

# ***DISCOVERING THE BIBLE & OUR BIBLICAL HERITAGES***

Providing factual information about the Bibles, beliefs, values, movements, institutions, events and people of historical Christianity & Judaism.

2014 • NUMBER 10

## **Yom Kippur: The Day of Atonement**

*By Jim Myers*

Today, Yom Kippur is by far the most widely observed of Jewish holidays and fast days. Synagogues are packed with families in Israel, as well as throughout the diaspora. It has been the most important Jewish holiday throughout the centuries, going back into the Second Temple Period -- the times of the Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes and the Jesus Movement.<sup>1</sup> A good way for Christians to understand its importance is to compare it to what Easter means to Christians.

The term **Yom Kippur**, translated *Day of Atonement*, appears in the Hebrew Bible only in the following sections of Leviticus. The first describes the *Day of Atonement* that takes place every year:

*And YAHWEH spoke to Moses, saying: "Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to YAHWEH. And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before YAHWEH your ELOHIYM. For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people. And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people. You shall do no manner of work; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. It shall be to you a SHABBAT of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your SHABBAT." (Leviticus 23:26-32)*

This second section describes the *Day of Atonement* that takes place once every forty-nine years during the Year of Jubilee:

*And you shall count seven SHABBATS of years for yourself, seven times seven years; and the time of the seven SHABBATS of years shall be to you forty-nine years. Then you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family. That fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee to you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of its own accord, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine. For it is the Jubilee; it shall be holy to you; you shall eat its produce from the field. In this Year of Jubilee, each of you shall return to his possession. And if you sell anything to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor's hand, you shall not oppress one another. According to the number of years after the Jubilee you shall buy from your neighbor, and according to the number of years of crops he shall sell to you. According to the multitude of years you shall*

*increase its price, and according to the fewer number of years you shall diminish its price; for he sells to you according to the number of the years of the crops. Therefore you shall not oppress one another, but you shall fear your ELOHIYM; for I am YAHWEH your ELOHIYM.*  
(Leviticus 25:8-17)

In this article I am going to focus on Yom Kippur during the Late Second Temple Period, rather than the rituals now practiced in synagogues. Keep in mind that what follows will reflect what Jesus and his original followers experienced every year. There are hints in the Synoptic Gospels that the final year of the life of Jesus may have coincided with the Year of Jubilees, but we will look at what happened every year at the Temple. The fact that the highest official of the Temple, the High Priest, was required to personally officiate the rituals, made the importance of Yom Kippur very clear to everyone.

In Judaea during the late Second Temple period, the Sadducees had been predominant for many generations. They exerted great influence on the Temple and its cult. The New Testament, Josephus Flavius, and Rabbinic sources all describe high priests as belonging to the Sadducees (e.g., Acts 5:17-18; Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 20.199; M. Suk. 4:9).<sup>2</sup> Sadducees and Pharisees had many disputes over the interpretation of laws, so there can be no doubt that those related to the Temple cult were of great importance to the people. Therefore, in the weeks leading up to Yom Kippur, the people probably witnessed many discussions how they upcoming rituals should be performed. I would imagine that Jesus was also involved in the debates and expressed his positions on the subject. It must be understood that at the heart of the debates between Sadducees, Pharisees and Jesus is that all of the parties involved held the Torah as the holiest and most authoritative Scripture. Each desired to follow its principles precisely for its own right.<sup>3</sup>

If you had been in Jerusalem, you would have felt the anticipation of the holiday in the air a week before Yom Kippur. Seven days prior to the Day of Atonement, it was customary to transfer the high priest from his house to a special chamber wherein he prepared himself and practiced the ritual. The night before Yom Kippur was a special occasion because throughout it, the high priest had to remain awake to avoid being contaminated by any pollution. Many of the people of Jerusalem came to divert him and prevent him from falling asleep by reading or quoting Scriptures. He may have read Scriptures to them in return. This custom of reading the Scriptures was practiced outside Jerusalem and continued even after the destruction of the Temple.<sup>4</sup>

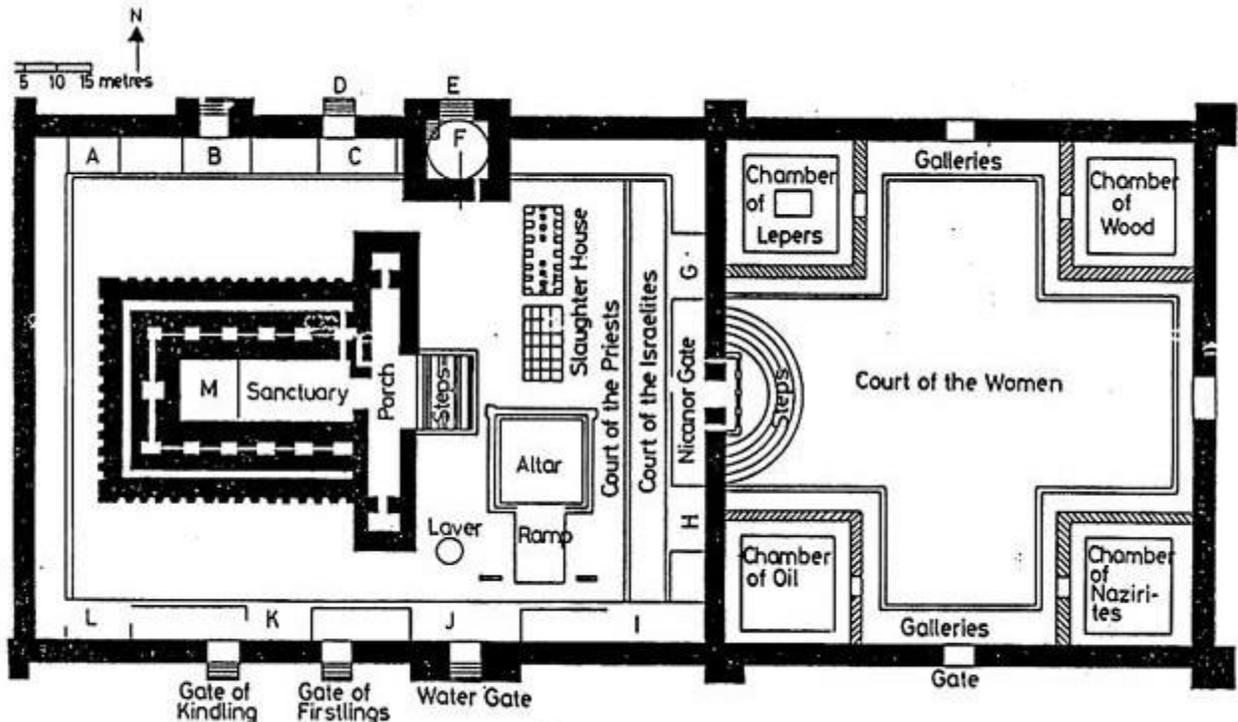


There were many ritual that had to be performed by the high priest on Yom Kippur, so some sources say he commenced the worship at midnight. The daily whole-offering and additional whole-offerings, which took place, as did most of the other rites, in the Temple court and to a far lesser extent in the sanctuary, were made by him while clothed in special golden garments. The prescribed rites of the day, such as that of the two goats and the burning of incense in the holy of holies, were performed in white garments; from these he changed back to gold ones for the afternoon whole-offering. Each change of garments was accompanied by an immersion and sanctification of hands and feet before and after the performance of each rite.

As pointed out above, forgiveness of sins was an important part of Yom Kippur. Lev. 16:30 stated, "For on that day [shall the priest] make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from *all your sins* before the Lord." Keep in mind that Yom Kippur had been preceded by one month and nine

days of intense focus on TESHUVAH (repentance). The Torah did not offer a Temple ritual in which a person could simply participate in it and have a sin committed against another person forgiven without TESHUVAH being done first. The bottom line is that for the sins between man and his fellow man, the sinner must repair the harm done to the person sinned against and request forgiveness from him first before asking for forgiveness from God.<sup>5</sup> Yom Kippur wasn't a blank check for sinners to avoid responsibilities of their actions.

Now let's turn to the activities that took place on Yom Kippur at the Temple. The **Kohen Gadol** (High Priest) had to follow a precise order of services, sacrifices, and purifications. Below is a diagram of the Temple that will help you understand where the activities that follow took place.



SOURCE<sup>6</sup>

In the diagram above, locate the Court of Women, Nicanor Gate, Court of Israelites, Court of Priests, Altar, Holy Place (Sanctuary) and Holy of Holies (M). Below are the Yom Kippur activities in the order they occurred.<sup>7</sup>

- (1) **Morning (Tamid) Offering** - The Kohen Gadol performed the regular daily (*Tamid*) offering at the altar, which was usually performed by ordinary priests. After immersing in a *mikvah* and washing his hands and feet, he dressed in special golden garments and performed the ritual.
- (2) **Garment Change #1** -- The Kohen Gadol immersed in a special *mikvah* in the Temple courtyard and changed into special linen garments, and washed his hands and feet twice, once after removing the golden garments and once before putting on the linen garments.
- (3) **Personal Sin-Offering** - The Kohen Gadol placed his hands on the bull and made a confession over the animal on behalf of himself and his household, pronouncing the *Tetragrammaton* (sacred

name YHVH). The people prostrated themselves when they heard. He then slaughtered the bull as a *chatat* (sin-offering) and collected its blood in a bowl.

- (4) **Lottery of the Goats** -- At the **Nicanor Gate**, the Kohen Gadol drew lots from a lottery box over two goats. One was selected *for the Lord*, and one *for Azazel*<sup>8</sup> (*for absolute removal*). The Kohen Gadol tied a red band around the horns of the goat *for Azazel*.
- (5) **Incense Preparation** -- The Kohen Gadol ascended the *mizbeach* (altar) and took a shovel full of embers with a special shovel. He was brought incense, filled his hands, and placed them in a vessel.
- (6) **Incense Offering** -- Holding the shovel and the vessel with incense, the Kohen Gadol entered the *Kadosh Hakadashim* (Holy of Holies). In the days of the First Temple, he placed the shovel between the poles of the Ark of the Covenant. In the days of the Second Temple, the Ark was no longer in the Holy of Holies so he put the shovel where the Ark would have been. The Mishnah states: *After the ark was taken away a stone remained there from the time of the early prophets, and it was called shetijah. It was higher than the ground by three fingerbreadths.*<sup>9</sup> He waited until the chamber filled with smoke and left.
- (7) **Sprinkling of Bull's Blood in the Holy of Holies** -- The Kohen Gadol took the bowl with the bull's blood and entered the Most Holy Place again. He sprinkled the bull's blood with his finger eight times, before the place the Ark would have been. He then left the Holy of Holies and put the bowl on a stand in front of the *Parochet*.
- (8) **Goat "for the Lord" presented as Sin-Offering for the Priests** -- The Kohen Gadol went to the eastern end of the Israelite courtyard near the Nicanor Gate, laid his hands on the goat *for the Lord*, and pronounced confession on behalf of the Kohanim (priests). The people prostrated themselves when he pronounced the sacred Name. He then slaughtered the goat and collected its blood in another bowl.
- (9) **Sprinkling of Goat's Blood in the Holy of Holies** -- The Kohen Gadol took the bowl with the goat's blood and entered the Holy of Holies again. He sprinkled the goat's blood with his finger eight times the same way he had sprinkled the bull's blood. The blood was sprinkled before the place where the Ark would have been. The Kohen Gadol then left the Holy of Holies, putting the bowl on a stand in front of the *Parochet*.
- (10) **Sprinkling of blood in the Holy Place** -- Standing in the Holy Place, on the other side of the curtain from the Holy of Holies, the Kohen Gadol took the bull's blood from the stand and sprinkled it with his finger eight times in the direction of the curtain. He then took the bowl with the goat's blood and sprinkled it eight times in the same manner, putting it back on the stand.
- (11) **Smearing of Blood on the Golden (Incense) Altar** -- The Kohen Gadol removed the goat's blood from the stand and mixed it with the bull's blood. Starting at the northeast corner, he then smeared the mixture of blood on each of the four corners of the Golden (Incense) altar in the Holy Place. He then sprinkled the blood eight times on the altar.
- (12) **Goat for Azazel** -- The Kohen Gadol left the Holy Place and walked through the Court of Israelites. He placed his hands on the goat *for Azazel* and confessed the sins of the entire people of Israel. The people prostrated themselves when he pronounced the Sacred Name. While he made a

general confession, individuals in the crowd at the Temple would confess privately. The Kohen Gadol then sent the goat off to the wilderness. In practice, to prevent its return to human habitation, the goat was led to a cliff outside Jerusalem and pushed off its edge.

- (13) **Preparation of Sacrificial Animals** -- While the goat for Azazel was being led to the cliff, the Kohen Gadol removed the insides of the bull, and intertwined the bodies of the bull and goat. Other people took the bodies to the *Beit HaDeshen* (place of the ashes). They were burned there after it was confirmed that the goat for Azazel had reached the wilderness.
- (14) **Reading From the Torah** -- After it was confirmed that the goat for Azazel had been pushed off the cliff, the Kohen Gadol passed through the Nicanor Gate into the Courtyard of the Women and read sections of the Torah describing Yom Kippur and its sacrifices.
- (15) **Garment Change #2** -- The Kohen Gadol removed his linen garments, immersed in the *mikvah* in the Temple courtyard, and changed into a second set of special golden garments. He washed his hands and feet both before removing the linen garments and after putting on the golden ones.
- (16) **Offering of Rams** -- The Kohen Gadol offered two rams as an *olah offering*, slaughtering them on the north side of the inner altar, collecting their blood in a bowl, carrying the bowl to the outer altar, and dashing the blood on the northeast and southwest corners of the outer altar. He dismembered the rams and burned the parts entirely on the outer altar. He then offered the accompanying *mincha* (grain) offerings and *nesachim* (wine-libations).
- (17) **Musaf Offering** -- The Kohen Gadol then offered the *Musaf offering*.
- (18) **Burning of Innards** -- The Kohen Gadol placed the insides of the bull and goat on the outer altar and burned them entirely.
- (19) **Garment Change #3** -- The Kohen Gadol removed his golden garments, immersed in the *mikvah*, and changed to a new set of linen garments, again washing his hands and feet twice.
- (20) **Removal of Incense from the Holy of Holies** -- The Kohen Gadol returned to the Holy of Holies and removed the bowl of incense and the shovel.
- (21) **Garment Change #4** -- The Kohen Gadol removed his linen garments, immersed in the *mikvah*, and changed into a third set of golden garments, again washing his hands and feet twice.
- (22) **Evening (Tamid) Offering** -- The Kohen Gadol completed the afternoon portion of the regular (tamid) daily offering in the special golden garments. He washed his hands and feet a tenth time.

The destruction of the Temple in 70 CE brought an end to the Second Temple Period, the Levitical priesthood, Sadducees, and Pharisees. The Jewish leaders faced the choice of ending the observances specified in the Torah since it was physically impossible to fulfill them -- *or coming up with a new way without a Temple, without a High Priest, and without sacrifices. Their decision was to replace the Temple with the synagogue, the High Priest with the rabbis, and sacrifices with prayers.* The Yom Kippur Service held in synagogues mirrors the ancient Temple Service. The Jewish leaders knew that the rituals were not a form of magic. It was YAHWEH that granted forgiveness *ó not the rituals.* He hadn't changed. Yom Kippur begins at sundown on October 3, 2014. **BHC**

# October Memorials

*In Loving Memory*

**JEWELL G.  
PATTERSON**

**March 14, 1907  
October 1, 1995**

*May you dwell under His  
wings in complete SHALOM  
forever!*



**In Their Remembrance**

*May their memories inspire us to seek  
those qualities of mind and heart which  
they shared when we walked life's  
journey together.*

*May we help to bring closer to  
fulfillment their highest ideals and  
noblest strivings.*

*May their memories deepen our loyalty  
to those things which we valued and  
shared --  
faith, love, peace and devotion and our  
biblical heritage.*

*As long as we live, they too will live; for  
they are now a part of us, as we  
remember them.*

(Inspired from prayers found in Yitzhor  
Reflections - The New Mahzor - The Prayer  
Book Press)

*In Loving Memory*

**Calvin P.  
A SPECIAL FRIEND  
OF BHC**

**1914  
October 17, 2003**

*May you dwell under His  
wings in complete SHALOM  
forever!*

שָׁלוֹם

Remembering those who came before us is a very important part of the Biblical Heritage Center's mission. It is our privilege to honor them by the BHC Memorial Garden and Memorials which are printed in this newsletter. The Memorial Garden is on the website at <http://www.biblicalheritage.org>. Please visit it the next time you are on the Internet and stop back by often. If you would like to add your loved one to this section, send the information to us. There is no charge, but donations are accepted. Remember those who have meant so much to you with a BHC Memorial.

<sup>1</sup> *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 14 (2011) 71–91; *The Day of Atonement in the Late Second Temple Period: Sadducees, High Priests, Pharisees, Norms, and Qumranites* Calendar(s) by Isaac Kalimi; Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, 2011; p. 73 (<http://fontes.lstc.edu/~rklein/Doc12/isaack.pdf>)

<sup>2</sup> *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism*; p. 73 (<http://fontes.lstc.edu/~rklein/Doc12/isaack.pdf>)

<sup>3</sup> *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism*; p. 76 (<http://fontes.lstc.edu/~rklein/Doc12/isaack.pdf>)

<sup>4</sup> *The Jewish People in the First Century Volume Two: Historical Geography, Political History, Social Culture and Religious Life and Institutions*; Edited by S. Safrai and M. Stern in co-operation with D. Flusser and E. C. van Unnik; © 1976 By Stichting Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum Testamentum; Fprtrpress Press, Philadelphia, PA; p. 897.

<sup>5</sup> *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism*; p. 71, ff.3. (<http://fontes.lstc.edu/~rklein/Doc12/isaack.pdf>)

<sup>6</sup> <http://spots.gru.edu/nprinsky/Humn2001/BibleOTpix/HerodTempleFloorplan.jpg>

<sup>7</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yom\\_Kippur](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yom_Kippur)

<sup>8</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azazel>

<sup>9</sup> *The Jewish People in the First Century Volume Two*; p. 869.