

# A Summarization of Yom Kippur Traditions

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*Yom Kippur* (יום כפור) or the Day of Atonement occurs ten days after *Yom Teruah/Rosh HaShanah*, and is considered to be the most holy day of the year in Judaism. It occurs on the tenth of Tishri on the Hebrew calendar, and is considered to be a High Sabbath or *Shabbat shabaton* (שַׁבַּת שַׁבְּתוֹן):

"*This shall be a permanent statute for you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall humble your souls and not do any work, whether the native, or the alien who sojourns among you; for it is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; you will be clean from all your sins before the LORD. It is to be a sabbath of solemn rest for you, that you may humble your souls; it is a permanent statute*" (Leviticus 23:29-31). *Yom Kippur* is a very serious day, as it is considered to be *the time* that Israel is to be cleansed of sin before God. There are a variety of specific animal sacrifices and offerings to be made on the Day of Atonement, listed in Leviticus 16, the procedures of which are described in *Yoma* 1-7 in the Mishnah. It is a required fast day when one reflects on his or her status with the Lord, and rights any wrongs that have been committed during the previous year.

It is easy for some Believers who have received salvation in Yeshua to balk at the need to seek further forgiveness for their sins, but a specified time of personal introspection has been frequently sought by many in the Christian community wishing to restore a sense of reverence and piety to the Church. While there have been many seasonal movements among people seeking to focus on one's need to rely upon God, and they have done some good in helping Believers' sanctification, their effects are often temporary. Is this

## Messianic Fall Holiday Helper

because the Christian Church as a whole has forgotten the importance of *Yom Kippur*?

The Day of Atonement for Messianics can equally be a challenge, because of a possible emphasis on celebration at *Yom Teruah/Rosh HaShanah*, instead of a serious attitude and call to reflection from the sounding of the *shofar*. Many Messianics likewise have difficulty reverently focusing on their relationship with the Lord, and in considering where they need to improve in their spiritual walk. For us, while recognizing that our ultimate forgiveness is indeed found in Yeshua, we still need to know that we are humans with a fallen sin nature, and that we need the Lord to empower us for good works. We need to be reminded that without Him, we are nothing, and we need to intercede for the salvation of others.

### The Holiest Day

Due to the extreme holiness of *Yom Kippur*, the Torah prescribes that all work is to be prohibited on this day. It is by no means to be a time when we conduct our normal affairs, as it is to be consecrated completely unto God as we are restored or renewed to Him, and to others in the community of faith:

“You shall not do any work on this same day, for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the LORD your God. If there is any person who will not humble himself on this same day, he shall be cut off from his people. As for any person who does any work on this same day, that person I will destroy from among his people. You shall do no work at all. It is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places. It is to be a sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall humble your souls; on the ninth of the month at evening, from evening until evening you shall keep your Sabbath” (Leviticus 23:28-32).

“Then on the tenth day of this seventh month you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall humble yourselves; you shall not do any work” (Numbers 29:7).

The admonition seen in Leviticus 23:29 is “any person who does not practice self-denial throughout that day shall be cut off from his kin” (NJPS). Appearing in the Nifal stem (simple action, passive voice), the verb *karat* (כָּרַת) has a variety of possible applications, including: “to **be cut off, disappear,**” “to **be cut off, excluded** from the religious community” (*HALOT*).<sup>1</sup> While there are always exceptions for not working, such as working to defend Israel or working to preserve life, those who were found unnecessarily working in Ancient Israel were punished severely—often with death. When we do not

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<sup>1</sup> *HALOT*, 1:501.

## A Summarization of Yom Kippur Traditions

meet with the Lord at such a specified, serious time as this, what penalties might we incur? While God may not cut us off, per se, and reject us as His people—might our relationship with Him be damaged or stifled in some way?

The seriousness of *Yom Kippur* is seen all throughout the Bible, particularly in the role that the high priest was to play in the Torah. Leviticus 16:2 specifies, "The LORD said to Moses: 'Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at any time into the holy place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, or he will die; for I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.'" This is the single time of year that the high priest was to enter into the Holy of Holies, and spread animal blood on the mercy seat for covering the sin of Israel. The high priest had to be highly conscious of the specific procedures that were involved for approaching the Creator in this specific part of the Tabernacle, and later the Temple.

Jewish religious literature often demonstrates the severity of this day in the minds of those who participated in it. The Mishnah talks about how the high priest "did not prolong his prayer, so as not to frighten the Israelites" (m.*Yoma* 5:1),<sup>2</sup> lest they think he had been struck dead. Emerging from the Holy of Holies, Sirach 50:6 says that the glory of God would surround the high priest "Like the morning star among the clouds, like the moon when it is full."

Leviticus 16 specifies that several types of offerings are to be made on the Day of Atonement, including that of a bull, a ram (v. 3), as well as two goats (v. 7). Determined by the casting of lots, one of these goats is to be sacrificed, and the other is to be let go as the "scapegoat" (v. 8). This ceremony is very interesting, especially given its significance in the context of the Ancient Near East:

"With his finger he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it seven times and cleanse it, and from the impurities of the sons of Israel consecrate it. When he finishes atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall offer the live goat. Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send *it* away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who *stands* in readiness" (Leviticus 16:19-21).

The admonition to the high priest was that one of the goats was to be sacrificed, while the other was to be let go into the wilderness. The command in Leviticus 16:8 for the determination of the goats is that "one [is] marked for the LORD and the other marked for Azazel." The phrase *l'Azazel* (לְאִזָּזֵל) or "to Azazel" in Hebrew is important to consider. This term has some important spiritual significance, because *Azazel* is often viewed as being "the name of a demon. . .the etymology of the name has been explained as a

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<sup>2</sup> Neusner, *Mishnah*, 272.

## Messianic Fall Holiday Helper

metathesized form. . . meaning something like 'fierce god' or 'angry god' which, if correct, would reveal decisively the demonic character of the being" (*ABD*).<sup>3</sup> Ronald L. Eisenberg explains in the *JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions*, "Just as the first goat was set aside as a burnt offering for the Lord, so in parallel fashion the second was sent to Azazel as a literal sin offering, a messenger that returned the sins of Israel to their demonic source."<sup>4</sup> With this in mind, he notes that "the modern Hebrew equivalent of 'go to hell' is 'lech l'Azazel.'"<sup>5</sup>

Jubilee years were always to be initiated on *Yom Kippur*, signaling a release of the people from their debts and initiating a rest in the Land of Israel. To signal the inauguration of a jubilee year, the *shofar* was to be sounded:

"You shall then sound a ram's horn abroad on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the day of atonement you shall sound a horn all through your land. You shall thus consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a release through the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, and each of you shall return to his own property, and each of you shall return to his family" (Leviticus 25:9-10).

Perhaps the most common command that is associated with *Yom Kippur* is the admonition "you shall humble your souls" (Leviticus 23:32) or "you must deny yourselves" (NIV). The Hebrew verb behind this is *anah* (אָנָה), appearing in the Piel stem (intensive action, active voice), carrying with it the idea of "to oppress, cause one to feel dependent," and in some causes "to do violence to" (*HALOT*).<sup>6</sup> By being humbled, some form of "violence" may be dealt to a person, perhaps as someone has to confront his or her fallen sin nature. The Septuagint rendered this with the verb *tapeinoō* (ταπεινώω), "to cause someone to lose prestige or status, humble, humiliate, abase" (*BDAG*).<sup>7</sup>

The Torah itself does not tell us what afflicting, humbling, or lowering oneself is all about, and there are many important facets of it that surely need to be considered. However, the principal *halachah* that is to be followed on *Yom Kippur* is fasting. This is based on passages elsewhere in the Tanach:

"But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer kept returning to my bosom" (Psalm 35:13).

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<sup>3</sup> David P. Wright, "Azazel," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:536.

<sup>4</sup> Eisenberg, 224.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *HALOT*, 1:853.

<sup>7</sup> *BDAG*, 990.

## A Summarization of Yom Kippur Traditions

“Why have we fasted and You do not see? *Why* have we humbled ourselves and You do not notice?’ Behold, on the day of your fast you find *your* desire, and drive hard all your workers. . . Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one's head like a reed and for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the LORD?...And if you give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness and your gloom *will become* like midday” (Isaiah 58:3, 5, 10).

By the First Century *Yom Kippur* had asserted itself as being referred to frequently as “the fast.” Reflecting on Paul’s journey to Rome, Luke writes, “When considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast was already over, Paul *began* to admonish them” (Acts 27:9). F.F. Bruce astutely points out, “By the ‘Fast’ he means, of course, the Great Day of Atonement, which falls on Tishri 10.”<sup>8</sup> While there are a few independent Messianics who have tried to say that there is no command in the Pentateuch to fast on the Day of Atonement, the witness of history and the Apostolic Scriptures stands against this.

The purpose of fasting is not only to abstain from food for an entire day, but also abstain from one’s regular creature comforts. The Mishnah specifies that in Jewish tradition there are some specific ways of afflicting oneself: “On the Day of Atonement it is forbidden to (1) eat, (2) drink, (3) bathe, (4) put on any sort of oil, (5) put on a sandal, (6) or engage in sexual relations” (m.*Yoma* 8:1).<sup>9</sup> In a more modern context, these are usually distilled down to five prohibitions: (1) eating and drinking, (2) bathing for pleasure, (3) anointing the body with oil, (4) wearing leather or leather shoes, (5) engaging in sexual intercourse.<sup>10</sup> Generally non-Orthodox Jews today will avoid eating, wearing any kind of cologne or perfume, and sexual relations on *Yom Kippur*; not all will avoid wearing leather.

In Jewish orthopraxy, while violation of any of these things is considered severe on the Day of Atonement, the penalty of extirpation only applies to eating, drinking, and working. The Talmud states, “*This is the sense of that statement*: when they said that it is forbidden, they made that statement solely concerning half of the requisite volume, but if one has eaten or drunk the requisite volume to incur a penalty, the penalty is extirpation. And even though the penalty is extirpation, the penalty of extirpation applies only to eating, drinking, and performing acts of labor alone” (b.*Yoma* 74a).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> F.F. Bruce, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 506.

<sup>9</sup> Neusner, *Mishnah*, 277.

<sup>10</sup> Eisenberg, 206.

<sup>11</sup> *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

## Messianic Fall Holiday Helper

Mainline Jewish *halachah* does allow for many exceptions regarding the commands of *Yom Kippur*, specifically in relation to the prohibition against eating. The Rabbinic principle of *Piku'ach Nefesh* or regard for human life "overrides all of the prohibitions of the Day of Atonement just as it does those of the Sabbath. Children are exempted from all modes of affliction, except the wearing of shoes. However, both in the time of the Second Temple, as well as in the Middle Ages, there were those who insisted that children observe the 'laws of affliction' in opposition to the view of the sages that it is one's duty to feed them with one's own hand" (*EJ*).<sup>12</sup> Today, it is frequently understood that only those children who have undergone *bar/bat mitzvah* should have to fulfill all of the *halachah* of *Yom Kippur*, and because of their young age they should not be expected to fast for the entire day. Eisenberg also makes some important points in this regard, He writes,

"[A] sick person whose health would be jeopardized by fasting is obligated to eat, according to the principle of *pikuach nefesh*. . . Even a healthy person seized by a fit of 'ravenous hunger' that causes faintness must be fed on *Yom Kippur* with whatever food is available until he recovers. According to tradition, children under the age of nine and women in childbirth (from the time labor begins until three days after birth) are forbidden to fast even if they want to."<sup>13</sup>

Mainline Jewish observance of *Yom Kippur* is not cruel in the least, as it allows for exceptions regarding the sick, children, and pregnant women relating to fasting. Perhaps the only exception to these rulings would be with the Karaites who reject all of the Oral Torah and require that all are to be afflicted, no matter their condition.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps one of the most significant things to consider in regard to the holiness of *Yom Kippur* is that in Second Temple times it was the only time when the Divine Name of God, YHWH (יהוה), would be spoken. Within the Judaism of Yeshua's day the people used terms such as "the Temple," "the Place," "the Kingdom," "Heaven," or even "the Name" to refer to God. These terms are especially affluent throughout the Gospel of Matthew, which uses the phrase "kingdom of heaven" some 31 times.<sup>15</sup> It is also reflected in the fact that neither Yeshua nor the Apostles ever use God's proper name. The Mishnah reflects these traditions that existed in the Judaism of Yeshua's day:

"And the priests and people standing in the courtyard, when they would hear the Expressed Name [of the Lord] come out of the mouth of the high

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<sup>12</sup> Moshe David Herr, "Day of Atonement," in *EJ*.

<sup>13</sup> Eisenberg, 206.

<sup>14</sup> Herr, "Day of Atonement," in *EJ*.

<sup>15</sup> This figure was determined using a root search of the Revised Standard Version (RSV) in BibleWorks 7.0.

## A Summarization of Yom Kippur Traditions

priest, would kneel and bow down and fall on their faces and say, 'Blessed be the name of the glory of his kingdom forever and ever'" (m.*Yoma* 6:2).<sup>16</sup>

On *Yom Kippur*, we as Messianic Believers would do well to consider the sanctity and holiness of God's name, and be sure that we are not making it common. We must consider this scene of when it was actually used, and the reaction of the people.

### Traditional Prayers

One of the major features of the Day of Atonement that is seen throughout Jewish history is the emphasis on prayer. The custom of spending most of *Yom Kippur* in prayer—or at least in some kind of reflection or meditation—goes back to the Second Temple period. The First Century Jewish philosopher Philo observes, "[We] all devote [our] entire leisure to nothing else from morning till evening, except to most acceptable prayers by which [we] endeavor to gain the favor of God, entreating pardon for [our] sins and hoping for his mercy, not for [our] own merits but through the compassionate nature of that Being who will have forgiveness rather than punishment" (*The Special Laws* 2.196).<sup>17</sup>

Today in the Synagogue, "The prayers for the Day of Atonement begin in the evening with *Kol Nidrei*. The subject of the distinctive middle blessing of the *Amidah* prayer of the Day of Atonement is God's pardoning, forgiving, and granting atonement for Israel's iniquities. . . The prayers of the Day of Atonement and of the New Year have many common features, and at times some of the prayers particular to the New Year have passed into the prayers of the Day of Atonement" (*EJ*).<sup>18</sup>

The prayers that we see evident on *Yom Kippur* in Judaism today, whether one is Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform are those that relate to the confession of sin, and pleas for God's forgiveness and mercy toward Israel and the world. The *Kol Nidrei* prayer is actually a prayer that came much later in Jewish history, in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries, and is a plea to God to cancel all broken vows.<sup>19</sup> This prayer has come under some criticism in recent years not only for its relative lateness, but also because of the opinion of Christian outsiders that Jews are not honest and that they are allowed to break their word with Christians. While many Jewish theologians insist that

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<sup>16</sup> Neusner, *Mishnah*, 275.

<sup>17</sup> Philo Judaeus: *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C.D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 586.

<sup>18</sup> Herr, "Day of Atonement," in *EJ*.

<sup>19</sup> For a review of its liturgy, consult, *Maḥzor for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*, pp 352-353.

## Messianic Fall Holiday Helper

the canceling of vows is something between an individual and God, many other synagogues avoid using it to avoid any controversy.<sup>20</sup>

The day service of *Yom Kippur* often employs more standard prayers that go through a litany of sins that the people have corporately committed and need remission for. Offensives such as improper behavior, speaking out of place, disrespecting others, being arrogant or wanton, or acting out of jealousy are emphasized in the *Al Chet* prayer,<sup>21</sup> which is employed either in the *Erev Yom Kippur* or morning *Shacharit* service.<sup>22</sup> The *Musaf* service of *Yom Kippur*,<sup>23</sup> which is an additional service to the morning service in many Jewish communities, employs the *Amidah* or standing prayer to remember the lives of those who have died for the Lord. Its liturgy is largely adapted from Leviticus 16 and m.*Yoma* 1-7 detailing the sacrificial rituals of the Day of Atonement.

The *Mincha* is a small afternoon service that is followed in some synagogues,<sup>24</sup> as well as the *Ne'ilah*, the concluding service.<sup>25</sup> This last service also involves the blowing of the *shofar*, which in Jewish thought is used to signify the closing of the gates of Heaven for Israel's redemption for the next year. Those who have needed to get their accounts straight with God may have lost their chance at the sounding of the ram's horn. The parallels between this blowing and what will happen when Yeshua finally returns to the Earth—after the trumpet has been sounded—are very striking.

As one can expect, the traditional prayers and services of *Yom Kippur* in the Jewish community are designed to focus on the holiness of God. The customary Torah portion for this most sacred of days is the holiness code of Leviticus 19:1-18, and is often accompanied by reflections from the Book of Jonah. A critical theme of Jonah is the repentance and restoration of sinners toward God, as the Day of Atonement is ultimately a renewal of oneself to His service for the next year.

It is very true that as we consider the liturgies that are often employed by our Jewish brothers and sisters at *Yom Kippur*, that many of them think that after this day that they do not have a chance for repentance before God until the next year. Many of them go to the Day of Atonement in total fear as though they have no chance of being reconciled toward God. Unless they ultimately come to a knowledge of Yeshua as the Messiah of Israel—*no different than any other human being on this planet*—that fear is well-

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<sup>20</sup> Eisenberg, pp 210-212.

<sup>21</sup> For a review of its liturgy, consult Hertz, *Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, pp 910-923; Scherman, *ArtScroll Siddur Ashkenaz*, pp 776-781.

<sup>22</sup> Eisenberg, pp 214-216.

<sup>23</sup> For a review of its liturgy, consult Hertz, *Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, pp 924-927.

<sup>24</sup> For a review of its liturgy, consult Scherman, *ArtScroll Siddur Ashkenaz*, pp 776-781.

<sup>25</sup> For a review of its liturgy, consult Hertz, *Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, pp 928-937.

## A Summarization of Yom Kippur Traditions

founded. Of course, only God knows the true intentions of the Jewish heart, but for those of us who have found the Messiah it should cause us to pray even more so for the salvation of others, *and particularly for our Jewish brethren*. We should come to *Yom Kippur* with a heavy heart for the salvation of the world, and recognize that Israel will only be restored first with the prime restoration of individuals toward our Heavenly Father via the work of His Son.

### Varied Jewish Customs to Know for Yom Kippur

In addition to the types of prayers that are commonly offered at *Yom Kippur*, there are some important Jewish customs associated with this day that we as Messianics need to be aware of. Many of these traditions are adhered to in the Messianic Jewish community, but it is not common to see them followed in the independent Messianic community.

A notable custom that is frequently observed is eating well before the Day of Atonement begins. It is accredited to an interesting Rabbinic point of view that if one eats well on the ninth of Tishri, fasting on the tenth, then one is considered as having fasted on both the ninth and the tenth. The Talmud specifies, "*R. Bibi bar Abbayye considered completing his recitation of the entire Scriptural lections for the year on the eve of the Day of Atonement. Hiyya b. Rab of Difti recited to him on Tannaite authority: "It is written, 'And you shall afflict your souls, on the ninth day of the month at evening' (Lev. 23:32). Now do people fast on the ninth of the month? Do they not fast on the tenth of the month? But the passage serves to tell you the following: "Whoever eats and drinks on the ninth of the month is regarded by Scripture as if he had fasted on the ninth and the tenth" (b.Berachot 8b).*"<sup>26</sup> While the Rabbinical logic here may escape some of us, there is logic in eating a large meal (especially with carbohydrates) before the start of *Yom Kippur*. If one is going to fast for an entire day, then we should fill ourselves to contentment so that on *Yom Kippur* our stomachs are full of enough food to last us through the day.

An interesting point of view that we see present in First Century Diaspora Judaism, as detailed in the works of Philo of Alexandria, is that he advocated that the Day of Atonement, while being a time of repentance and purification, was able to be a time of joy. This joy may not be the kind of happiness where we dance and jump up and down, but was instead to be a tempered joy in the Lord. The purpose of the fast of *Yom Kippur* is to purify people, and enable them to release their deepest thoughts and emotions to God. A clear result of this release must be some kind of joy or fulfillment:

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<sup>26</sup> *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary.*

## Messianic Fall Holiday Helper

"The reputation of the day is due to two reasons: one that it is a feast and the other that it is purification and escape from sins for which amnesty has been given by the favors of the gracious God who has assigned the same honor to repentance that he has to not committing a single sin" (*Special Laws* 1.187).<sup>27</sup>

"But on this fast it is not lawful to take any food or any drink, in order that no bodily passion may at all disturb or hinder the pure operations of the mind; but these passions are wont to be generated by fullness and satiety, so that at this time men feast, propitiating the Father of the universe with holy prayers, by which they are accustomed to solicit pardon for their former sins, and the acquisition and enjoyment of new blessings" (*On the Life of Moses* 2.24).<sup>28</sup>

Philo was a contemporary of Yeshua and the Apostles, and we see many of his sentiments reflected in parts of the Apostolic Scriptures, particularly in the Epistle to the Hebrews.<sup>29</sup> While he recognizes the sanctity of the Day of Atonement, he also recognizes the happiness that is to come when it is over and people have made their accounts right with God. As Believers in Yeshua, should we not likewise have some serious spiritual satisfaction after we have borne our hearts and souls to the Heavenly Father? Is it not a good thing to annually pour out ourselves to the Lord, so that we might be spiritually renewed and empowered for another year of service unto Him?

In later Jewish tradition, the Day of Atonement became associated with the time when the second set of Ten Commandments were given by God to Moses. Many viewed it as a day when Satan has no power to accuse Israel of any wrongdoing (*Leviticus Rabbah* 21:4). Perhaps most important, the time period right before *Yom Kippur* was considered the right time for people to send gifts to the poor, and to ask those in the community of faith for forgiveness for any wrongs committed toward them.

Today in mainline Judaism, the evening of *Yom Kippur* (along with *Rosh HaShanah*) is considered to be one of the only two times that the *tallit* (טלית) or prayer shawl can be worn at night. Particularly on *Yom Kippur*, the standard protocol is to make sure that one has donned the *tallis* immediately before the repetition of the *Kol Nidrei* prayer.<sup>30</sup>

A major custom that is also prevalent on *Yom Kippur*, as rudimentary as it may sound, is the need to honor God by wearing clean clothes. It is consistent with the idea that one is to wear his or her best on the Sabbath, as

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<sup>27</sup> *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, 551.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 493.

<sup>29</sup> For a further examination, consult the commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic* by J.K. McKee.

<sup>30</sup> Eisenberg, 208.

## A Summarization of Yom Kippur Traditions

the Talmud explains, "R. Hanina would stand in his cloak on the eve of the Sabbath at sunset and exclaim, 'Come and let us go forth to greet the Sabbath, the Queen.' R. Yannai would put on his garments on the eve of the Sabbath and say, 'Come, bride, come, bride'" (b.Shabbat 119a).<sup>31</sup> On this highest of Sabbaths, one is expected on the Day of Atonement to wear clothes befitting of going into the presence of God. While traditions do vary from community to community, many Jews wear white on *Yom Kippur* to symbolize the innocence that they believe will be restored to them for the coming year, or perhaps even to resemble being God's messengers ("angels") to the world. This is largely based on Isaiah 1:18, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool."

A final practice that you need to be aware of—which is notably not practiced in many Jewish communities—and often only in fringe sectors of Orthodox Judaism, is the *kaparos* ceremony. Eisenberg describes it, stating, "On the day before Yom Kippur, a cock (for a male) or a hen (for a female) traditionally is swung around the head three times while the following is pronounced: 'This is my substitute, my vicarious offering, my atonement; this cock [hen] shall meet death, but I shall find a long and pleasant life of peace.'"<sup>32</sup> It is thought among some that the death of a rooster for a single person will substitute for the required animal sacrifices that are now no longer offered on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

The practice of *kaparos* is not common at all in Orthodox Judaism. In fact, Eisenberg explains, "Many major rabbinic authorities, both medieval and modern, have strenuously opposed the *kaparos* ceremony. They have attacked it as a pagan superstitious ritual, decrying the belief that one may substitute the death of an animal for one's own life."<sup>33</sup> While many Jews think that this ceremony may be idiotic, those who practice it are often very serious. While we as Believers in Yeshua may likewise think that it is rather strange, those Orthodox who swing a chicken around their head and then snap its neck do recognize that something needs to die for them in order for their sin to be covered.<sup>34</sup> However, many of them are blinded to the truth of Yeshua the Messiah having died for them, and as a result need our prayer and intercession during this serious time.

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<sup>31</sup> *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary.*

<sup>32</sup> Eisenberg, 223.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> The liturgy for this ceremony is actually included in Scherman, *ArtScroll Siddur Ashkenaz*, pp 772-775.

### The Atonement for us as Believers

For those of us in the Messianic community, *Yom Kippur* often evokes mixed feelings or mixed reactions. On the one hand, there are those who see the importance of a day to reflect on where we are in our individual and corporate relationships with the Lord. The Day of Atonement is used as a special time to fast, meditate, and pray not only for oneself, but also to intercede for the lost and for our world. *Yom Kippur* is not only a time to fast, but it is a time when we can secure forgiveness from other people, as we enter into the next year with a clear conscience and enlivened spirit. The Talmud teaches, “*is it possible that while the guilt offering for a certain sin atones, a suspensive guilt offering does not? But lo, ‘atonement’ is inscribed with reference to that too! The one effects complete atonement, while the suspensive guilt offering does not effected complete atonement*” (b.Yoma 85b).<sup>35</sup> Only one who has offered forgiveness, in Jewish thought, has fully observed *Yom Kippur*.

There are many in the Messianic community, however, who have some difficulty reconciling the severity of the Day of Atonement and the repentance that is to occur on this day, to their understanding of Yeshua’s completed work for them. Many do not think it is necessary to consider their current standing with God, and how He is in the continual state of refining us as Believers for His service. Many think that since Yeshua has already been offered up as a sacrifice for their sins that their relationship with the Lord may not need a time of introspection and refining. We personally believe that these attitudes are immature, because while we can be reconciled to God at any time for wrongs we have done (1 John 1:8), or likewise fast and pray at any time, *Yom Kippur* is a time when God Himself commands us to fast and pray and consider where we stand before Him.

As Messianic Believers who are diligently striving to obey God’s commandments, we do have some serious advantages over the Jewish person who is thinking that this is the only time that he can get himself right before God. We do have Messiah’s blood covering our lives. But we need not become arrogant about this, and remember that we have the responsibility to intercede for the world. Yeshua Himself entered into the Holy of Holies in Heaven, offering Himself up for us (Hebrews 9:24-26), and as a result is continually interceding before the Father. Should not we take at least one day and intercede for the world—and especially for those who are observing *Yom Kippur* without the knowledge that He is the Savior? Should we not let the Holy Spirit work on us, and prepare us for the tasks that lie ahead in demonstrating God’s salvation to others? Consider these things as you remember *Yom Kippur*.

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<sup>35</sup> *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary.*