

## A Messianic Jewish Commentary on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement)

Leviticus 16:1-34, Numbers 29:7-11, Isaiah 57:14-58, 2 Corinthians 5:10-21

*By Hannah Neshet*  
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The feasts of Israel can be called '**chagim**', a Hebrew word which **means 'to revolve around'**. We now come to the most holy of all times in the Biblical cycle of Feasts and Festivals: **Yom Hakippurim (Day of Atonement)**.

This was the one day in the year, that the Cohen Hagadol (high priest) could enter the Holy of Holies in order to make atonement for the nation of Israel.

The LORD said to Moses: **"Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die."** (Leviticus 16:2)

But when Yeshua died on the execution stake, that restrictive veil was torn, from top to bottom. The tearing of one's garments is a Jewish custom that signifies grief or mourning. So when Yeshua's father saw that His son was dead, He tore the curtain from top to bottom - from the heavens to the earth.

**And the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.**(Mark 15:38)

In contrast to this time when only the Cohen could come into the Holy of Holies and only once a year (on Yom Kippur), as followers of Yeshua, we now have 24/7 access to our Heavenly Father through a new and living way. Halleluyah!

**By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place.** (Hebrews 10:20)

And yet, Yom Hakippurim holds tremendous significance for us as New Covenant Believers. It can be a somber time of fasting and prayer, but also a joyful one in remembrance of our Covenant relationship with God.

It is a time when we can remember to be thankful that we have kapparah (atonement) for all of our sins through the precious blood of the Lamb, Yeshua Hamashiach (the Messiah). It is a time to make peace with our Maker and to experience, not just intellectually, but deep within our hearts that we are forgiven, redeemed, and free.

## HOLY GARMENTS

The parasha (scripture portion) for this Shabbat opens with Aharon, the Cohen Hagadol (high priest) preparing for the crucial once a year sacrifice of the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur).

In order to minister before the Lord on this holy day, Aharon first bathed in water (immersed himself in the mikvah) and then put on a holy, linen tunic. In the Holy of Holies, he was not to wear his usual golden garments, designed for splendor and beauty, but rather simple, white linen clothing, representing purity and humility, befitting this most sacred of all days.



So, too, do many religiously observant Jewish people, when attending Yom Kippur services, dress in simple, white linen. They also do not wear leather shoes, in remembrance of the sacrifice of the animal, but instead rubber soled sneakers. And so you may see a curious sight - elegant women in beautiful white dresses, with sport shoes on their feet.

Jewish people also abstain from all food or drink, even water, all bathing and any enjoyable activities, including marital relations.

## GOING TO A FEAST/WEDDING

The rabbis give another reason for the manner of dress on this holy day:

*"When men are summoned before an earthly ruler to defend themselves against some charge, they appear downcast and dressed in black like mourners.*

*Israel appears before God arrayed in white, as if going to a feast, confident that all who return penitently to their Maker will receive not condemnation but pardon at His hands."*

(The Soncino Press, Pentateuch & Haftorahs, Edited by Dr. J.H. Hertz, p. 480)

Since the temple is no longer standing and no sacrifices being offered, we who know Yeshua trust in the sacrifice that He made of His own self as our atonement.

But the Jewish people who know not Yeshua yet as their Jewish brother and Savior, believe that the sacrifices have been replaced this day with prayer (tefilah) , repentance (t'shuvah), and charity (tzedakah).

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## CLOTHED IN WHITE GARMENTS

The Book of Revelations tells us that "**He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.**" (Revelations 3:5 )

Obviously, if those who overcome will be clothed in these white garments, befitting a place in the Holy of Holies, some will not overcome and will not be so clothed. May we each be overcomers who will be clothed in white garments and have our names written in the Book of Life.

## THE BOOK OF LIFE

Yom Kippur is considered in traditional Judaism as day that God pronounces judgment, administering either the rewards for good deeds (mitzvot) or the punishments for evil deeds. Christianity is a religion that emphasized faith over deeds (works) and often criticizes or condemns Judaism as a 'religion of works'.

Although we know we are saved by grace alone, and have faith that those who truly put their faith in Yeshua as Messiah and Savior shall not perish but inherit eternal life, Yeshua also promises that when He returns, He will reward each one **ACCORDING TO THEIR WORKS.** (Matthew 16:27)

James also tells us that our faith, **if not accompanied by works** is DEAD and cannot save. **Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead... You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.**" (James 2:14-24)

We must be careful in judging Jewish people who come to God in deep devotion and repentance, who perceive 'Jesus' as a Gentile, foreign God, and who therefore refuse to put their faith in Jesus out of loyalty to God, as being eternally damned to hell.

Would God condemn those with the same faith as Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and others of Jewish faith, willing to be martyred rather than bow to a 'foreign god'?

We must leave the issue of who is 'saved' and who is 'going to hell' to the only perfectly Righteous Judge, and keep our own consciences clear before Him. God is well able to reveal His son to the Jewish people.

And one day He will - in His timing. His arm is not too short to save. And at the same point, He will use us, if we are willing, to be the instruments of this revelation to many whose hearts are already prepared.

## THE AZAZEL

Aharon cast lots for two goats on Yom Kippur. One was offered as the sacrifice. But the other goat was chosen as the 'Azazel'. This is an interesting word. It is a rare Hebrew noun meaning, **'dismissal' or 'entire removal'**.

OUR SINS ARE NOT JUST 'COVERED' – THEY HAVE BEEN REMOVED - AS FAR AS THE EAST IS FROM THE WEST!

In today's modern Hebrew, azazel is used as a curse word on television! The entire removal of the sin and guilt of Israel is symbolized by Aharon **'laying both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confessing over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel.**



All their transgressions are **laid upon the azazel**, who is then sent away into the wilderness. **"and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land which is cut off..."** (Lev. 16:21-22)

Notice the striking similarities between these verses and those of Isaiah 53: **"And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all...For He shall bear their iniquities..."** (Isaiah 53:6,11)

Whomever these verses are speaking of, He willingly offered himself as the 'scapegoat', the azazel, for the people. The rabbis of ancient times considered **this a definite Messianic prophecy. Most agreed that Isaiah 53 speaks of the Messiah of Israel.**

## ISAIAH 53 - THE SUFFERING SERVANT

This prophetic portion of scripture is the subject of much controversy today. They have been effectively hidden from most Jewish people, even those who faithfully attend synagogue services by omitting the entire chapter from the proscribed selection of Sabbath Torah and Haftarah (prophetic) readings.

Why? Because they so perfectly describe the atonement Yeshua made for us through the sacrifice of his own life as the suffering servant. This would challenge the entire Rabbinic Jewish establishment; forcing them to admit that they have been wrong for centuries. This would take a great deal of humility.

Even Yeshiva students, those who study in Rabbinical educational institutions, are denied the truth by keeping them studying the Talmud, a compilation of Rabbinical interpretations of the scriptures, rather than focusing on the study of the prophetic word itself.

Numerous Rabbinic commentators take for granted that Isaiah 52:13-53:12 refers to the Messiah. The following references are gleaned from traditional rabbinical sources, as in the Talmud (oral law).

*"He, Messiah, shall intercede for man's sins, and the rebellious, for his sake, shall be forgiven."* - Jerusalem Targum on Isa. 53:12

*"and when Israel is sinful, the Messiah seeks for mercy upon them as it is written, 'By his stripes we were healed' (Isa. 53:5), and 'he carried the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors' (Isa 53:12) Genesis Rabbah.*

The interpretation widely promoted today among rabbinic teachers, that Isaiah 53 speaks not of the Messiah but of the nation of Israel, seems to have gained serious adherents only in the 13th century. A contemporary, Rabbi Moshe Kohen ibn Crispin, responded to this theory with rather strong words:

"(In contrast to those) having inclined after the stubbornness of their own hearts and their own opinion, I am pleased to interpret the parasha (Isaiah 53) in accordance with the teachings of our rabbis, of the King Messiah...and adhere to the literal sense. Thus I shall be free from forced and far-fetched interpretations of which others are guilty." (S.K. Driver and A. Neubauer, *The Suffering Servant of Isaiah*, p. 199ff)

R. Moses Alshech (16th century) apparently ignored the nation-of-Israel interpretation altogether, stating flatly: "Our rabbis with one voice accept and affirm the opinion that the prophet (Isaiah) is here (ch. 53) speaking of the Messiah."

I was absolutely shocked, the first time a Christian read to me these Scriptures. I had certainly never read them before in the Siddur (prayer book) we used in the synagogues or in the weekly Torah readings. I found it incredible that a Hebrew Prophet had described the death of Yeshua by crucifixion so clearly hundreds of years before it happened.

**"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows,  
yet we considered him stricken by God,  
smitten by him, and afflicted.**

**But He was pierced through for our transgressions,  
He was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,  
and by His wounds we are healed.**

**We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to his own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

**He was oppressed and afflicted,  
yet he did not open his mouth;  
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter  
and as a sheep before her shearers is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.**

**By oppression and judgment he was taken away.  
And who can speak of his descendants?  
For he was cut off from the land of the living;  
for the transgression of my people he was stricken.**

**He was assigned a grave with the wicked,  
and with the rich in his death,  
though he had done no violence  
nor was any deceit in his mouth.**

**Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him  
and cause him to suffer  
and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering  
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,  
and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.**

**After the suffering of his soul,  
he will see the light of life, and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and  
he will bear their iniquities,**

**Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,  
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,  
because he poured out his life unto death,  
and was numbered with the transgressors.**

**For he bore the sin of many,  
and made intercession for the transgressors."** (Isa. 53:4-12)

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In a limited sense, the claims that Israel has suffered as an azazel 'scapegoat' for the nations is true. Because of the blindness with which the Lord TEMPORARILY afflicted Israel with regards to their Messiah, **salvation has come to the Gentiles.**

**"For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins."** (Rom 11:25-27)

Against all warnings, a portion of the Gentile Christian Church has remained ignorant of this mystery, and therefore become 'wise in their own opinion' with regards to the Jews, rather than acknowledging the great debt they owe Israel and the Jews for their Messiah and the Bible, and a place in the Covenant with God.

But there are two real problems with ascribing Isa. 53 to the nation of Israel.

- 1) Israel cannot make atonement for their own transgressions. One cannot be one's own scapegoat. "For the transgressions of My people He was stricken." (v. 8)
- 2) Israel has not suffered silently or willingly, but with voice complaints and cries. " He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth...so he opened not His mouth." (v. 7)

#### ATONEMENT FOR WILLFUL SIN

In Hebrew, the use of the word iniquities means 'crooked' and signifies a willful departure from the law (Torah) of God. The ordinary sacrifices were limited to atone for involuntary or unintentional sins.

But this special sacrifice also atones for willful sin. Only Yeshua's death fulfills that described in Isaiah 53, of God's suffering servant, who was like a lamb, led to the slaughter, who opened not His mouth; who bore our iniquities. The sacrifice of Yeshua, acting as the High Priest (cohen hagadol), but who came into the heavenly Holy of Holies with His own blood, atones for all of our sins.

**"He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption." (Hebrews 9:12)**

Our sins were symbolically transferred to the Messiah, who became our 'scapegoat'. The blood of bulls and goats can never fully remove sin, only cover it for a time. A perfect, absolutely sinless one was required to pay the price for our rebellion and uncleanness. Only Yeshua the Messiah could fulfill this role. He willingly gave his life as the Kapparah (atonement), the Korban (sacrifice) for our sins.

Rabbinic tradition states that the Cohen (Jewish priest) would tie a scarlet cloth to the horn of the goat for Azazel and that when the sacrifice was fully accepted, the scarlet cloth became white.

This symbolized God's gracious promise in Isaiah 1:18: **"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow."**

Tradition also adds that this miracle did not take place for forty years before the destruction of the temple. Why? Because Yeshua was already sacrificed, the ritual of the Azazel was no longer necessary nor accepted by God.

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3 (Edersheim, Alfred, The Temple, Hendrickson Publishers, 1994, p. 249)

## EVERLASTING STATUTE

Yom Kippur (The day of atonement) is declared to be observed forever, not just until the Messiah comes. Some question whether we are still to fast and 'afflict our souls' if Yeshua has given us atonement, or if it should instead be turned into a joyous feast.

In remembrance of the terrible price that Yeshua paid to redeem us, the suffering He endured, Yom Kippur should not be changed into a light or jovial celebration. We cannot treat the blood lightly.

A period of fasting and critical self-examination is good for our spiritual walk with God. This is declared to be observed, not only by the native born Jews, but also by any stranger who sojourns with the Jewish people.

## THE LIFE IS IN THE BLOOD

When I was a little girl, I sometimes helped my mother cook and bake. I noticed that whenever she broke open an egg, she placed it first into a separate bowl



and examined it before mixing it in with the rest of the ingredients. I thought this an unnecessary inconvenience, and wanted to just crack it right into the batter.

But my mother told me we must not do this in case there are any blood spots in the egg. I never questioned this further; just assumed I suppose, that blood spots are 'gross', and she didn't want to contaminate her baking. It never occurred to me that this may actually be a Biblical prohibition, nor did my mother ever explain this to me.

I'm not even sure if she knew herself. Not until after I received Yeshua and started reading the Bible for myself, did I find out the reason for cracking that egg into a separate bowl. It is because God's word states,

**"For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul." (Leviticus 17:11)**

I had no understanding that it is only blood that makes atonement for our sins.

This I did not know, even after observing the Day of Atonement for over 30 years! A little niece of mine was boasting about how long she fasted that year on Yom Kippur, but when my Mom asked her if she understood why she was fasting, she had no idea.

Most of us, even religious Jews, also have very little comprehension of this concept, but the Tanach makes it clear. It is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.

## THE WAY OF SALVATION

Yeshua boldly declared Himself the Messiah. He warned us that He is the only way to the Father. There are not many paths to God. We may only draw near to Him under the covering of the blood of atonement for our sins. There is no difference between the way of salvation for a Jew or for a Gentile:

**"There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. By God's grace, without earning it, all are granted the status of being considered righteous before him, through the act redeeming us from our enslavement to sin that was accomplished by the Messiah Yeshua.**

**God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement (Kaparrah) through faith in his blood."(Rom. 3:23-35)**

The rabbis recognized that every man is in need of atonement for his sins, for it is written, **"For there is not a righteous man upon earth who does good and sins not."** (Eccl. 7:20) - Sanh. 46b.

A story is recorded (Berakhot 28) in which Yohanan ben Zakkai's disciples gather around his deathbed and find him weeping. They ask, *"Rabbi, you are the light of Israel, the pillar on which we lean, the hammer that crushes all heresy. Why should you weep?"*

In answer, the tzaddik confesses that he is afraid to die, because he is not sure whether he will end up in heaven or hell. In contrast, Messiah son of David, who saves Israel is called, 'The Lord our Righteousness' (Yehovah Tzidkeinu). (Jeremiah 23:5-6)

This is God's way - a blood sacrifice to atone for sin. Who are we to question God? This is consistent with the faith of the Israelite slaves in Egypt. They applied the blood of the slain lamb to the sides and tops of the doorframes of their houses, according to God's instructions through Moses, so that the destruction of God would 'Pass-over' them.

**"The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass-over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt."**(Ex. 12:13, 23)

This was a perfect foreshadowing of how the blood of the Messiah, the Lamb of God who was slain, protects us from God's wrath and judgment. When John (Yochanan) saw Yeshua coming towards him, he said, **"Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."**(John 1:29)

When Abraham offered up his beloved son, Isaac, upon the altar, the Torah portion read on the second day of Rosh Hashanah (Akedat Yitzchak), Abraham showed that he understood the entire episode to be prophetic, especially when he declared, **"G-d will provide for Himself the lamb..."** (Gen. 22:8)

Note the name that Abraham gave to the place after the Akeda is not "The Lord provided", but rather "The Lord will provide."

Isaac, at this time, was at least a young man. Rabbinic tradition places him at age 40. He could have easily resisted his father's attempts to bind him and offer him up, but the apparent absence of any struggle demonstrates that Isaac willingly offered up his life.

Note the startling comparison of the sages: *"Isaac carried the wood (for the sacrifice) like a man who takes up his cross."* - Pesiqta Rab. 54a.

Yeshua, as the beloved only Son of God, also willingly offered up His life. He entered Jerusalem on the 10th of Nissan, was inspected and assessed by the people for the required four days before the Passover, found to be without blemish, and was then slain in order to fulfill the words of the prophets.

**"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed...the Lord has laid on him the iniquity (sin) of us all."**  
(Isaiah 53:5-6)

If you are convinced by these ancient Hebrew Scriptures from the Tanach that this is the Truth, it makes no difference whether you are Jew or Gentile, you may pray to the God of Israel asking Him to forgive your sins through your faith in Yeshua. God has freely offered you salvation through your acceptance of the sacrifice of His Son as the atonement (Kippur) for your sins

. It will be the beginning of a brand new life for you as the Spirit of God gives you a new heart, cleanses you from all iniquities, and begins to lead and guide you along a pathway of Truth. As you grow and mature, read God's word, walk in obedience, and fellowship with other believers, your life will begin to be transformed into one of dignity and purpose.

As you immerse in the waters of the Mikvah, you will be born again spiritually into the Kingdom of God. You have walked through a doorway into eternal life.

**"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."** (John 3:14)

Yeshua is the gate to salvation: **"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved."** (John 10:9)

I believe that you may be reading this by a specific, divine plan, not by random coincidence. Especially if you are Jewish, you may never have had the opportunity to read or understand our own Hebrew scriptures, or God's plan for eternal salvation and restoration of our broken lives here on this earth. Please pray in sincerity and faith:

God of Israel, of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaacov, please forgive my sins through my faith in the blood of your son, the Messiah, Yeshua. I believe that He willingly sacrificed His life to atone for all of my sins, and that He was raised to life from the dead. Thank you for this precious gift of eternal life as I put my trust in Yeshua. Please lead and guide me by Your Spirit, in all Truth. Give me a new heart and new spirit, that I may follow you all the rest of my days. Restore me, that I would fulfill your plan for my life. Amen.

Thank you for studying Torah (Bible) with us. Please feel free to share this message with others by e-mail or link us to your website:  
[www.voiceforisrael.net](http://www.voiceforisrael.net)

**“For out of Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 2:3)**

About the Author:

Hannah Neshher grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and received her education in a religious Hebrew school in Canada. During a crisis pregnancy, she came to know Jesus (Yeshua) as her Messiah and Savior. She now lives in Israel with her children and grandchildren, teaching Christians about the Jewish roots of their faith.



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