

# YOM KIPPUR

FUSION  
WITH RABBI JASON



*with*  
**Rabbi Jason Sobel**

**TORAH PORTIONS**  
**Yom Kippur**

5785 - THE YEAR OF OPEN WINDOWS



## THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTIONS

# LEVITICUS 16

*Yom Kippur* / יום כפור

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The “old treasures” of the Jewish roots of our faith aren’t just ideas and concepts—they include practices and traditions. Rather than dismissing them as “Old Testament,” WHAT IF...they could deepen our understanding and appreciation of *Yeshua’s* atoning work on the Cross? This exploration of ancient rhythms of worship is going to inspire you!

### NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN..... 2

In a time when Western Civilization has all but abandoned “sin” as a category for reality, *Yom Kippur* is a precious gift. As the “Days of Awe” reach their climax at this holiest day, the subject of sin—and what is to be done about it—is unavoidable. The Torah is explicit in its prescription: this day is a “permanent statute.” How do we reconcile this text with *Yeshua* and His finished work?

### HEBREW WORD STUDY..... 3

This holiday’s name has profound theological significance. Take a deep dive into the Hebrew word that identifies this holiday: *kippurim*. Rather than a cultural phrase that casually rolls off our lips, this study will forever shift the way you think about *Yom Kippur*.



## OVERVIEW

*Yom Kippur*—which is Hebrew for “Day of Atonement”—is the holiest day of the year for the Jewish people. Its central themes are atonement and repentance. Traditionally, this holy day is marked by a 25-hour period of focused prayer and fasting (“afflicting our souls”), typically accompanied by extensive time in services. Beyond this, there are five actions to be avoided: eating and drinking, wearing leather shoes, applying lotions or creams, washing or bathing, and marital relations. *Yom Kippur* completes the annual period known in Judaism as the High Holy Days (or sometimes the “Days of Awe”).

# Fusion Global

Holiday Torah Portion – *Yom Kippur* / יום כפור | with **Rabbi Jason Sobel**

Staff Contributor

## COMMENTARY

This week is a very special *Shabbat*. Not only is it a weekly *Shabbat*, but we will also be observing *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement). We will gather with the entire Jewish world on Friday night and Saturday to worship *ADONAI* and seek Him for repentance and restoration. Likewise, as Messianic Jews, we will also thank Him for His true and final atonement for our sins through His promised Messiah, *Yeshua*!

In Leviticus 23:26-29 we read:

*ADONAI* spoke to Moses, saying: “However, the tenth day of this seventh month is *Yom Kippur*, a holy convocation to you, so you are to afflict yourselves. You are to bring an offering made by fire to *ADONAI*. You are not to do any kind of work on that set day, for it is *Yom Kippur*, to make atonement for you before *ADONAI* your God. For anyone who does not deny himself on that day must be cut off from his people.”

Traditionally, in Judaism, we take the “deny yourself” aspect pretty seriously on *Yom Kippur*. In the Jewish understanding, this means fasting, especially food, and in many communities, even drinking. But, in more Orthodox communities, this idea goes even further; often, one might sit on the floor instead of comfortable seating, and one would avoid modern creature comforts like leather shoes, beauty, cosmetics products, and even spousal relations. Basically, *Yom Kippur* is when we remove anything that focuses us on ourselves, our comfort, or anything other than God. It is also common to wear all white as a sign of purity or cleanliness before *HaShem* on *Yom Kippur* (yes, even though it is typically after Labor Day).

The rationale for this practice is that it serves as an external expression of an internal desire for God to purify our lives so that we might be found acceptable before His holy and righteous eyes. We see the biblical basis for this tradition in Isaiah 1:18,

“Come now, let us reason together,” says *ADONAI*. “Though your sins be like scarlet, they will be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they will become like wool.”

*Yom Kippur* is a full day of continual beauty as we express our desire for God to cleanse our lives and make us fit to serve Him. The liturgical prayers we offer throughout the day focus on repentance, even to the point of the *Al Chet*—a Hebrew confessional prayer “for sin”—essentially saying, “Forgive us for the sin we sinned when we didn’t realize we were sinning” (paraphrase mine). Within the Messianic Jewish world, we are particularly attached to the symbolism and beauty of the modern traditions observed on *Yom Kippur*, as we understand *Yeshua* to be our *kapparah* (covering) for our atonement. He has washed us white as snow by the work of His sacrificial blood. The Lord has paid the price for our sins so that every year on *Yom Kippur*, when we dress in white and deny ourselves, we are embracing these external signs of purity as authentic expressions of the “white as snow” purity provided through the Blood of the Lamb.

# New Testament Tie-In

## Sin is a serious problem

Throughout history, the universal struggle against sin, often depicted as a crouching adversary (see Genesis 4:7), has shaped humanity's journey. The genesis of war, violence, poverty, crime, and more can be traced back to sin. No one is immune to its reach. As the Apostle Paul succinctly puts it, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Friedrich Von Logau, the 17th-century German poet, captured this universal struggle in his verse:

*Man-like is it to fall into sin,  
Fiend-like is it to dwell therein;  
Christ-like is it for sin to grieve,  
God-like is it all sin to leave.<sup>1</sup>*

That third line highlights a sentiment that is relevant for *Yom Kippur*. This is **not** to suggest that this is a day of grieving! It is, however, a day of reflection and repentance, and Scripture offers a direct line between repentance and "godly grief" (see 2 Corinthians 7:9-11). The beauty and ironic joy of repentance is its forward-looking nature. It's a reversal of direction that anticipates a correspondingly different future. In our repentance, we humbly confess the sins of the past and take steps to avoid them in the days to come

**But our repentance doesn't erase our sins.** You see, sins don't just call for repentance—they require *atonement*. Note the verbiage in Leviticus 16:29-30,

It is to be a statute to you forever, that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you are to afflict your souls, and do no kind of work—both the native-born and the outsider dwelling among you. For on this day **atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you**. From all your sins you will be clean before *ADONAI* (emphasis added)

It is good, vital even, that we reverse the course of our sinful behaviors, but this only addresses the future—it doesn't repair the damage of the past we're leaving behind. Which brings us to the heart of *Yom Kippur*. God's desire is not merely that we're moral but that we're healed and whole (i.e., *shalom*). Sin is the catalyst of death. It wreaks havoc on the soul. It ravages societies. It festers in the form of existential guilt. Something besides repentance is needed. And always will be, hence, the command that *Yom Kippur* "be a statute to you forever."

Forever. What do we do with this "permanent statute" (NASB) now that the Temple and its sacrificial system are gone? Now that *Yeshua* has inaugurated a "better covenant" in His blood (see Hebrews 7:22)? First of all, the Lord was emphatic: "Do not think that I came to abolish the Torah or the Prophets! I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). *Yeshua* is the high priest to whom all Israel's preceding priests point. Unlike them, He "continues forever, [and] holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is also able to save forever those who come to God through Him, since He **always** lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:24-25 *emphasis added*). The permanence of *Yom Kippur* is realized in the "forever-ness" of *Yeshua* and His intercessory priesthood!

But—as Rabbi Jason would say—of course, there is more! The writer of Hebrews revealed the striking relationship between *Yeshua's* death on Golgotha and *Yom Kippur*, the only day of the year that high priests could enter the Holy of Holies.<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 9:12 (CSB) states that He "entered the most holy place once for all time, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption." This permanent statute has not been abandoned but fulfilled, just as the Lord announced in the Sermon on the Mount. He is our great high priest who entered the Holy of Holies "once for all" and "always lives" to bring your name before the God of heaven

## Yeshua is a serious Savior.

# Hebrew Word Study

## *kippurim* [כפרים] / “atonement”

Compared to other languages, Hebrew is very concrete. Hebrew words do not translate with too much symbolism or philosophical metaphor. The spiritual or even prophetic reading is always grounded in real life. Semitic scholar J. Swanson wrote that atonement is “an act of ceremonially accounting for wrong done in a covenantal relationship, which causes forgiveness, pardon, and right relationship, which may have a possible implication of appeasement or anger.”<sup>3</sup> But what complicates understanding atonement is the Western views of sin, what is clean and unclean, and the sacred and profane.

So “atonement,” while it sounds like it would be a vast theological system, is a simple covering, or in Hebrew, the plural covering(s). Even more concretely, it is a noun, a place where the act of atonement happens. This language gap is why some translations choose to translate it as “mercy seat” since it is the *place* of atonement. The root word means, “to smear,” so the place of smearing (the cover of the ark) is the place where atonement is made. Unfortunately, it is difficult to read “smearing the smear on the smearing place,” so it becomes more complicated and turns into “atonement made on the mercy seat.” The problem is that this Western adaptation can take away from the simple act of covering. Or even more, what it means to be a *covered* sinner. But before we get to the implications of atonement, it is essential to dig deeper into the word's meaning.

The root word for “atonement” occurs around 150 times in the Old Testament. The first time it appears is in the consecration of the priests (Exodus 29:36). Part of their training and anointing included accepting some of the sacrifices as food that they would eat in the presence of God. In other words, the atonement covers their sin, but the effect is a right relationship with God, being one with Him in His presence.

But then the Torah details a somewhat bizarre directive—the priest made atonement **for the altar** (v. 37). This act begs the question: can objects sin? The text tells us that this act of atonement consecrated the altar or declared it holy. This perspective deepens an otherwise concrete concept.

*The simple “smear” turns into a place...  
The place provides presence, and...  
The presence makes things holy*

Incredibly, in the biblical text, “atonement” becomes where God declares what is sacred and what is profane.

Curiously, the plural word for “atonement” —*Kippurim* (כפרים) only occurs only eight times—generally in connection with The Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur* – see Exodus 29:36; 30:10, 16; Numbers 5:8; 29:11). Connecting atonement(s) to a word like “day” gives that simple covering not only **a place** but also a **time**, a time for atonement(s). This insight means that there is a place *and* time where God declares something “covered” and treats it as holy. The implication is that God says an object or person is “holy” not because they are clean but because they are set aside as holy.

In the Bible, only God can determine whether something is clean or unclean, sacred or profane. The scriptures present an atonement that occurs in a real place, in real-time, accomplished only by the blood of the sacrifice. Hence, *Yom Kippur* is a solemn day during which we fast and contemplate our sins (Leviticus 23:27). It is the time and place when we ask God to *cover* all of our sins corporately as a nation. However, one significant challenge with the atonement found in the sacrificial system is that our sin is constant. We need covering continuously—a daily *Kippur* (Exodus 29) and an annual, corporate *Kippurim* (Leviticus 23). Sin is a universal human problem in need of a divine solution.

The book of Hebrews argues that when the Messiah *Yeshua* entered the real Tabernacle in heaven, He did not enter by “the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12). His blood does not merely cover us—it provides us permanent access to God's presence. And in His presence, He declares us cleansed and holy.

# FUSION

Rabbi Jason & Fusion Global present  
**HEBREW WORD STUDY**

כפר

**כפר / kafar:** VB. **to atone, make atonement, cover, appease, expiate.** The verb primarily describes the action of covering over iniquity.

Slightly over half the instances of this term are in Leviticus. Generally, the priest is the one who atones (*kafar*), either on behalf of himself (e.g., Lev 9:7), of others (e.g., Lev 4:20; Num 6:11), or of the tabernacle (e.g., Lev 16:18). Atonement results in forgiveness (e.g., Exod 32:30–32), consecration (e.g., Lev 16:18; Ezek 43:26), cleanness (e.g., Lev 12:7–8; Num 8:21), appeasement of divine wrath (e.g., Num 16:46–47), and removal of sin or iniquity (e.g., Isa 6:7). In several passages, God atones for the iniquities or transgressions of His people (e.g., Ezek 16:63; Psa 78:38). Genesis 32:20 uses this verb for a non-religious act of appeasement: Jacob attempts to appease (*kafar*) his brother, Esau, by sending him a gift.

taken from the *Lexham Theological Wordbook*

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## THOUGHTS for REFLECTION

Take some time this week to prayerfully consider and discuss with friends:

- Many Christians are sensitive to practices that might suggest “legalism.” This is totally understandable. There is a well-documented and tragic history of reducing the teachings of Scripture to mere “performance religion.” But legalism is not primarily WHAT we do but WHY we do it—motive matters! This week we read that *Yom Kippur* traditions are an “external expression of an internal desire.” What traditions do you embrace and practice to reveal your heart?
- For many people, the word “repentance” has negative connotations. Let’s be honest: nobody likes to admit they’ve messed up. Confession is only the beginning though. Repentance is the follow-through that looks like a different way of living. Read 2 Corinthians 7:9-11 this week and invite the Holy Spirit to examine your heart. You may feel grief over past sins, but is it “godly grief” that leads to life-giving repentance? You have all the grace you need to walk in victory over guilt and shame—embrace it!

# GLOBAL

**NEXT WEEK'S READINGS:** *Sukkot Shabbat Chol ha-Moed* / סוכות שבת חול המועד

## **TORAH**

*Sunday* / Exodus 33:12-16

*Monday* / Exodus 33:17-19

*Tuesday* / Exodus 33:20-23

*Wednesday* / Exodus 34:1-3

*Thursday* / Exodus 34:4-10

*Friday* / Exodus 34:11-17

*Saturday* / Exodus 34:18-26

## **Prophetic Reading (Haftarah):**

Ezekiel 38:18-39:16

## **New Covenant Reading:**

John 7:2,10-34

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *Tree of Life Version*.

<sup>1</sup> John Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations*, Tenth Edition. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1914), 979.

<sup>2</sup> In Arnold Fruchtenbaum's commentary on this passage, he notes: "The author draws a contrast between the work of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement and the work of the Messiah. The contrast is not between Jesus and the five Levitical offerings of Leviticus 1-7. It is between the most important day of the Levitical year and what the Messiah accomplished through His death, which became the basis for the ministry of the Great High Priest in Heaven: the Day of Atonement of Leviticus 16." [*The Messianic Jewish Epistles: Hebrews, James, First Peter, Second Peter, Jude*, 1st ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2005), 118.]

<sup>3</sup> Swanson, J. (1997). *In Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)* (electronic ed.). Logos Research Systems, Inc.