

The Feasts of the Lord – Yom Kippur

by Rufus Barnes



Perhaps the holiest day of the Jewish year is Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement, which Leviticus 23 vv 23 – 26 tells us falls on the tenth day of the month of Tishrei.

The verses in Leviticus could not be clearer as to how important this Feast is to God. *'Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present an offering made to the Lord by fire. Do not work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the Lord your God. Anyone who does not deny himself on that day must be cut off from his people. I will destroy from among his people anyone who does any work on that day. You shall do no work at all.'*

Yom Kippur comes 10 days after the Feast of Rosh Hashanah, the New Year. During those ten days, known as the Days of Awe, the Jewish people were expected to make themselves right with their family, friends and acquaintances before, on Yom Kippur, the High Priest appeared before God so that the people might be made right with God.

The process by which the people were made right before God was laid down in great detail in Leviticus 16. The people were required to *'humble their souls'*, which has been taken to mean 'to fast'. When there was a Temple in Jerusalem, Yom Kippur was the only time in the year that the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies and there he sacrificed one of two goats. Over the second goat, the scape goat, the High Priest confessed the sins of the people before releasing it into the desert by the back gate of the Temple – this symbolically taking their sins from the midst of the nation.

So important was this day that the priestly order prepared themselves for every eventuality. The Bible says that nobody but the High Priest was allowed into the Holy of Holies and then he could only enter once a year and whilst in the Holy of Holies he would proclaim the sacred name of God – a name which was regarded as too holy to write down and which is often referred to in the Old Testament by the use of the word 'LORD' in capital letters.

What if the High Priest died just before he had to undertake his solemn duty? It is believed that another priest was prepared to take over as High Priest at short notice. What happened if the High Priest died in the Holy of Holies before he had completed his duties? Some people believe that the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies with

a rope attached to his feet so that if he died he could be pulled out and a replacement could complete the task. Nothing must prevent the sins of the people being atoned for on Yom Kippur. Nothing must prevent the regeneration for which the Day of Atonement was the necessary precursor.

Today in Israel everything comes to a halt on Yom Kippur. For many, otherwise non-observant Jewish people, Yom Kippur is the one 'Feast' that they observe; the one occasion in the year that they will attend synagogue.

Remembering that Yom Kippur is one of the Feasts in Leviticus 23 referred to as the 'Feasts of the Lord', what is its significance for Christians? On the cross Jesus died for our sins. Christians used to refer to Jesus being the 'propitiation' for our sins. That is a very old-fashioned word but in its original Greek there was a sense of appeasing angry gods. The Hebrew equivalent is 'atoned for'. Jesus was and is the atonement for our sins. Perhaps on Yom Kippur we should spend time remembering what Jesus has done for us and give thanks.

Rufus Barnes – May 2020

*After becoming a Believer and getting married, Rufus Barnes went to Bible School in Jerusalem where his eyes were opened to the Hebraic root of the Christian faith. He is currently Vice-Chair of **CMJ UK**, is on the leadership team of **Hephzibah Cambridge** and leads an Israel prayer meeting in his home town in Essex UK. He has led a number of study tours to Israel and was Chair of **Love Never Fails**.*