



biblestudy

The Day of Atonement

The Unification of God with
the People of this World.

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THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

Introduction

The Day of Atonement is the fifth of seven annual festivals that reveal God's plan for man. Through the yearly festival season God reminds us that He has a specific goal for humanity, to create a Spiritual Family. The Christian's purpose here on earth is to develop God's character; inculcate His ways into our lives, and make His mind our own. By applying His teachings in our everyday lives while we interact with others, we build His character in us. In essence we become like God the Father.

Our physical families are very similar. Children are taught and trained by their parents. As children mature in the family, they are shaped by the lessons learned in the family. At adulthood the son or daughter will retain the characteristics of their parents. Likewise, God purposely designed the interaction within the physical family to reflect His process of nurturing and developing His own Spiritual Family. Every individual member of His family has the potential to pursue and exercise godly character, it's simply a matter of choice.

Evolution would have us believe man developed strictly by chance. This theory proclaims man's existence on earth was by haphazard genetic mutations that refined him into a thinking animal, thus set apart or above the rest of the animal kingdom. Evolution leaves no room for Divine purpose, nor does it allow the hope of an eternal life with God after death. It relegates man to a physical life with a future based upon the ability to survive. His life depends on his ability to obtain food,

shelter and maintain good health for as long as possible. When he breathes his last breath, that life is gone forever – no different than all other animals. Even though man has a mind capable of wondrous engineering feats, can compose marvelous music, and has the power of love and compassion, evolution's reward is a permanent death.

In stark contrast to the evolution theory, God's plan for man's salvation is real. We are given an opportunity to transcend a permanent death. It is certain this physical life will end; however, God has the power and desire to share eternity with those who will conform to His way of life.

“My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; Yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord Gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints.” (Prov. 2:1-8)

God promises wisdom and protection for those who rely on His Word to guide their lives. Those who are called of God and commit to His way of life are considered His family and are referred to as saints (people set apart or sanctified by God). The Atonement festival is a yearly reminder of the

steps required to bring mankind into harmony with God. From the time God called the Israelites out of Egypt to this present age, Atonement pictures the unification of God with the people of this world. Quite simply, Atonement means at – one – ment. Atonement is a unique festival coupled with six other feasts that clearly reveals the awesome potential for man.

Now we will begin the question and answer portion of our Bible Study. In order to gain the most from this study, you will need to look up each scriptural reference. Without doing so, you will gain knowledge, but you will not develop the depth of understanding this study can supply. We invite you to take your time, meditate on the things you study, and learn more about God’s plan for His creation.

Let’s begin.

THE ATONEMENT FESTIVAL

QUESTION

When is Atonement observed?

Notice Leviticus 23:27 states, the festival is observed on the tenth day of the seventh month on the Hebrew calendar. According to this calendar, the seventh month is Tishri. Compared to our Gregorian calendar today, Tishri is a 30 day month that begins approximately mid September. The Hebrew Calendar begins counting in the spring of the year with each month based on lunar cycles. Compare Leviticus 23:5: Passover is observed on the fourteenth day of the first month, Nissan, on

the Hebrew Calendar. Passover, the first of God’s annual feasts, is kept in the early spring, and Atonement occurs six months later around the beginning of the fall season.

QUESTION

Who established Atonement as a Festival?

The Lord God gave Moses the command to keep the Atonement festival. Moses, in turn, instructed God’s people who were gathered in the wilderness concerning these feasts of God (Read Leviticus 23:26, 44).

NOTE: Many believe the Festivals were Jewish festivals, created by the Jews to be kept only by the Jews. But this is not what the Bible reveals. It was God himself who created the Festival Days for the benefit of mankind. Notice what is written in Leviticus 23 verses 2, 4, 37, and 44; these passages clearly state that these are “appointed Feasts of the Lord”. The Festivals of God originated with God himself, NOT with the Jews! Strangers, or foreigners who wanted to worship God were also required to keep these days (Exodus 12:48-49).

QUESTION

What was the entire wilderness congregation to do to observe this festival?

In Leviticus 23:27, 32 God, through Moses, commanded His people to “afflict your souls.” To afflict one’s soul is another way of saying to fast. They were commanded to fast -- abstain from eating -- for the duration of the Day of Atonement. Notice in Psalms 35:13 fasting is a means to

humble oneself before God. When a person refrains from eating, his attitude or mindset is softened – he is humbled.

Comment: King David fasted to humble himself before God. There are other examples: Exodus 34:27-28 -- While receiving the covenant of the Ten Commandments, Moses neither ate nor drank for forty days and nights. Jonah 3:5-10 -- When Jonah warned the citizens in Nineveh of eminent destruction if they didn't repent of their evils, the entire population of Nineveh, including the animals, fasted. Because of their humility and repentance, God relented from destroying the city. Esther 4:16, 17 -- Esther asked all the Shushan Jews to fast three days and nights for her safety as she approached her husband-king. In Esther 5:2 we are told Esther was given favor in the eyes of King Ahasuerus. Queen Esther was allowed to approach the King and ultimately petition him to save all the Jews of Shushan. Matthew 4:1-2 -- Before Jesus was tempted by Satan, Jesus fasted forty days and nights in order to draw very close to God. When tempted to turn the stones to bread, Jesus was inspired to quote from Deuteronomy 8:3:

“...man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.”

QUESTION

Why did God allow His chosen people to hunger?

In Deuteronomy 8:2-6 we learn that God sought humility and a willingness to separate from the

ways of this world that are in opposition to God. Through hunger one's pride and selfishness wanes. In Proverbs 6:16-19 God emphasizes the seven human traits He considers abominable. Through fasting we can receive help to rid ourselves of these attitudes. Even though hunger is an unpleasant and sometimes painful feeling, God's ultimate goal is to build His character in His people.

QUESTION

How is the Day of Atonement to be kept?

In Leviticus 23:32 God proclaimed the day of Atonement a Sabbath, a day of “solemn rest”. In Leviticus 23:28, 30-31 He also commanded no work on this day. Anyone found working during this appointed time would be removed from among God's chosen people. Atonement was commanded to be observed as a “statute forever throughout your generations”.

Bear in mind, Atonement is for the specific purpose of God's people becoming at one with Him – all barriers removed, and that includes more than our overcoming wrong attitudes. There is another component to this Feast that we will soon discuss. Since everyone is fasting on the day of Atonement, there is no need for preparing meals or taking time to eat. Atonement focused directly on drawing close to God.

QUESTION

Is fasting a form of penance?

No! Leviticus 23:32 tells us Atonement is celebrated or kept as a Sabbath. In Leviticus 23:27 God told the people to assemble themselves in a

“Holy convocation”. Fasting is for the purpose of humbling the mind, not inflicting pain on the body.

In Matthew 6:16-18, while instructing the disciples, Jesus Christ warned those who fast not to put on a show of outward suffering. Fasting is a private matter between you and God. After all, building a relationship with God is solely dependant on individual dedication to develop God’s character in us.

THE ATONEMENT CEREMONY

During the Day of Atonement God commanded an offering to be made to Him by fire (Leviticus 23:27). This offering is discussed in Leviticus 16:1-28. In Numbers 29:7-11 He gave specific instructions to Aaron through Moses on exactly how the Atonement offerings were to be made.

Before the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, God used the blood of animals to symbolically cleanse the sins of His people. These sacrifices are a picture of how atonement can be accomplished.

QUESTION

Did Aaron have to prepare himself before giving the Atonement offerings?

In Leviticus 16:4, 6 Aaron is seen preparing himself to enter the Most Holy place in God’s temple. God required Aaron to bathe his body and attire himself in holy linen garments. God emphasizes the need to come before Him unsoiled.

QUESTION

Was a special offering required to cleanse the priesthood before the Atonement offering ceremony?

In Leviticus 16:11-14 God instructed the Israelites to erect a Tabernacle in which to perform the priestly duties, including the sacrifices. Inside the Tabernacle was found the Temple, which housed both the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place or what was called the Holy of Holies. These two chambers were separated by a veil or curtain (Exodus 26:31-33). The Most Holy Place was entered only once a year, on the Day of Atonement. However, a special sacrifice was made to cleanse the priesthood before the atonement or sin offering was presented.

Inside the Most Holy Place was the mercy seat, which covers the Ark of the Covenant that contained items that were important in the history of Israel. Before sprinkling the blood on the Mercy Seat, Aaron was to remove a portion of coals from the altar, sprinkle them with fine incense and allow the smoke to cover the mercy seat. In Leviticus 16:2 God’s presence entered the incense cloud above the mercy seat. During this ceremony, God and His people were symbolically brought together (at-one-ment).

QUESTION

What does the mercy seat portray?

In Exodus 25:16-22 God specially designed the mercy seat to represent His throne in the midst of the congregation of Israel. God established it as a symbol of His presence with His people.

QUESTION***What is represented by the two kid goats?***

In Leviticus 16:5, 7 two goats were selected from the congregation of God's people. Both goats were designated as sin offerings; however, one was to be offered to God and the other was to be led out into the wilderness where it was released.

QUESTION***How are the goats chosen?***

In Leviticus 16:7-9 notice the goats are brought before God for His selection. Lots were used to identify God's choice for the sin offering. God manipulated the lots to fall on His particular choice. Remember, this is God's festival – the decisions pertaining to this special day are His, not left in the hands of man.

QUESTION***What is the purpose of the sin offering goat?***

Leviticus 16:15-19 tell us the blood of the sin offering goat was also sprinkled on the mercy seat in the Most Holy Place to cover the sins of the people. This ceremony cleanses the congregation of Israel from their sins – the people are symbolically washed before God. This goat represents the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the sins of mankind. His sacrifice, which we learned about in our Passover Bible Study, will reunite not only the individual but also the nations with God. It will atone for our national sins as well as our individual sins.

QUESTION***What is the purpose of the other goat?***

In Leviticus 16:21-22 Aaron confesses or places the sins of Israel onto the head of this second goat. In essence, this second goat carries its condemnation for sin with it into the wilderness to roam alone. Not only does it bear the sins of Israel, God lays on this live goat the responsibility for sin. It is not a scapegoat or an innocent victim; this goat is considered the author of sin, and thus represents not only God's enemy, but also the enemy of all mankind, Satan the Devil.

Satan's part in the national sins of Israel is symbolically laid upon this goat's head. Therefore, the live goat is taken out of the camp of Israel, which represents not only the removal of sin, but also the removal of the one largely responsible for it. This goat is not slain like the first goat because it represents complete rebellion against God, from which there is no repentance. Thus its sins, which the goat symbolically bears, could never be cleansed or washed away. The goat is led by a fit or strong man, an individual capable of assuring the goat will not return to the Israelite camp. Instead it is condemned to wander throughout the hot and desolate wilderness, tormented by the heat and alone, symbolically forever (See Revelation 20:10).

Comment: After the live goat was taken away from the congregation, Aaron washed himself, changed clothes and had the carcasses of the slain bull and goat disposed of away from the camp. Both the

fit man and he that disposed of the animals were to wash themselves before re-entering the camp. The entire congregation in the wilderness was now clean from sin.

“For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord. It is a Sabbath of solemn rest for you, and you shall afflict your souls. It is a statute forever.” (Leviticus 16:30-31).

THE TRUE AUTHOR OF SIN

The physical ceremony conducted during the Day of Atonement foreshadows a future time when God will remove the author of all sin, Satan the Devil (see Revelation 20:1-3, 7-10). This fifth festival is a chronological event in God's overall plan for man.

QUESTION

How did sin enter the world?

In John 8:44 and 1 John 3:8 we are told, sin entered the world by Satan the Devil. God did not create sin. The origination of evil is laid squarely upon the head of Satan. (Review Genesis chapter 3 and also Revelation 12:9 and 20:2.)

QUESTION

What is the consequence of sin?

Please read Romans 6:23 and Romans 8:6-7. These scriptures make it plain that the wages or payment for sin is death, but Satan would have us

believe that is not so. Rather than allowing God to define sin for us, Satan wants us to rely on our own human reasoning and personal judgment to decide what is right and wrong. He does not want us to use God's law for our standard of proper conduct. Many professing Christians believe the Apostle Paul dismissed the penalty of breaking God's law. But Romans 8:7-12, especially verse 12, make it clear to all but the most carnal of minds that the law is good, and is the instrument that defines good and evil for us. The law and commandments define sin. As made clear in Romans 6:23, disobedience to the law brings death. Paul upholds the law with all God's Commandments as "holy, just and good" (Romans 7:12).

QUESTION

What influence does Satan have in this world?

In II Corinthians 4:3-4 and Revelation 12:9 we learn the influence and deception of Satan has "blinded" this world so that most cannot understand God's purpose for creating mankind. Satan's purpose is to prevent God's plan from being fulfilled. If it were possible, he would destroy God himself. The meaning behind God's feast days is intentionally denigrated by the Devil in order to blind people to their incredible potential as sons and daughters in God's Family.

In Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:11-18, wherein he is referred to as Lucifer and the King of Tyrus, Satan is revealed as a perfect creation, a magnificent being, until pride entered his mind and caused him to sin. His desire became to exalt himself above God. Revelation 18:1-4 tells us the

entire world is under the influence of Satan, yet we are warned to resist his temptations. In Ephesians 2:1-3 Satan's influence is likened to the "power of the air", referring to his ability to broadcast to our minds his deceptions and rebellious and negative attitudes.

QUESTION

How will God remove sin from the earth?

God uses physical examples to help us understand spiritual events. Just as the fit man led away the scapegoat symbolically representing the one responsible for or the author of sin, God will send a powerful messenger to bind Satan in order to restrain him. In Revelation 20:1-3 we are told that this messenger or angel will shut Satan up in a bottomless pit for 1000 years, no longer able to deceive the nations. A bottomless pit is a metaphor used to describe a place from which there is no escape.

AT ONE WITH GOD

QUESTION

Does Jesus Christ desire closeness to those who believe the gospel that was given to and preached by the apostles?

We read in John 17:20-23 that Christ's last prayer before His crucifixion was for oneness with His followers. He desired to be as close to his followers as He is to God the Father. Don't miss this vital component in God's plan for man – He wants a close relationship with those who follow Him.

QUESTION

Are we commanded to love God?

In Matthew 22:34-40 Christ summarizes the first four of the Ten Commandments as meaning to love God with all our heart and mind.

QUESTION

Whose mind are we to inculcate?

In Philippians 2:5 we are admonished to exercise the very mind of Christ. II Timothy 2:15 tells us we are to work diligently, rightly discerning the Word of God.

QUESTION

Does obedience alone reconcile us to God?

1 John 5:1-5 and Ephesians 2:8-10 make it clear that even though God requires His people to obey His word, obedience alone doesn't constitute reconciliation to Him. Our salvation is not earned.

In Romans 3:23-25 and Ephesians 2:13 we read that salvation comes only by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. In Leviticus 16:29-34 where we read about the ceremony that was followed on the Day of Atonement, God uses the goat of the sin offering to draw a spiritual comparison for us. The covering of the congregation's sin came by way of the shedding of blood from this sin offering. The sacrifice pointed to the future sacrifice of Jesus Christ whose shed blood has paid the penalty for our sins.

Comment: The act of sacrificing animals in the Old Testament foreshadowed the crucifixion of Christ. God wanted His people to understand that sin invoked the death penalty; however, God allowed the blood of an animal to serve as reconciliation for sin so that in effect the people were washed clean of their sins. In that way their sins did not come between Him and His people, but animal sacrifices could not really pay the penalty for sin. After the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, however, there was no longer any need for animal sacrifices. Jesus, who lived a perfect, sin-free life, became the ultimate sacrifice that does pay the death penalty for sin in our stead.

QUESTION

What was torn during the crucifixion of Jesus Christ?

Please read Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38, and Luke 23:45. In the temple, a veil separated the Most Holy Place from the rest of the Temple. Only the high priest could enter this room and only on the Day of Atonement, once each year. God's presence rested on the mercy seat hidden behind the veil. Only the high priest, who represented Jesus Christ, gained access to God. This changed at the death of Christ. Having given up His life – his flesh, which was a type of veil (Hebrews 10:20) having been torn in punishment for our sins, and his blood having paid the penalty for sin – man could now have direct access to God. The veil separating the Most Holy Place actually ripped in two.

QUESTION

How do we access God?

In Psalms 141:2 David compared his prayer to the smoke and aroma of incense. In Luke 1:9-10 and Revelation 8:4 the prayers of the saints (those who follow God) ascend to Heaven as smoke from incense. The prayers of the saints approaching God's throne are symbolically represented by the smoke of the incense covering the mercy seat. Thus we are shown that we can gain access to God through our prayers.

QUESTION

Does God consider His people part of His family?

In II Corinthians 6:18 God calls His people sons and daughters, and He states He is their Father. Ephesians 3:14-15 tells us that God's people are His Family and that they even carry His name. In the Bible they are often referred to as the church of God (I Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:13, I Timothy 3:5).

CONCLUSION

What a tremendous opportunity man has to be a part of God's family. The annual festivals rehearse this awesome potential of man year after year. The congregation of Israel in the wilderness is a type of God's people today – spiritual Israel. Now, today, instead of atoning with the blood of goats, we can draw close to God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Atonement with God is a vital part of God's overall design for man's future.

For additional information on this vital subject, we invite you to visit our web site at WorldWatchToday.org or send your requests and questions to:

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