”

In Genesis 6, Noah hears a command from God concerning a coming flood that will destroy the world. God provides Moses with blueprints for an ark in which he and his family can weather the coming storm. At the beginning of giving the dimensions and specific instructions to Moses, verse 14 states, “Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch.” The command “shalt pitch” is the word *k-ph-r*. Interestingly, God is instructing Noah to cover the ark with pitch or tar to seal it from water, and to describe this, Moses uses the

verb *k-ph-r* to describe what took place. According to Averbek (1997), this is the only place where *k-ph-r* is used this way.

A few chapters later, in Genesis 32, there is the story of twin brothers—Jacob and Esau. After lying and deceiving Esau for most of his life, Jacob finally returned after obtaining two wives only to hear that Esau was coming to meet him with a mob of men. To forestall Esau’s wrath, Jacob selected certain animals of his flock and sent them ahead to Esau, instructing his servants in verse 20: “And say ye moreover, Behold, thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept of me.” The word “appease” found in that verse is the verb *k-ph-r*. In this situation, it clearly carries the idea of an appeasement. Jacob was offering a gift to appease Esau; and, in effect in Esau’s mind, covering over the former wrongs that Jacob had done to him. Jacob sent Esau a large gift, in excess of three hundred animals in order to appease him, showing how large Jacob considered his wrongs to be in Esau’s mind.

Twice in the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy 21:8 and 32:43, *k-ph-r* is translated “to be merciful.” In Deuteronomy 21, a situation is given of finding a person dead, with no one knowing who had killed this person. The elders of the city nearest the body were commanded to bring a heifer that had not reproduced or been used for plowing to a certain valley and perform a ceremony of cleansing in order to take away the sin of the land. Verse 8 provides the prayer that the elders were commanded to pray, “Be merciful, O LORD, unto thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and lay not innocent blood unto thy people of Israel’s charge. And the blood shall be forgiven them.” Here, Averbek (1997) notes, *k-ph-r* is used as a humble request to the Almighty Creator-God

that He would not charge the land and nation of Israel with innocent blood since they could not punish the killer. By performing this ceremony, the elders could cover this sin of possible murder even though they could not purge it through the death of the murderer. Thus, God could cover the sin of innocent blood being shed in this case.

God spoke to the prophet Ezekiel, giving him a message to the people of Israel about their sins and transgressions against God. In chapter 16 God compares Jerusalem with what He names as its sisters—Samaria and Sodom, both known as cities of great wickedness, whose people committed many abominable things such as child sacrifice, homosexuality, bestiality, etc. God foretold that judgment would come upon Jerusalem, meaning all the people of Judah—the Southern kingdom to which Ezekiel prophesied. However, in verse 63, He also spoke of one day when Israel would become aware of their sins and God’s judgment would end: “That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord GOD.” Here the word “pacified” is the translation from *k-ph-r*. God is indicating the time when He would restore Israel to the land and her glory after His time of judgment had ended after His anger was appeased or covered (*k-ph-r*). The reason for the judgment God poured out upon Israel of captivity was the sins of the people. When those sins were balanced by the judgments, then God would be pacified and reconciled to Israel.

The next usage for *k-ph-r* presents a contrast, showing the nature of this translation. In Psalms 78 the Psalmist recounts some of Israel’s history. He remembers the amount of rebellion of the people against God and His commands. Then he reveals the great mercy of God in verse 38: “But He, being full of compassion, forgave their

iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned He His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath.” Time and time again, Israel rebelled and forsook God with their actions in the wilderness. They committed idolatry with the golden calf, grumbled against Moses’ leadership, complained about the lack of food and later, that the *mannah* they were given was getting old. Also, they looked back often to Egypt as a wonderful place. There was ample reason for God to simply wipe out the entire nation of Israel because of their collective sins. However, in His great compassion, He covered (*k-ph-r*) their sin, choosing to allow the blood of the sacrifices to cover the iniquities of the people and forgive their sin. However, this does not signify a final purging or forgiving of their sins, as the sacrifices were perpetual and temporal in nature. Jeremiah 18:23 contains part of Jeremiah’s prayer to God that He would not forgive (*k-ph-r*) the sins of those that had sinned against him. While on the one hand this looks rather heartless and cruel, one must remember that the very people who were so cruel to Jeremiah as, at one point, to throw him into a muddy cistern to rot were the very people who were least likely to turn to God out of any true repentance. The prayer of Jeremiah might have been that even if they followed the prescribed ceremony without a heart that was towards God, He would not cover their sins with the blood of animals. Averbeck (1997) notes that *k-ph-r* here is parallel to *m-h-h* later in the verse which means wipe (or blot) out: this suggests that *k-ph-r* means “to wipe out” here.

Four times in the Old Testament *k-ph-r* is translated “make reconciliation.” In Leviticus 8 the anointing and purifying ceremony of Moses is set forth in great detail. In verse 15, it is made abundantly clear that the reason for all this ceremony and detail is to “make reconciliation” for the priests, the tent of meeting, and all the articles surrounding

worship. It is significant that reconciliation does not always mean complete forgiveness. The very term reconciliation carries the idea that two parties are thus able to tolerate each other. In the case of Esau and Jacob, Jacob gave a gift to his brother to cover over his wrongs and appease his brother. They were thus reconciled to each other and able to live near each other although Scriptures record that Jacob was unwilling to travel on with Esau and actually live in the same land as he (Gen. 33:12-18). Only because of the yearly ritual of the Day of Atonement was God able to continue living among the Israelites despite their wanton sins. However, this purification of the articles in the tent was only a temporary covering. Every year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest was to re-purify the altar before the Lord and the Holy of Holies in order for God to continue to be reconciled to the people of Israel. And every year, this temporary covering would be nullified by the sins of the people yet again. A second use of *k-ph-r* with this definition is prophetic in nature—looking forward to the coming of the Messiah and the final reconciliation of the people. In Daniel 9:24 Daniel was given the prophecy of the sixty-nine weeks that were to come before reconciliation would be made for the sins of the people of Israel. Many biblical scholars, such as Wood (1973), have been able set this date to about the very time of the Messiah and possibly the exact date upon which Jesus was crucified for the sins of the world. In this final act of redemption, the fullness of reconciliation is seen while it is not seen in the Old Testament. Moses made reconciliation for the tent of meeting, a reconciliation that had to be renewed every year; whereas, Jesus, with His own blood, made a final reconciliation that never needs to be renewed for the rest of eternity.

Proverbs is a book of wise sayings collected over time. In chapter 16 and verse

14, Solomon makes the observation that a wise man can pacify (*k-ph-r*) a king. When a king was angry, heads would often literally roll. In order to maintain some peace in the kingdom at large, a wise man would use his wisdom to turn aside or pacify the wrath of the king. Thus, the wrath of the king was extinguished without horrific consequences.

During the time of the kings in Judah, there was something like a spiritual “roller-coaster ride.” One king, or rarely a couple of kings in a row, would institute reforms and lead the people in true worship of God. Then, the next king or several kings would lead the people into idol worship and spiritual darkness. The people would therefore alternate between periods of righteous living and moral decay. During this period, there arose a king named Hezekiah who was a good king. He instituted several reforms including a return to the biblical feast of Passover. However, some of the people were not clean and still ate the Passover as they were seeking God. Hezekiah prayed that God would pardon (*k-ph-r*) the people because their hearts were seeking after God. God listened to this prayer and healed (or possibly “made whole”) the people from their iniquity of eating the Passover in an unclean manner. God covered over the iniquity of the people, allowing them to celebrate the Passover because their hearts had the right attitude.

K-ph-r is used four times in the Old Testament to mean purge or purge away. Probably the best example of this definition is found in the Psalms. Asaph, realizing the sins of the people of Israel, implores God not to remember them. In Psalm 79:9, Asaph pleads with God to purge away the sins of Israel and remain among them for His glory. Asaph is fully aware, as were many if not all of the patriarchs, that the sins of Israel will not be finally purged until the coming of the Messiah. However, he was seeking a temporary purging of their sins in order for God to be glorified and His holiness to

remain untainted. The sins of the people were able to taint the Tent of Meeting where God was worshipped, requiring the high priest to make atonement for it every Day of Atonement. Thus, Asaph was asking for this same purging of the sins of the people in order for God's presence to remain among them.

Isaiah was a prophet to the Israelite people, specifically the nation of Judah. He foretold many events including Messianic events. However, within some of his prophecies that were directed towards his people and current times, he foretold what the end result of Israel's idolatry and sin would be. He wrote, "Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know" (47:11 KJV; note: see NIV and NASB for different translations of *put off*). The words *put off* translate the word *k-ph-r* which is translated to "make atonement" elsewhere. No amount of legalistic, ritualistic sacrifices would cover the people's sin. Only a heart that was truly repentant before God could stave off the destiny and chastisement that awaited the people of Israel at the hands of the Babylonians. God's mercy is clearly evident in this warning before the occurrence in order to give the people of Israel another chance to repent and turn to Him. If they did not, they were told that it could surely not be put off.

In Ezekiel, there is an interesting translation for the word *k-ph-r*. In 45:20, there is the commandment to apply blood to the house of the prince in order to reconcile it every seven days. In this prophecy about the future, the people are told specifically to reconcile the house as the sins of the people could even make the house odious in the sight of God. Interestingly, here, as during the Day of Atonement, an inanimate object

can become impure through the sins of the people and need some type of purification.

K-ph-r is used, meaning to reconcile, although once again this is only a temporary covering in nature as it had to be repeated every seven days.

Yom Kippur—the Historical Ceremony

According to Montefiore (1972), the sacrificial system in the Old Testament was the means whereby the sins of the people were covered. However, without an inward repentance or purification of heart, the outward symbols did not truly serve to grant a covering for the individual who had sinned. This message was broadcast by the prophets during the time of the kings in Israel. At that time the Israelites tended to view the ritualistic aspects of atonement as a sort of guarantee for inward purification, even without repentance. Forgiveness, when obtained through the system, came only as a direct gift from God. The ritualistic aspects of the sacrificial system were ordered by God as a way to cover over and forgive the sins of the Israelites. The priests could not actually grant forgiveness, as this was solely the domain of God. In fact, it was very clear that the priest “made atonement,” and then God forgave the sins of the one offering the sacrifice as a direct result. The priest himself did not forgive the sins of the supplicant Israelite; he was merely the instrument used to perform the sacrifice.

Now that a clear understanding of atonement has been attained one is better able to discern the possible meaning within the Day of Atonement. The original account for the Day of Atonement is found in Leviticus 16. At this time the Israelites had already been to Mount Sinai to receive the Law, had built the Tabernacle according to God’s specifications, had installed Aaron and his sons as priests, and had gained the approval of

God on all the work. According to several scholars, Leviticus 16 follows in sequence of actions closely on the end of Leviticus 10. In that chapter, Nadab and Abihu, two of the sons of Aaron, offered what the King James Bible calls “strange fire” before the Lord along with the incense. At the first sacrifice offered on the altar of burnt offering God had sent fire from heaven to consume the animal. Thereafter the Israelites were commanded to keep that fire burning perpetually and use it in all of their sacrifices and offerings that required fire. Apparently Nahab and Abihu disregarded this command and used a different fire than the one commanded for the incense; so God struck them dead at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. It seems that immediately after this desecration Moses was given the instructions for the Day of Atonement. Montefiore (1972) suggests that the Day of Atonement was originally something like an emergency measure instituted to cleanse the Tent of Meeting. It would make sense that after the deaths of two people, priests no less, within the Tent precincts, there would need to be some type of cleansing ceremony in order to purge the Tent from this uncleanness. However, it must also be noted that later the ceremony of *Yom Kippur* was fully instituted as a feast day and integrated into the fall calendar of Israel’s festivals. Whether it was originally an emergency measure or not, it was ordained by God as a perpetual ceremony for the rest of Israelite history.

There were four main elements to *Yom Kippur*. First, the people were to “hold a convocation” or be drawn to the altar at the Tent of Meeting. Later that place would be in the Temple. Second, they were to “humble their souls.” There has been some debate over this phrase; however, the idea represented here most likely means a fast as seems to be indicated in Isaiah 58:3 which says, “Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou

seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.” Here, the “affliction” of the soul is equated with the idea of a fast. At this time, Israel was not seeking after God in any part of their daily lives or their worship. They were far from God in heart but still maintained a semblance of worship, as they still fasted on occasion. The Israelites were discouraged that their “affliction of the soul” or what seems to be fasting was not acceptable in the sight of God. It is possible that this affliction of soul was a fast in the case of the Day of Atonement. In any case, it was certainly understood that a repentant attitude and contrite heart were requirements. Third, they were to “present an offering” which was the key idea upon which *Yom Kippur* was constructed; fourth, as expected in a special Sabbath like this feast, they were to “do no work” (Glaser 1987, pp. 82-83).

Before explaining the actual ceremony, God prefaced His remarks with instructions to Aaron. He warned against coming near the Tent of Meeting irreverently. Considering the surrounding circumstances, it was very appropriate that God gave this warning. Glaser (1987) expounded further on the warning given by God. God had commanded that no one could enter the Holy of Holies. Only once per year on the Day of Atonement was a single exception allowed. God met with the high priest within the Holy of Holies as a cloud of glory, Shekinah. This cloud hovered over the Mercy Seat that rested upon the Ark of the Covenant. Only in this location could the sins of the people be covered and men make peace with God. God warned against coming near the Tent of Meeting because of that cloud. According to Milgrom (1991), cloud referenced in 16:2 could have two other interpretations. He holds that the incense the high priest burned on a pan of coals within the Holy of Holies produced this cloud. If this were the

case, then it may have served as a shield of sorts to keep the priest from viewing the actual Ark. Some scholars, according to Milgrom, hold to the view that it was the same cloud of God's presence that led Israel in the desert and rested over the Tent of Meeting when the people were camped. This verse could lend itself towards the latter view. This is still before the actual ceremony is outlined and could be part of the warning from God not to enter the Tent of Meeting. If this cloud was the one from the incense, then there shouldn't be a cause to warn the high priest away from the Tent of Meeting because of this cloud. If, however, this cloud was the manifestation of the presence of holy God, then there was cause to be warned not to enter the Tent of Meeting with a careless or casual attitude. In addition, the text indicates that the Lord Himself would appear in the cloud, "I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat" (Lev. 16:2). Milgrom (1991) suggests that the priest specifically raised the cloud so that God could manifest Himself in the cloud. However, if this were the case, then the priest would, in effect, have been controlling God which would negate the purpose of the Day of Atonement which was to propitiate God and cover over the sins of the people. If the high priest could do something to control God, then it is a little absurd that he would still need to appease a god he could control.

The next couple of steps in the ceremony are the bringing of the animals (a bullock and two goats in addition to the normal animals for the burnt offerings) into the court of the Tent of Meeting and the ceremonial washing by the priest as well as the donning of special garments for this occasion. Milgrom (1991) notes that the priest was required to wash his whole body before entering the Holy of Holies. He needed special purification for his body over and above the normal hand and foot cleansing needed at the

usual times before entering the very presence of God. He was to bathe his entire body, making all his flesh ceremonially clean and pure. Also, the priest, signifying the purity and holiness, wore special linen garments used only for this occasion. God required absolute purity over and above the normal amount He required, as on this occasion, the high priest would access the very presence of God.

Interestingly, the high priest was commanded simply to wear linen garments for this occasion. Moses was given very explicit instructions in Exodus 28 for very ornate and beautiful priestly garments especially for the high priest. However, on this particular occasion the high priest was commanded to wear simple linen garments. Milgrom (1991) speculated in his commentary on this phenomenon and the question of “why a simple linen garment?” (pp. 1016-1017). The high priest changed out of his ordinary, ornate robes into a simpler outfit made of linen that seems to have been reserved strictly for this one day a year. Angels are always seen pictured in white linen; so there may be some parallels to a type of “heavenly garb” (pp. 1016-1017). Angels are currently the only beings with access to God and the earth. On this one day, the high priest was allowed access to the mercy seat where God’s presence was. Therefore, perhaps this type of robe was required for such. Perhaps a simpler explanation exists. These garments may have been reserved for this day as the amount of blood being sprinkled could otherwise have badly soiled the ornate, high priestly garments. The washing and changing of the garments in a holy place could lend itself to this view. Whether the different garb was worn to typify heavenly garb or for practical considerations, it is very evident that the garment’s status as set apart for this one day only shows how holy and sacred God is. These garments could not be used for anything other than the time when the high priest

would come into the presence of God, either literally or figuratively.

Another possible explanation for the change of garb is given by Wenham (1979). He suggests that the simpler, less flashy garb of the high priest showed a humbling experience. The high priest, as the ultimate mediator between God and man, wore very regal, costly robes most of the time. However, when he was to enter the very presence of God, he donned the garb of a servant, becoming in appearance much like a slave. Interestingly, Jesus, at the Last Supper, takes upon Himself the role of a servant. And, ultimately, He would subject Himself to crucifixion between two thieves—a very humiliating death.

In addition to the normal burnt offerings of the day, there were three offerings including two blood sacrifices. The high priest was to take two handfuls of the incense only used in the temple and offer them on a pan of coals from the altar of God before the Mercy Seat. The cloud arising from the incense would serve to shroud the Mercy Seat in preparation for what followed. Then, the high priest would offer the blood of a slaughtered bullock for himself and his family. Next, the blood of one from a pair of goats was chosen by lots and offered on the Mercy Seat by sprinkling. That same blood was sprinkled on the Holy of Holies, the Tent of Meeting, and the altar in the court to purify them (Glaser 1987). Milgrom (1991) adds that the high priest would cast lots to decide which goat would be killed and which would be the scapegoat. According to Rabbinical tradition, the high priest would have a box with two lots demarcating “Azazel” and “for the Lord” (pp. 1019-1020). The box was shaken, and the high priest would reach in with both hands, drawing forth the lots and placing them, literally, upon the goats’ heads. The left one would receive the lot in his left hand and the right, the right.

Thus, the decision was God's alone.

Probably the most unique element of *Yom Kippur* was the ceremony of the scapegoat, or *Azazel*. According to Glaser (1987), this word *azazel* is only used in this ceremony four times and nowhere else in Hebrew Scriptures. The possible root for this word is the Arabic word *azal* which means "to turn off or away." A similar Arabic word *azala* means "to banish" or "remove." In essence, the people were meant to see two parts of one sin offering. Leviticus 16:5 clearly makes the distinction that both goats were a single sin offering. Aaron is not commanded to take two goats for separate sin offerings. Instead, they are one sin offering. One goat was slaughtered to cover and cleanse their sins. Those sins were then placed on the second goat to be taken away from the people.

There are three possible explanations for this unique word *azazel*. The first view is that it was the name of a demon that inhabited the area around Sinai. This is the most likely possibility according to Milgrom (1991). The goat was not sacrificial in nature as there is no mention of any sort of killing (either by a demon or any other creature) or the use of its blood ritualistically. Instead, it almost carries the idea of sending the sins and transgressions of Israel back to the originator as it were. Although this might be a tempting explanation as an aggressive stance, it is probably not the most likely. This would be much like making an offering to a demonic power which would definitely stand against the meaning of this day in its sacrificial nature before God. *Azazel* could be the name of a specific place of desolation near Sinai where the people were at the time of the command. However, this is not likely as the Israelites were very much a nomadic people. The third possibility is that *azazel* was simply the name for the goat, which the KJV translates as "scapegoat." Perhaps the most likely literal translation for *azazel* would be

“the remover.” As such, it would be the name of the goat that carried away or removed the sins of the people at the end of the ceremony of *Yom Kippur*.

Finally, after explaining the ceremony, God commanded that this feast be celebrated by Israel “perpetually.” In Hebrew thought, there were a series of “ages.” Each age had a beginning and an end. The Israelites understood that the Day of Atonement was to be celebrated each year throughout that age. When a new age of forgiveness dawned, *Yom Kippur* could end. At the coming of the Messiah, Jesus, a new age began (Glaser 1987). Therefore the Day of Atonement does not need to be celebrated by either Jew or Gentile as anything more than a memorial feast in today’s culture. Because of this, some may question the validity of this study on the Day of Atonement. However, there are some important applications and possible illustrations that can be drawn from this feast.

Practical Applications for the Believer today

As noted previously, the particular washing of his whole body undergone by the priest was different from the normal ceremonial cleansing for the everyday sacrifices. Milgrom (1991) notes that the high priest was required to wash his whole body before entering the Holy of Holies. Before entering the very presence of God the priest needed special purification for his body over and above the normal hand and foot cleansing needed daily. Isaiah 6:5-6 contains the account of the prophet’s words when he was brought before the very presence of God. Isaiah was struck with a sense of his own sinfulness and inadequacy before God’s holiness. He cried out, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of

unclean lips....” Then an angel took a live coal from the altar before God and touched it to Isaiah’s lips, granting him a special cleansing, enabling him to stand before God unashamedly. In the same way, believers today require a special cleansing, obtained at Salvation, in order to stand before God unashamedly.

The placement of this feast in the Jewish festival calendar may be significant. *Yom Kippur* is placed between the Feast of Trumpets and the Feast of Tabernacles. It is interesting to note that the Feast of Trumpets called Israel to repent, whereas the Feast of Tabernacles was a time of rejoicing. God can only redeem a people that has humbly repented before Him and can only bless a people with true joy once they are redeemed and cleansed in His sight. *Yom Kippur* called upon the people to act upon their repentance (the Feast of Trumpets) in order to experience true joy (the Feast of Tabernacles) (Glaser 1987). In addition to these implications, there are a few aspects of God’s character as well as an important lesson for spiritual leaders that may be learned from the Day of Atonement.

Woven into the ceremony of the Day of Atonement is an implicit warning to all spiritual leaders according to Monser (1886). Because of the position of the high priest, his sin required a bullock for atonement. He represented God to the people; therefore, in a sense, his sin had greater consequences because of his position. So a greater sacrifice was required. Similarly, 1 Timothy 5:20 makes it very clear that church leaders are to be chastised before the church if they fall into sin. Because their influence is so much more widespread than a layman’s, their sin can influence more people. In order to ensure that the people are less likely to fall into the same sin, it is important that the leader be rebuked publicly so that “others also may fear.” Upon the Day of Atonement the high

priest carried the blood of the sin offering to be sprinkled upon the Mercy Seat, symbolic of the throne of God Himself. The sin of the priest and of Israel tainted the earthly symbols of the throne of God as ours does. However, the blood of a sacrifice shed for the high priest purified and covered his sins, allowing him then to carry the same forgiveness to all Israel (Monser 1886). Today, church leaders have a great responsibility to be pure before God in order to carry a message of purity and His forgiveness to the people.

The New Testament, Christ Connection

The writer of Hebrews in 9:7 speaks about the high priest carrying the blood of animals into the sanctuary as an offering for his own atonement as well as that of the people. Later in this chapter he talks about Jesus who did not have to offer any additional sacrifice for Himself, being the spotless Lamb of God. Harrison (1980) further elaborates upon this point that Jesus is the ultimate high priest. Jesus did not have to follow the ritualistic sacrifices for His own sins because He had no sins of His own for which to atone, unlike the high priest on the Day of Atonement. Instead, Jesus sacrificed Himself for us and (either figuratively or literally) offered His own blood on the altar of heaven for all in much the same way that the high priest did during the Day of Atonement ritual. Norman Young (1981) concurs with this assessment. He notes that the Greek lends itself to the idea of Christ's dispersal of His own blood on a "Holy of Holies." Young thinks that this is simply meant to be the presence of God. This reference is made in order to show that there is a new age being perpetuated which is not based upon animal sacrifice. In order to open this new age, a blood sacrifice was needed to atone or purge the sins of the people who would enter into this new covenant. The earthly tent was divided into

two areas to symbolize the removal of the presence of God from the rest of the tent. In this way Jesus entered the presence of God in heaven—the perfect tent or the real Holy of Holies—after making the sacrifice for the people.

Young (2001) further notes in a more recent article that Hebrews 6:19-20 could very well be referring to the Day of Atonement when it speaks of Jesus' entering the veil. The Greek words lend support to the idea that the veil is most probably the one separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the tent. If this is the case, as is the traditional view, then Jesus would indeed be the fulfillment of the Day of Atonement ritual. However, in a contrasting article, Davidson (2001) presents a slightly different view for the source material for Hebrews 6:19-20. His contention is that the more probable scenario is that of an inauguration. In evidence of this, he cites the reference to Melchizedek, compared to Jesus by the author of Hebrews, instead of Aaron, who was the one that carried out the Day of Atonement ritual. Moses, who was more of a leader/ruler for the people, did indeed enter the Holy of Holies in order to inaugurate it upon the completion of the tent (Ex. 40:1-9, Lev. 8:10-12, Num. 7:1). Davidson (2001) contends that these passages are the Old Testament background for this passage of Hebrews. If this is the case, then it is possible that the traditional view has been wrong, and Jesus may not be the fulfillment of this particular ritual although that does not necessarily detract from His claim to be the fulfillment of the law.

Davidson's position may be in error on a couple of points as Young (2002) reveals. In the first place, Moses was never referred to as a high priest whereas Jesus is said to be a high priest, just not after the order of the Aaronic high priests. Second, in no place in any of the dedication or inauguration ceremonies in the Old Testament is the

terminology of going “within the veil” utilized as it is in Hebrews. Third, Moses dedicated the tent once while Hebrews emphasizes the continual nature of the rituals that Christ came to fulfill in one broad, sweeping, atoning work. In addition, the rituals mentioned in Hebrews involve the blood of a sacrifice, which the writer contrasts with the blood of Jesus. Davidson (2002) replies to Young’s objections with a few points in his article. While there is no mention of Moses with the title of high priest, that seems to be the point of Hebrews—to present a new idea of a high priest that is melded to a ruler. This idea is also a shift from the mortal, sinful, Levitical priest in the Old Testament to the immortal, sinless Son of God, a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. Also, there is a fundamental shifting contrast from the ineffectual animal sacrifices to the effective sacrifice of Jesus once-for-all. Although there are other debates about these references in Hebrews, there is no need to rehash them all for this paper on the Day of Atonement. However, Davidson and Young may not be as far apart as could be surmised. They share a fundamental agreement that Jesus did indeed enter the Holy of Holies (whether symbolically or literally in heaven) after offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice. Jesus is the high priest who is able to atone for the sins of all the people, not through the blood of goats, but through His own blood.

The two goats can be seen as representative of Christ’s finished work in a single act on the cross. On the one hand, the sacrificial goat is representative of Jesus on the cross. Christ died instead of man in the same way that the one goat was killed instead of the people of Israel. The second goat holds prophetic implications for the people of Israel. Romans 11:26-27 speaks of a deliverer who comes from Zion, turning the people away from their idolatry and wickedness. At that time God declares that He will take

away the sins of Israel. Similarly Jeremiah 31:31-34 speaks of a time coming when God will write His law upon the hearts of the people of Israel. When that happens, God will forgive their wickedness and completely erase their sins. At the second coming of Christ to the earth to set up His kingdom, He will take away all the sins of Israel. The remnant of Israel will be restored to God in wholeness of heart, for God has not abandoned Israel, as Zechariah 13:1 states (Gustafson 1958).

Brooke (1901) makes the following observation. For the Israelites, once a year God allotted a single, great day for the atoning of all their sins. After the ceremony was completed, the Israelites could be assured that all their sins had been completely covered. In like manner, Christ died once for all. His sacrifice through the crucifixion did not just cover our sins. As far as God is concerned, they were obliterated for all time. Glaser (1987) elaborates further upon this point that the feasts are fulfilled in Christ. In Him alone will a sinner find true, final atonement. It is not enough to repent of sins; the sinner must accept the atoning work of Christ on the cross in a similar manner that the Israelites had to accept the work of the goats on their behalf.

The Nature of Sin and the Nature of God

The sacrificing of the goats served to cleanse the sins of the people. However, Milgrom (1976) raises a point about the purification of the tent itself during the ritual. If the purgation of the people from unknown sins or sins of ignorance were the sole intent of the ritual of the Day of Atonement, then the priest would not have needed to purify the tent itself along with the altars with the blood of the sacrificial goat. Milgrom (1976) suggests that the wanton sins of the people were such as to profane the Holy of Holies

itself, the throne of God on the earth. Only the blood of a sacrifice sprinkled within the place and upon the tent could purge the sins of the people from the tent. This view presents the awful nature of sin. It is able to profane that which God has made holy, necessitating blood to cleanse it. Even inanimate things can be marked and tainted by the sins of the people. A blood sacrifice has always been and will always be the only way to cleanse the taint of sin.

The theme of holiness is extremely important in the book of Leviticus as evidenced by the many uses of the Hebrew word *kadosh*. Central to the idea of holiness is the Day of Atonement. This was the ultimate expression of God's mercy and grace. His desire for Israel to live holy lives is expressed. He allowed one day a year for every Israelite to find acceptance and forgiveness before God and to renew his relationship with God. God knew that no one could keep His law. Thus He graciously provided a way for restoration until the final atonement of His Son (Glaser 1987). Harrison (1980) also makes note that the entire account in chapter 16 is prefaced with the reminder of Nadab and Abihu. As has been noted, these two approached God with an attitude that was horribly inappropriate and disrespectful. With complete disregard for God's explicit command, they attempted to follow their own way of offering incense to God and as a result were killed in the ensuing judgment. Afterwards Aaron was instructed not to enter the Holy of Holies at any time. This injunction was given to guard against another such tragedy. God is not to be taken in a common or casual way, emphasizing His holiness. Harrison further elaborates on the theme of God's holiness, as seen all throughout the rituals of the Day of Atonement. A sinner can only come to God and expect forgiveness if he comes one way and one way only. The actions of man cannot save him. Only by

following the way provided by God can one hope to be cleansed. There is no way that man is good enough for God to save him. God's absolute holiness and justice must be satisfied first.

At least two of the items—the incense and the cloud—within the ceremony of *Yom Kippur* point towards God's holiness. The incense used was a specific blend of spices, peculiar in its uniqueness to the Tent of Meeting. The Israelites were forbidden to make, keep, or use this exact blend for themselves according to Exodus 30:37. Not only was the blend of spices uniquely holy but the gradation or fineness of the incense used by Aaron here was also unique to the ritual. Common or normally ground incense could be offered on the sacrificial altar, while on the inner altar, perfumed incense was offered. However, for the Holy of Holies, only “finely ground” perfumed incense was used (Milgrom 1991, pp. 1025-1026).

The cloud referenced could point to a smoke screen made from some additive to the coals. Rabbinic tradition indicates that possibly the high priest raised this smokescreen to shield his eyes from the Ark and the Mercy Seat before entering the veil. After entering, he would proceed to add the incense, possibly as a means to placate God's wrath (Milgrom 1991). However, the Israelites knew that the incense was holy and special. It is unlikely that they would have tampered in any way with the formula prescribed by God. In addition, the cloud raised from the incense would have been more than sufficient without any added smoke-raising agent.

Another important characteristic of God that is noteworthy in the passage describing the Day of Atonement is His position as Creator, but more specifically Owner, of all there is. Brooke (1901) makes note of this fact that God ordained special feast days

for Himself as a reminder that first and foremost all things were and are His. Such things were earmarked as holy or set apart to God.

These are just a few of the many lessons that could be learned from a more thorough study of *Yom Kippur*. As Dr. Hartman related, the ultimate source of joy comes after the atonement of Jesus. As the Jews were commanded to “afflict themselves” before the ceremony and feast and celebrate after the ceremony, we as believers have repented from our sins. The ultimate atonement of Jesus has swept away for all time our sins, giving us a greater cause for joy and celebration. This is perhaps the greatest lesson that can be learned from even a cursory examination of *Yom Kippur*. While it should not be celebrated as a feast today, it can be studied for great knowledge and profit by believers today. This feast is not irrelevant in today’s culture. Instead, it is applicable and should not be taken lightly or simply tossed to the side as many would do without thought.

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