

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-08-30—DAY OF ATONEMENT OR DAY OF COVERING?

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The Day of Atonement is, perhaps, the most misunderstood holyday of all, at least for those whose primary language is English. For many, this day focuses on one or several of four main topics: 1) fasting; 2) two goats; 3) atonement or reconciliation; and 4) Passover.

The Jews call this day Yom Kippur. *Yom* is simply Hebrew for *day* but *kippur* is NOT the same as the English word *atonement*. In fact, Yom Kippur has been completely misunderstood because two Hebrew words in the Bible have been wrongly translated as a result of Catholic influence¹ upon the earliest English Bibles. The words in question are *kippur* (H3725) and *kaphar* (H3722), which are always wrongly translated in every English Bible as *atonement* or *reconciliation*.

The word atonement means reconciliation, which is restoration of a broken relationship. Biblically, atonement and reconciliation mean restoring a relationship with God after it was broken by sin. The problem with translating the Hebrew words as the noun *atonement* or verb *make atonement* is that the Hebrew noun *kippur* means a COVER or COVERING and the Hebrew verb *kaphar* means TO COVER—they have absolutely nothing to do with atonement or reconciliation as Scripture proves.

Everyone knows that the blood of animals was sprinkled on people as part of sacrificial sin offerings. However, it is also sprinkled on inanimate objects in the Tabernacle or Temple such as the Mercy Seat and the Altar of Burnt Offering! What is the purpose or function of animal blood? Pay attention to the words *kippur* and *kaphar* in this verse:

EXODUS 29:36 “And you shall offer a bull every day *as a sin offering for atonement [kippur = a covering]*. You shall cleanse the altar when you make atonement for [kaphar = cover] it [by sprinkling the blood of the bull upon it], and you shall anoint it [with blood] to sanctify it.

The purpose of sprinkling animal blood was to COVER SINS. That makes sense for people but why is blood sprinkled on THINGS? If *kippur* and *kaphar* mean atonement or reconciliation, then how does the blood of an animal atone or reconcile the FURNITURE of the Tabernacle or Temple? Inanimate objects cannot sin nor do they have a relationship with living beings, so what would be the purpose of sprinkling them with blood? On the other hand, it makes sense if animal blood covers the UNCLEANNES of sin.

Still, if the blood covers sins, what needs to be cleansed on the Tabernacle or Temple furnishings? The uncleanness of sins in people can be transferred to THINGS such that they become DEFILED or UNCLEAN. This is like getting grease on

¹ <https://www.internationalstandardbible.com/A/atonement.html>.

things after working on the car. The same happens with sin. One example was when God required Moses to remove his sandals at the burning bush to avoid defiling the GROUND. It was holy because of God's presence² and could have been defiled by Moses. In another case, Reuben defiled Jacob's BED when he lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine³—his sin defiled the bed and made it unclean. Likewise, everything in the Tabernacle and Temple could be defiled and made unclean because of the sins of people.

Another proof that *kippur* and *kaphar* do not mean atonement or reconciliation is the existence of the veil in the Tabernacle or Temple⁴ into the inner Holy of Holies. The veil prevented anyone from entering into God's presence or gazing upon Him⁵, even if they had just sacrificed an animal and their sin was FORGIVEN! The only reason that no one could enter into the presence of God was if their sins still REMAINED even after they are forgiven. They DO and here is why:

HEBREWS 10:4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

Animal blood does not TAKE AWAY SIN and since sin separates people from God⁶, the veil that kept them from being in the presence of God had to remain in place. If animal blood actually REMOVED sin then there would be no need for the veil. However, animal blood only COVERS sin so it is hidden, not removed. Even though sin was forgiven through the animal sacrifices, their sins were not removed so people were not allowed into God's presence. When Jesus died on the cross, the veil in the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom⁷. Unlike animal blood, His blood REMOVES sin⁸:

HEBREWS 10:17-18 then He [God] adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." [quoting Jer. 31:34, a prophecy of a future covenant with Israel] 18 Now where there is remission [removal] of these, *there is* no longer an offering for sin.

God never said to anyone under the Old Covenant that He would FORGET their sins, so it stands to reason that, if animal blood does not remove sin, God still remembers it. Only to those under the New Covenant does Jesus say, "My blood ... is shed ... for the remission [removal] of sin." (Matt. 26:28). If sin is removed then sin does not exist any longer and God does not remember it. The remission or removal of sin makes the person SINLESS. Without sin, a person is no longer separated from God and worthy to enter into His presence:

² Exod. 3:4-5.

³ Gen. 35:22; 49:4-5; 1 Chr. 5:1.

⁴ Heb. 9:3.

⁵ Exod. 33:20.

⁶ Isaiah 59:2.

⁷ Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45.

⁸ Also Jer. 31:34.

HEBREWS 10:19-22 Therefore, brethren, **having boldness [confidence that we will not die] to enter the Holiest [Holy of Holies] by the blood of Jesus,** 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated **for us, through the veil,** that is, His flesh, 21 and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, 22 **let us draw near [to God]** with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

The blood of animals is obviously deficient compared to the blood of Jesus Christ, which TAKES AWAY sin and allowing entry into the presence of God! Under the Old Covenant, the closest anyone ever came to God was when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies and even then His presence was obscured by a cloud of incense:

LEVITICUS 16:12-13 “Then he [*the High Priest*] shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, with his hands full of sweet **incense** beaten fine, and **bring it inside the veil.** 13 “**And he shall put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the Testimony, lest he die.**

Unlike animal blood, the blood of Jesus Christ allows even the lowliest of the saints to go PAST the veil and enter into the presence of God! If *kippur* and *kaphar* mean atonement or reconciliation, then the veil would be completely unnecessary.

This is similar to someone who has an illness. Animal blood in the Old Covenant sacrifices simply COVERED sin, which is like treating an illness with drugs that only **mask** the SYMPTOMS. The problem is that the person is still sick and contagious even if they feel better. On the other hand, the blood of Jesus Christ in the New Covenant does more than cover sin—it produces REMISSION of sin. The sin is completely removed and the person is sinless! This is like treating an illness so that it is completely cured and the person is no longer contagious. The Old Covenant animal blood is NOT atonement or reconciliation because sin still exists even though it is forgiven. Only the blood of the New Covenant removes sin completely.

The final proof that *kippur* and *kaphar* in the Old Testament simply mean COVER and TO COVER is the fact that atonement and reconciliation, **by definition,** RESTORE a relationship with God after it was broken by sin. The blood of Jesus Christ actually atones for and reconciles sin, the **result** of which is PEACE with God:

EPHESIANS 2:12-18 that at that time **you were without Christ,** being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and **without God in the world.** 13 But now in Christ Jesus **you who once were far off have been brought near [to God] by the blood of Christ.** 14 For **He Himself is our peace [from the Greek verb eiro meaning “to join”],** who has made both one, and has **broken down the middle wall of separation,** 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is,* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* **making peace,** 16 and **that He might reconcile them both to God** in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and

to those who were near. 18 For through Him **we both have access [admission] by one Spirit to the Father.**

In the mid-90s there was a saying, “No Jesus, no peace. Know Jesus, know peace.” It succinctly describes the end result of His sacrifice—peace with God. Animal blood does not remove sin; therefore, there is no atonement or reconciliation so it does not restore peace with God. Entering into the presence of God is allowed only for those WITHOUT sin. The BLOOD of Jesus Christ is the ATONING sacrifice⁹ that reconciles—restores the broken relationship—and makes PEACE with God:

1 JOHN 2:2 And **He [Jesus Christ] Himself is the propitiation [atonement] for our sins,** and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Propitiation simply means ATONEMENT. And there you have it. The blood of Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice that TAKES AWAY SIN, thereby making the sinner SINLESS, which reconciles and restores the relationship between God and mankind. The result is PEACE with God.

Eighteen of the apostolic epistles (it is missing in James, 1 & 3 John) and Romans begin with the nearly identical greeting of “Grace to you and **peace** from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” The Greek word for *peace* is derived from a verb meaning *to join*. In fact, in the Greek *peace* means *to set at one again*. The peace through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ joins together those who were once separated, making them one again. This is atonement and reconciliation! **The BLOOD of Jesus Christ for the New Covenant REMOVES sin and is the ATONEMENT that RECONCILES and restores a relationship with God allowing access into the PRESENCE of God. The result is PEACE with God.** This is why the apostles included a pronouncement of PEACE upon the *ekklesia* in their letters—PEACE is the ultimate purpose and fulfillment of the atoning blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ! Jesus spoke of being ONE with Him and God in John 17 but He also said, **“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.”** (John 14:27). HIS peace is His sacrifice! This was NEVER possible with animal blood, which can only COVER sin, not bring about atonement and reconciliation.

Hopefully, it is clear now why Yom Kippur is the Day of COVERING, not the Day of Atonement because it has nothing to do with atonement or reconciliation. It was an **annual cleansing ceremony** to COVER the sins of the High Priest, the priests, and all the people. It also CLEANSED the Tabernacle or Temple, the Holy of Holies, the Altar of Burnt Offerings, and the Altar of Incense of sin once a year:

HEBREWS 9:7 But into the second part [*the Holy of Holies*] the high priest went alone **once a year, not without blood,** which he offered for himself and *for the people’s sins* committed in ignorance;

LEVITICUS 16:32-34 [*Regarding Yom Kippur*] “And **the priest,** who is anointed and consecrated to minister as priest in his father’s place, shall **make atonement [kaphar = cover his sins],** and put on the linen clothes, the holy garments; 33 “then

⁹ Also 1 John 4:10.

he shall make atonement for /kaphar = cover the uncleanness of/ the Holy Sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for /kaphar = cover the uncleanness of/ the tabernacle of meeting and for the altar [of burnt offerings], and he shall make atonement for /kaphar = cover the sins of/ the priests and for all the people of the assembly. 34 “This shall be an everlasting statute for you, to make atonement for /kaphar = cover the uncleanness of/ the children of Israel, for all their sins, once a year.” And he did as the LORD commanded Moses.

EXODUS 30:1, 10 “You shall make an altar to burn incense on; you shall make it of acacia wood. ... 10 “And Aaron shall make atonement upon /kaphar = cover the uncleanness on/ its horns once a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonement /kippur = covering/; once a year he shall make atonement upon /kaphar = cover the uncleanness on/ it throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD.”

NOTE: The phrase “offering of atonement /kippur = covering/” refers to one of the offerings performed on Yom Kippur.

The Yom Kippur annual ceremony was necessary such that, as God said, “I may dwell among them.” (Exod. 25:8). It cleansed the people and the Tabernacle or Temple so that God could enter into the Holy of Holies above the Mercy Seat. There, He was AMONG or NEAR to the people but the veil (or incense) prevented them being in His PRESENCE.

Knowing that Yom Kippur is the Day of COVERING is unlikely to stop it being called the Day of Atonement; however, knowing the true meaning of *kippur* and *kaphar* brings clarity regarding the purpose of the day. It was a day to COVER the uncleanness of sin in the Old Covenant so that God could be near the ancient Israelites, which counters the idea that it was an atonement or reconciliation.

It is also important because the Day of Covering is part of the sequence of events of God’s plan to bring MANY sons and daughters in His Kingdom. In fact, the Day of Trumpets, Day of Covering, and Tabernacles together are called the Feast of INGATHERING¹⁰, which portray events that lead to the final Great White Throne Judgment. The Day of Trumpets describes the events of the Great Tribulation and Day of Vengeance. Tabernacles depicts the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ. The Day of Covering pictures rescuing survivors of a destroyed world (Day of the LORD) and bringing them to Jesus Christ in Jerusalem. This is the beginning of a millennium of PEACE and prosperity under a righteous King!

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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¹⁰ Exod. 23:14-16; 34:22-23.