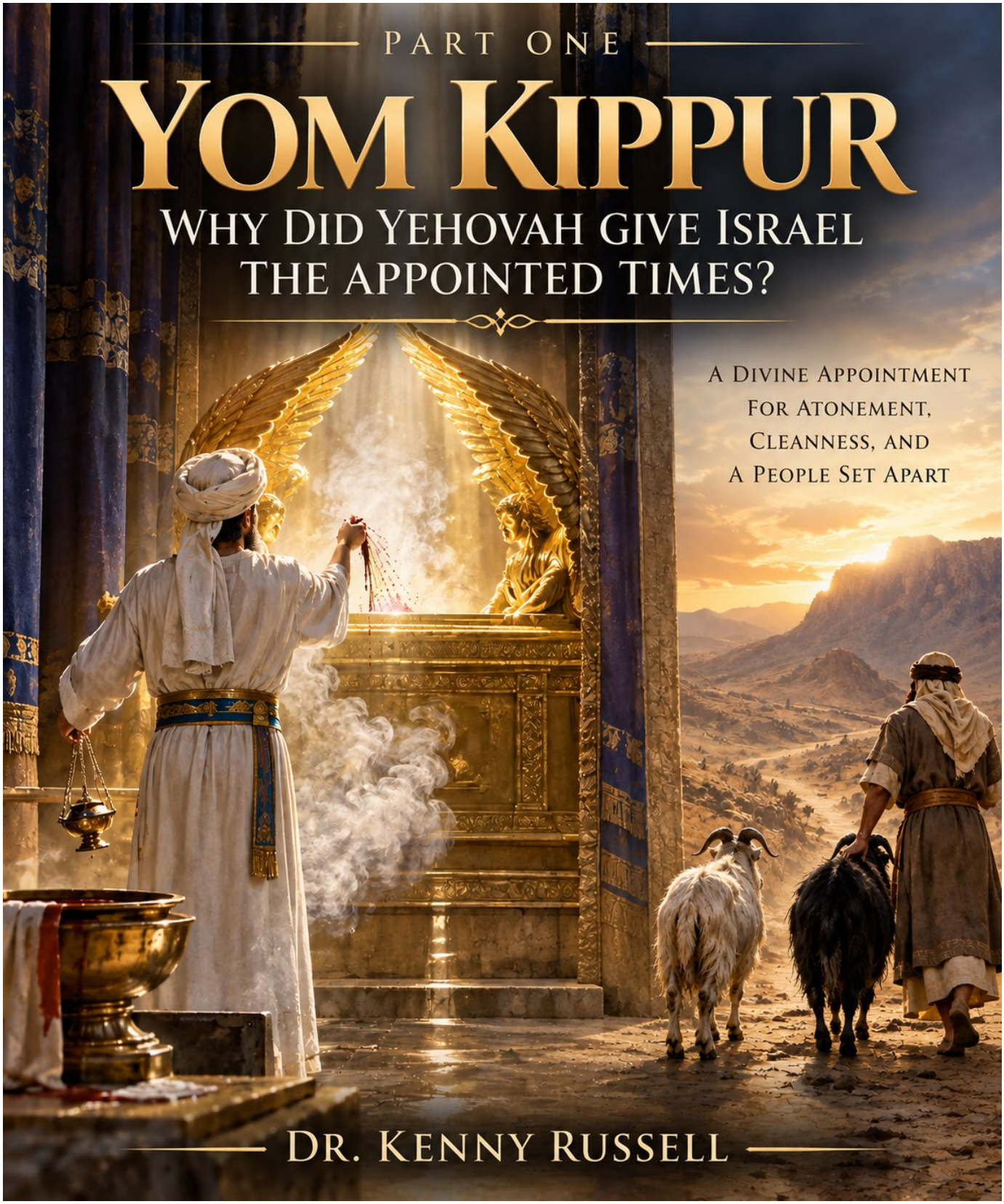

PART ONE
YOM KIPPUR
WHY DID YEHOVAH GIVE ISRAEL THE APPOINTED TIMES?
A DIVINE APPOINTMENT FOR ATONEMENT, CLEANNESS, AND A PEOPLE SET APART
DR. KENNY RUSSELL

YOM KIPPUR

Why Did Yehovah Give Israel the Appointed Times?

Dr. Kenny Russell

Key Scriptures: Exodus 19:3–6; Exodus 25:8; Leviticus 16; Leviticus 17:11; Leviticus 23:1–44; Numbers 29:7–11; Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Jeremiah 31:31–34; Zechariah 12:10; Hebrews 8–10

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This publication intentionally uses Hebrew names (e.g., Yehovah for LORD, Yeshua for Jesus, Ruach HaKodesh for Holy Spirit, Tanakh for the Hebrew Bible) to reflect the Hebraic context of Scripture and to communicate more effectively to Jewish and Israeli audiences.

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INTRODUCTION

An Invitation to Look Again

Yom Kippur is one of the most solemn and significant appointed times Yehovah gave to Israel. Even today, across Israel and throughout Jewish communities around the world, the Day of Atonement carries a weight unlike almost any other day of the year. It causes people to stop, reflect, examine their lives, seek forgiveness and consider where they stand before the Creator. Yet beneath the familiar observance lies an extraordinary biblical picture that I believe deserves to be examined again, not first through the traditions of Judaism or the doctrines of Christianity, but through the words of Scripture itself.

That is the purpose of this chapter.

I am writing from Israel, where the appointed times are not merely subjects I encounter while turning the pages of an ancient book. They are woven into the rhythm of life around me. The streets change. Businesses close. Families gather. The atmosphere changes as the nation moves through its biblical and traditional calendar. Living here has continually challenged me to go back to the Scriptures and ask a simple question: **What did Yehovah originally intend Israel to see when He gave these appointed times?**

That question becomes particularly important with Yom Kippur.

If you are already a follower of Yeshua, you may immediately associate the Day of Atonement with His sacrificial death and His role as our great High Priest. I certainly do. But I want to encourage you not to rush there too quickly. There is something powerful about first standing where Israel stood, listening to the instructions given through Moses, watching the High Priest approach the sanctuary and understanding why blood, sacrifice, cleansing and mediation were necessary. When we understand the original pattern, the work of Messiah becomes even more breathtaking.

If you are Jewish and do not believe that Yeshua of Nazareth is Messiah, I especially want to welcome you into this study. I am not asking you to begin by accepting my conclusion. I am inviting you to open the Scriptures of Israel and ask questions with me. Read Moses. Read Isaiah. Read Jeremiah. Examine what Yehovah said concerning atonement, the bearing of iniquity and the New Covenant. Then consider Yeshua within that biblical framework and decide whether the connections deserve a closer look.

You may discover that some ideas you have associated exclusively with Christianity actually begin within the Tanakh.

The **New Covenant**, for example, did not originate with Christianity. Yehovah announced it through the prophet Jeremiah, explicitly promising it to "the house of Israel and the house of Judah" (Jeremiah 31:31). The idea of one bearing the iniquity of others does not originate in the New Covenant writings either. On Yom Kippur, Leviticus describes the living goat bearing Israel's confessed iniquities away into the wilderness, while Isaiah later describes Yehovah's righteous Servant who "shall bear their iniquities" (Isaiah 53:11).

Those connections deserve our attention.

I have learned through years of studying Scripture that sometimes the most important discoveries begin when we become willing to ask a question without being afraid of where the biblical answer may lead us. Religious tradition can tell us what we are supposed to see. Denominational theology can tell us what we are supposed to believe. History can leave emotional barriers that make certain questions uncomfortable even to ask. But truth should never be frightened by examination.

So throughout this chapter, I want to keep bringing us back to the text.

Why did Yehovah command that blood be taken behind the veil?

Why did the High Priest first require atonement for himself?

Why were two goats necessary for the people?

Why was one goat sacrificed while the other remained alive?

Why were Israel's iniquities confessed over the living goat?

Why did that goat then bear those iniquities away into the wilderness?

And perhaps the greatest question of all:

Why did the entire process have to happen again the following year?

These are not questions Christianity invented. They rise directly from Leviticus 16.

Then the Prophets add further questions.

Why does Isaiah describe a righteous Servant who suffers in connection with the transgressions of others and "bears their iniquities"? Why does Jeremiah announce that Yehovah will make a New Covenant with Israel and Judah? Why does that promise culminate with the extraordinary words, **"I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more"** (Jeremiah 31:34)?

Something is happening within the Scriptures.

Torah establishes the pattern.

The Prophets develop the expectation.

And then we are faced with the question of Messiah.

For me, this is where the study becomes deeply personal. I do not believe Yeshua of Nazareth is Messiah merely because I inherited a Christian tradition telling me that He is. The more deeply I have studied the Torah and the Prophets, the more convinced I have become that Yeshua must be examined within the story Yehovah had already revealed through Israel. I see patterns established centuries before His birth that illuminate His mission with remarkable clarity.

Yom Kippur is one of the most powerful of those patterns.

But this chapter is not merely an argument about the identity of Messiah. There is something much more personal at stake.

Behind the priest, the blood, the sacrifices, the goats, the sanctuary and the veil stands the heart of the Creator.

Yehovah tells Israel that He brought them out of Egypt and **"brought you to Myself"** (Exodus 19:4). Soon afterward He commands Israel to build the sanctuary **"that I may dwell among them"** (Exodus 25:8).

Those two statements have profoundly shaped my understanding of atonement.

Yehovah did not redeem Israel merely to remove them from Egypt.

He brought them to Himself.

He did not establish atonement merely so that a religious requirement could be satisfied.

He desired to dwell among His people.

That means the deepest question behind Yom Kippur is not simply, **"How can sin be forgiven?"**

It is:

HOW CAN A HOLY GOD DWELL IN THE MIDST OF A SINFUL PEOPLE?

Once we see that question, the entire Day of Atonement begins to open before us.

The blood begins to make sense.

The priest begins to make sense.

The veil begins to make sense.

The two goats begin to make sense.

The cleansing of the sanctuary begins to make sense.

And eventually, I believe, Messiah begins to come into focus.

Whether you are already a believer in Yeshua, a Jewish reader investigating His claims, or simply someone seeking to understand the Scriptures more deeply, I invite you to walk slowly through this chapter with me. Do not feel pressured to reach my conclusion before examining the evidence. Open your Bible. Read the passages. Ask questions. Test what I write against the Scriptures.

Most importantly, ask Yehovah to reveal His truth to you.

Because my purpose is not simply to convince you of a theological position. I want us to encounter the heart of the One who established Yom Kippur in the first place.

The Creator is holy.

Sin is serious.

Atonement is necessary.

But mercy has made a way.

And as we are about to discover, the destination is greater than forgiveness alone.

The goal of atonement is His presence.

So let us begin where Yehovah began.

Let us go back to Israel.

Let us go back to Sinai.

Let us go back to the Tabernacle.

Let us stand outside the veil.

Let us watch the High Priest.

Let us look again at the two goats.

And before bringing our assumptions with us, let us ask the question that will guide everything that follows:

WHY DID YEHOVAH GIVE ISRAEL YOM KIPPUR?

There are moments when reading Scripture when we need to resist the temptation to rush toward the answer. Yom Kippur is one of those moments. Some readers of this book already believe that Yeshua of Nazareth is Israel's promised Messiah. Others may be Jewish readers who love the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob but have never seriously considered Yeshua outside the framework in which He has traditionally been presented. Others may simply be searching. Wherever you stand, I want to invite you to do something with me: for a moment, put aside the conclusions you have inherited and allow the Scriptures themselves to ask the questions.

Before we ask whether Yom Kippur points toward Yeshua, we first need to understand why there had to be a Day of Atonement at all. Why blood? Why sacrifice? Why a priest? Why a sanctuary? Why a veil? Why a mercy seat? Why were two goats required for Israel? Why was one killed while the other was sent alive into the wilderness? Why did this happen every year? These are not Christian symbols being imposed upon the Torah thousands of years later. They originate in the Torah itself, within Yehovah's covenant relationship with Israel. Behind all of them stands one enormous question: **How can the holy God of Israel dwell in the midst of a people affected by sin and uncleanness?**

That question has become increasingly important to me because Yom Kippur is so often approached primarily as a day concerning sin, repentance and forgiveness. Those things certainly belong at its heart, but there is something deeper underneath them. Sin had created a problem of presence. Yehovah had redeemed a people for Himself, and He desired to dwell among them. Yet the people among whom He desired to dwell were capable of sin, rebellion and uncleanness. Yom Kippur therefore reveals something astonishing about Yehovah's character. He does not simply identify the problem and withdraw. He establishes a means of atonement so that His presence can remain among His covenant people. The story of atonement is ultimately the story of the Creator who desires to dwell with His people.

These Are My Appointed Times

When we open Leviticus 23, we encounter words that should shape everything that follows: "The feasts of Yehovah, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts" (Leviticus 23:2). Notice the ownership in that statement. Yehovah does not introduce them merely as Israel's festivals. He calls them **His** appointed times. The Hebrew word *moed* carries the idea of an appointed time, a designated season or an appointed meeting. Israel did not decide when these meetings would occur or invent ceremonies by which they could approach the Creator. Yehovah established the appointments, determined their purpose and entrusted their observance to His covenant people.

That distinction matters tremendously. These appointed times existed long before Christianity, church calendars or Christian prophetic charts. They were also given before the many traditions that would later surround their observance within Judaism. They belong first to Yehovah and are revealed in His Torah. Therefore, whether you are Jewish, Christian or simply searching for truth, our safest starting point is the same: **What does the Scripture actually say?** Before asking what Yom Teruah, Yom Kippur or Sukkot might tell us prophetically, we must first allow Torah to explain why Yehovah established these appointments in the life of Israel.

I have spent many years encouraging people to return to Scripture and ask questions they may never have thought to ask. This is one of those occasions. Instead of beginning with, "What does this feast mean to my religious tradition?" perhaps we should first ask, **"What did Yehovah intend this appointed time to teach Israel?"** Who gave it? To whom was it given? Why was it necessary? What did Israel learn about holiness by keeping it? What did the sacrifices reveal about sin, life, blood and cleansing? What did the priesthood teach about approaching Yehovah? And why does the Torah itself contain patterns that seem to leave us looking for something greater?

So let us go back to Sinai. Let us stand with a people who have recently walked out of Egypt. If you already believe in Yeshua, resist the temptation to rush immediately to the New Covenant writings. If you are Jewish and do not presently believe Yeshua is Messiah, I am not asking you to begin by accepting my conclusion. I am asking you to walk through the Torah with me. Let us first establish the pattern from Moses and the Prophets. Then, when we eventually look at Yeshua of Nazareth, you can ask for yourself whether His life, death and resurrection fit the pattern that Israel's own Scriptures have already established.

Redeemed Before They Arrived at Sinai

One of the first things we need to understand is that Israel did not arrive at Mount Sinai attempting to earn redemption. They arrived because they had already been redeemed. That order is vital. Yehovah did not hand Israel the Torah while they were slaves in Egypt and say, "If you obey these commandments well enough, I will deliver you from Pharaoh." He acted first. The Passover lamb had already been slain. Blood had already marked the houses. The firstborn had been spared. Egypt had experienced judgment. The sea had opened, Israel had

crossed on dry ground, and the army pursuing them had been defeated. Only after redemption did Yehovah bring Israel to Sinai.

That changes the way we should read what happens next. Covenant instruction was not the price Israel paid to escape Egypt. Yehovah's saving action preceded Israel's covenant responsibility. Deliverance came before the instructions governing the life of the redeemed community. This is important because Torah can sometimes be portrayed as though Israel were desperately attempting to earn enough favor for the Creator to become their Redeemer. The Exodus tells the opposite story. Yehovah heard their cries, remembered His covenant, acted in power and brought them out. The people standing at Sinai were learning how a people who had already been redeemed were now to live in relationship with their Redeemer.

Then Yehovah says something that I consider one of the most beautiful statements in the Exodus story: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself" (Exodus 19:4). Notice His destination. He does not merely say, **"I brought you out of Egypt."** He says, **"I brought you to Myself."** Egypt was the place they were leaving, but Yehovah Himself was the destination toward which redemption was moving. Israel had been delivered from bondage so that they could belong to Him, hear His voice, walk in His ways and live in His presence.

This is one of the truths I want us to carry throughout this entire book: **redemption has a destination.** We can describe salvation almost entirely in terms of what we have escaped - judgment, bondage, sin, or death, but redemption is not merely about what Yehovah brings us out of; it is about whom He brings us to. Israel came out of Egypt to meet with Yehovah. This is the heart of biblical redemption. It moves toward relationship, and relationship moves toward presence. If we understand that, we are already beginning to understand why Yom Kippur was necessary.

A Kingdom of Priests

At Sinai, Yehovah begins to reveal the identity and calling of the people He has redeemed. "If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant," He declares, "then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5–6). Israel was not simply becoming another political nation among the nations. Yehovah was establishing a covenant people who would be set apart for His purposes - a treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

There is a small phrase in that declaration that I do not want you to miss: **"For all the earth is Mine."** Israel's election was taking place within Yehovah's purpose for the whole earth. The God who entered covenant with Israel was not a local deity whose authority stopped at Israel's borders. He is Creator. The earth belongs to Him. The nations belong to Him. Israel was being set apart in the midst of a world that already belonged to Yehovah. Israel's calling can therefore never be properly understood if we separate it from Yehovah's larger purpose for His creation.

We can trace this purpose back before Sinai to Abraham. Yehovah declared, "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). Israel was chosen, but the nations were never forgotten. The covenant would be entrusted to Israel. The priesthood would operate within Israel. The sanctuary would stand among Israel. The sacrificial system would be given to Israel. The prophets would speak from Israel, and Messiah would come from Israel. Yet from the beginning, Yehovah's redemptive purpose had the nations in view. Israel's calling and the redemption of the nations were never intended to be competing stories.

This will become particularly important as we move from Yom Kippur toward Sukkot. Later we will explore what the appointed times reveal not only about Israel but about Yehovah's purpose for the nations. For now, hold onto this foundational truth: **Yehovah chose Israel within a plan that ultimately concerns the whole**

earth. We must not erase Israel in order to reach the nations, and we must not become so focused on Israel that we forget the nations. Scripture requires us to hold both together because the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob declares that the entire earth belongs to Him.

"That I May Dwell Among Them"

After Sinai, Yehovah makes another statement that brings us closer to the heart of Yom Kippur: "Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). Read those words slowly. What does Yehovah desire? He desires to **dwell among His people**. The Tabernacle was not merely Israel's religious meeting hall. It represented something breathtaking: the Creator of heaven and earth intended to place His dwelling in the midst of the people He had redeemed out of slavery.

Try to picture Israel's camp in the wilderness. Families, tribes, tents, children, livestock and the ordinary activity of human life surround the Tabernacle. At the center is the dwelling place associated with Yehovah's presence. His presence is not an occasional addition to Israel's national life. He is at the center. Everything else is positioned in relation to Him. This physical arrangement communicates a spiritual reality: Israel was to become a people whose entire existence revolved around the presence, holiness and purposes of Yehovah.

Living here in Israel has made this dimension of Scripture increasingly personal to me. I do not read these passages merely as ancient history concerning a distant people. I live among the descendants of this story. I walk the streets of this land and hear Hebrew spoken around me every day. Yet the more closely I look at Israel's story, the more I am struck by something deeper than geography. Yehovah did not merely want Israel occupying a particular territory. He wanted Israel **near Him**. Land mattered. Covenant mattered. Nationhood mattered. But at the center of everything was His presence.

And that creates the great tension running through Leviticus. Yehovah is holy, but the people among whom He chooses to dwell are not. The Holy One has placed His sanctuary among human beings who can sin, rebel and become unclean. How can sinful humanity approach such holiness and survive? How can the sanctuary remain among people whose uncleanness affects the very place where Yehovah has chosen to dwell? This is not a small theological problem hidden somewhere in Leviticus. It is one of the central problems of Israel's Scriptures, and Yom Kippur is Yehovah's appointed response within the Sinai covenant.

The Problem of His Presence

We often approach atonement primarily from the perspective of human guilt: we have sinned, therefore we need forgiveness. That is true, but Leviticus asks us to look more deeply. The issue is not merely, **"How can guilty people be forgiven?"** The larger question is, **"How can Yehovah continue dwelling among His people when sin and uncleanness are present?"** Sin is not simply a legal entry in a heavenly record. Sin damages relationship, produces death, brings uncleanness and contaminates what is intended to be holy.

The problem in Leviticus is therefore not Yehovah's unwillingness to dwell with Israel. Quite the opposite. His desire to dwell among His people is precisely why the problem of sin must be addressed. If He had no intention of remaining in their midst, there would be no need to cleanse the sanctuary. But Yehovah does intend to remain. Therefore, He establishes a means by which uncleanness can be dealt with, sin can be atoned for, the sanctuary can be cleansed and covenant relationship can continue.

I want you to feel the tension before we resolve it. Imagine being an Israelite in that wilderness camp. The presence of Yehovah is not an abstract doctrine. His sanctuary stands in your midst. You have heard what happened in Egypt. You have seen the mountain shake. You know that the One dwelling among you is holy. Yet you also know yourself. You know your family. You know your nation. You know that the people surrounding this sanctuary are capable of rebellion. How does holiness remain in the midst of human weakness? Yom Kippur answers that question with blood, sacrifice, priesthood, cleansing and mercy.

The Day of Atonement

Leviticus 16 takes us into one of the most solemn moments in Israel's covenant life. Once each year, the High Priest entered the innermost place of the sanctuary. Behind the veil stood the Ark, and above the Ark was the *kapporet*, commonly called the mercy seat or atonement cover. This was not a place into which Aaron could casually wander whenever he desired. Yehovah warned Moses, "Tell Aaron your brother not to come at just any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die" (Leviticus 16:2).

Why such severity? Yehovah explains: **"For I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat."** The issue is His presence. The Holy of Holies was not dangerous because Yehovah was unpredictable. It was dangerous because human uncleanness was approaching divine holiness. Aaron could not determine the terms of that encounter. Yehovah established the way of approach. There would be a priest. There would be sacrifice. There would be blood. There would be cleansing. There would be atonement. Even the High Priest could enter only according to the way Yehovah had provided.

Pause and consider what Israel was learning. Human beings do not determine the terms upon which we approach the Creator. Israel did not create the way into the Holy of Holies. Aaron did not negotiate the conditions of entry. **Yehovah provided the way into His presence.** That principle becomes essential to everything that follows. Whatever conclusions we eventually reach concerning Messiah, the Torah has already established the foundation: when the separation between a holy God and sinful humanity is overcome, the initiative and provision come from Yehovah Himself.

The Priest Who Needed Atonement

There is another detail in Leviticus 16 that becomes increasingly significant as we continue. The High Priest could not simply walk into the sanctuary carrying everyone else's sins. Aaron himself required atonement. "Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering, which is for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his house" (Leviticus 16:6). Before the High Priest could represent Israel, his own condition had to be addressed. The mediator himself was part of the human problem.

Think about the limitation this reveals. Israel's High Priest stood in a unique position, yet he was still a man requiring atonement. Before he could carry sacrificial blood on behalf of the nation, blood had to be offered for him. He could represent the people, but he could never become the final solution to their problem. His own need for atonement leaves us with a question that Torah itself invites us to consider: **Will there ever be a mediator who does not first need atonement for himself?**

Stay with Aaron for a moment. Watch him prepare. Watch the sacrifice. Watch the blood. Watch him move toward the veil. Watch him disappear from the sight of the people. Israel waits outside while one representative enters the place they cannot enter. Everything about the moment teaches dependence. The people cannot cleanse themselves. They cannot appoint themselves High Priest. They cannot enter behind the veil on their own terms. They must depend upon the provision Yehovah has established on their behalf.

That picture should begin stirring something within us. When it comes to atonement, human beings are profoundly dependent upon Yehovah's provision. Israel needed a mediator. Israel needed sacrifice. Israel needed blood. Israel needed mercy. The sinner could not manufacture cleansing from within himself. That truth does not diminish human responsibility or repentance; it reveals the extraordinary nature of divine mercy. **Yehovah provided what His people could never provide for themselves.**

"I Have Given It to You"

Leviticus 17:11 gives us one of the great interpretive keys to the sacrificial system: "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 by the life." There are many profound words in that verse, but I want to draw your attention to these: **"I have given it to you."**

The sacrificial system was not humanity desperately attempting to persuade an unwilling Creator to become merciful. Yehovah Himself provided the means of atonement. He established the altar. He established the priesthood. He determined the sacrifices. He appointed the day. He gave the blood upon the altar for atonement. The entire system begins with divine provision. Israel did not discover a method for forcing open the door into Yehovah's presence. Yehovah opened a way for His covenant people to remain before Him.

This changes the emotional atmosphere surrounding Yom Kippur. Certainly it is solemn. Sin is serious. Blood is shed. Israel is commanded to humble itself. Yet underneath that solemnity is mercy. Yehovah wants relationship to continue. The One who exposes sin is also the One who provides atonement. The God whose holiness reveals Israel's uncleanness is the same God who establishes cleansing. Judgment is not the only message coming from the sanctuary. **Mercy is speaking there too.**

The blood represented life. Sin produces death, and a life was given. Israel could never legitimately conclude that sin was insignificant. Every sacrifice communicated its seriousness. Every drop of blood declared that life mattered. Every Yom Kippur reminded the nation that it could not cleanse itself. Yet every sacrifice also testified that Yehovah had not abandoned His people. When I see both sides together, Yom Kippur becomes profoundly moving. Sin is more serious than we want to admit, but Yehovah's desire for reconciliation is greater than we often dare to believe.

The Mystery of the Two Goats

Now we come to one of the most remarkable pictures in the entire Day of Atonement, and it deserves far more attention than it often receives. Leviticus 16 does not present Israel with one goat but **two**. Yehovah tells Aaron to take "two kids of the goats as a sin offering" (Leviticus 16:5). Later, Aaron is instructed to take the two goats and present them together "before Yehovah at the door of the tabernacle of meeting" (verse 7).

Notice that Torah initially presents them together. They belong to the same Yom Kippur ritual. Lots are then cast over them. One is designated "for Yehovah," while the other is designated "for Azazel" and is ultimately sent away into the wilderness. Whatever questions surround the precise meaning of *Azazel*, the function of the two goats in the chapter is clear: one is killed and its blood is used in the work of atonement, while the other remains alive and carries away Israel's confessed iniquities.

Why two goats?

I believe the answer begins to emerge when we recognize that Yom Kippur is communicating more than one dimension of what Yehovah does with sin. Sin must be **atoned for**, but sin must also be **removed**. One goat

dies. Another disappears into the wilderness. One gives its blood. The other symbolically carries Israel's iniquities away from the camp.

One picture alone would not communicate the entire message as vividly as the two together.

The Goat Whose Blood Went Behind the Veil

Leviticus 16:15 says, "Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which is for the people, bring its blood inside the veil... and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat." This is extraordinary. The blood of the goat is carried into the innermost sanctuary on behalf of Israel. The people remain outside. Their representative enters with the blood of another.

The blood is then connected with cleansing the Holy Place "because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins" (verse 16). Again, Torah itself establishes the vocabulary: **sin, sacrifice, blood, priest, sanctuary, atonement and cleansing.** We do not need later religious imagination to create these connections. They are already present in Moses.

But the ritual is not finished when the blood has been presented.

There is still another goat standing alive.

And what happens to that goat opens another window into the meaning of atonement.

The Living Goat

After the work of cleansing has been completed, Aaron turns toward the living goat. Leviticus records:

> *"Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat."*

Leviticus 16:21

Do not rush past those words.

All the iniquities.

All their transgressions.

All their sins.

Symbolically, the sins of Israel are placed upon the head of another.

The goat has not committed those sins. Yet it becomes the bearer of what belongs to the people.

Then Torah says that the goat "shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land" (Leviticus 16:22).

Here is the second picture.

The first goat shows us blood presented for atonement.

The second goat shows us guilt being carried away.

The people remain. The sin-bearer leaves.

He Shall Bear Their Iniquities

Now I want my Jewish reader especially to stay with me, because we do not yet need to leave the Tanakh to see where this language takes us.

Leviticus tells us that the goat **"shall bear on itself all their iniquities."**

Now turn to Isaiah.

In Isaiah 53 we encounter the Servant of Yehovah. The passage says:

> *"Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."*

Isaiah 53:4

Then:

> *"Yehovah has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."*

Isaiah 53:6

And later:

> *"My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities."*

Isaiah 53:11

Listen to the language.

Leviticus 16:

The goat shall bear their iniquities.

Isaiah 53:

The Servant shall bear their iniquities.

I am not suggesting that Isaiah simply calls Messiah "the Yom Kippur goat." Scripture does not say that. We should not force the text beyond what it says. But neither should we ignore the vocabulary Yehovah has placed before us. Torah has already taught Israel the concept of an innocent representative bearing away the iniquity of others. Then Isaiah describes a righteous Servant upon whom Yehovah lays the iniquity of others and who bears their iniquities.

That should make us stop and ask questions.

Who Is This Righteous Servant?

Isaiah says of this Servant:

> *"He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities."*

Isaiah 53:5

He is described as righteous, yet He suffers in relation to the sins of others. He is compared to "a lamb led to the slaughter" (verse 7). He is "cut off from the land of the living" (verse 8). His grave is associated with the wicked and the rich (verse 9). Yet after this suffering and death, the passage remarkably continues to speak of Him seeing His seed, prolonging His days and seeing the travail of His soul.

Whatever conclusion you ultimately reach about Isaiah 53, you cannot dismiss the sacrificial vocabulary.

I want you to ask a question rather than inherit an answer:

Why does the Tanakh repeatedly give us the picture of one bearing what belongs to another?

The animal bears Israel's iniquities.

The Servant bears iniquities.

The sacrificial victim dies while the people live.

The righteous Servant suffers while transgressors receive the benefit.

Could Yehovah have been preparing Israel to recognize something?

The Sin Is Carried Away

The second goat is led into the wilderness "to an uninhabited land" (Leviticus 16:22). The image is powerful. The sins confessed over that goat are carried away from the camp. Israel does not chase after it. The goat is not brought back the following afternoon. It disappears from the community carrying what has been symbolically placed upon it.

This reveals another beautiful aspect of Yehovah's forgiveness. He does not merely acknowledge sin; He provides for its removal.

David later expresses this beautifully:

> *"As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."*

Psalm 103:12

The language is different, but the heart of the image is wonderfully familiar. Transgression is **removed**.

Micah asks:

> *"Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity...?"*

Micah 7:18

Then he declares:

> *"You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea."*

Micah 7:19

Yehovah does not delight in keeping His people permanently chained to forgiven sin. The Day of Atonement gives Israel a visible picture: guilt is confessed, placed upon another and carried away.

One Messiah, Both Pictures

Now we are ready to ask whether Yeshua of Nazareth fits this Torah pattern.

When the New Covenant writings describe His death, they do so using language already familiar from Israel's Scriptures. Peter, himself a Jewish follower of Yeshua, writes that Yeshua "Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24), drawing upon Isaiah's Servant imagery. Hebrews speaks of Messiah being "offered once to bear the sins of many" (Hebrews 9:28).

Again we hear the language of bearing sin.

This is why the two goats matter so much to me.

In the Yom Kippur pattern, I see two dimensions that come together in Messiah: **atonement through sacrificial death and the bearing away of sin.**

One goat dies.

One goat bears the iniquities away.

Yet Yeshua does what no pair of animals could finally accomplish: He gives His own life and bears the sins of others.

The animals were the pattern. Messiah is a person.

Why Two Goats Instead of One?

Perhaps you are wondering why Yehovah did not simply use one goat. Torah does not give us a verse saying, "Two goats are required because they prophetically represent these two specific aspects of Messiah," so we should be careful not to claim more than Scripture states. Yet the ritual itself visibly communicates two complementary realities.

The slaughtered goat cannot visibly carry Israel's confessed sins into the wilderness because it has died. The living goat cannot provide the blood carried behind the veil because it remains alive. Two animals therefore portray what one animal cannot enact simultaneously: **death associated with atonement and living removal associated with the bearing away of iniquity.**

When I then look at Yeshua, I see both realities converge.

He dies.

He bears sin.

He gives His life.

And through what He accomplishes, sin can be removed.

This does not mean every detail of the two goats must be turned into an allegory. We do not need imaginative speculation when the biblical parallels are already so powerful.

The strength is in letting Scripture interpret Scripture.

When the Sanctuary Needed Cleansing

Now we come to another aspect of Yom Kippur that is easily overlooked. The Day of Atonement was not concerned only with individual Israelites seeking forgiveness. Leviticus says that the High Priest "shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins" (Leviticus 16:16). He was also to act for "the tabernacle of meeting which remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness."

That final phrase arrests my attention every time I read it: **"in the midst of their uncleanness."** Yehovah's dwelling was among them, but their uncleanness was among them too. The sanctuary therefore required cleansing because the sins and uncleanness of the people affected the holy environment in which Yehovah had chosen to dwell. Atonement involved more than an individual saying, "I have been forgiven." It concerned the continuing presence of Yehovah among the covenant community.

This is where Yom Kippur begins expanding beyond the highly individual way many believers have learned to think about salvation. We often ask, "How can I have my sins forgiven? How can I know that I am saved?" Those are important questions, but Yom Kippur forces us to see a **nation** standing before Yehovah. There is a corporate dimension to atonement. There is a sanctuary in the midst of a people. There is collective responsibility, national identity and covenant relationship. This will become extremely important when we later examine the prophetic significance of the fall feasts (appointed times) for Israel.

Clean Before Yehovah

Then we reach one of the most beautiful declarations in Leviticus 16: "For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before Yehovah" (verse 30). Notice the movement: **atonement, cleansing, clean before Yehovah.** The objective is not merely that a religious ceremony has been completed correctly. The objective is restored relationship in His presence.

This gives us a much richer understanding of Yom Kippur. It was not religious theatre. Yehovah was teaching Israel about the reality of holiness and the seriousness of sin while simultaneously revealing His provision for cleansing. Sin polluted. Sin separated. Sin brought death. Yet Yehovah provided atonement. Blood was given. Iniquity was borne away. The sanctuary was cleansed. The people were cleansed, and covenant relationship could continue.

When I think about Yom Kippur from that perspective, I no longer see only a nation mourning over sin. I see the God of Israel making a way to remain among the people He loves. That changes the emotional center of the day. Repentance is not an end in itself. Cleansing is not an end in itself. Even atonement is not the final destination. All of these serve something greater: **reconciliation and restored presence.** Yehovah is dealing with what separates so that those He has redeemed can remain near.

And perhaps this is where Yom Kippur needs to become personal for every reader, whether Jewish or from the nations. We can become fascinated with Hebrew terminology, priestly garments, sacrifices and prophetic patterns while remaining emotionally distant from the message. But what if the question is not merely, "Do I understand Yom Kippur?" What if the deeper question is, **"Do I desire Yehovah's presence?"** If the purpose of cleansing is restored fellowship, studying Yom Kippur without hungering to know the Creator would be like studying a doorway without ever wanting to enter the room.

Why Every Year?

At this point we need to ask an uncomfortable question. If Yom Kippur dealt with Israel's problem, why did it have to be repeated the following year? Why again and again, generation after generation? The High Priest entered. Sacrifice was offered. Blood was presented. Atonement was made. The sins were confessed. The goat carried them away. The sanctuary was cleansed. The people were cleansed. Yet another year came, and another Yom Kippur was required.

The repetition itself was speaking.

Every annual observance carried within it evidence of its own limitation. Something real happened through the covenant system Yehovah had established, but the story had not reached its destination. Another year meant another sacrifice. Another generation meant another High Priest. More sin meant another Day of Atonement.

This is where I want my Jewish reader to stay with the Tanakh for a little longer before we turn to Hebrews.

The Hebrew prophets themselves tell us that something new was coming.

Not Christianity.

Not a Gentile replacement for Israel.

A **New Covenant promised by the God of Israel to Israel.**

The New Covenant Is an Israel Promise

The words "New Covenant" can immediately sound Christian to a Jewish reader. I understand that. For many Jewish people, the phrase may evoke churches, Christianity, the New Testament or a religion perceived as separate from Israel. But that reaction can prevent us from noticing something astonishing.

The phrase does not originate with Christianity.

The promise is in Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 31:31 declares:

> *"Behold, the days are coming, says Yehovah, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."*

Before we discuss what Christians believe about that covenant, simply allow Jeremiah to speak.

Who promises it?

Yehovah.

With whom does He promise to make it?

The house of Israel and the house of Judah.

The New Covenant is therefore not originally a Gentile idea.

It is an Israelite promise.

It belongs inside the prophetic hope of Israel.

"Not Like the Covenant I Made with Their Fathers"

Jeremiah continues:

> *"Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke..."*

Jeremiah 31:32

We need to allow the force of those words to reach us.

Yehovah Himself distinguishes the coming covenant from the covenant made when He brought Israel out of Egypt.

This is not a Christian theologian attacking Torah.

This is Jeremiah.

This is the Hebrew Bible.

This is Yehovah speaking through an Israelite prophet to Israel.

Something about the covenant relationship was going to change.

That does not mean Yehovah was rejecting His people. The very next promise is addressed to them.

Torah Written on the Heart

Jeremiah continues:

> *"But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Yehovah: I will put My Torah in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."*

Jeremiah 31:33

Notice what the New Covenant does not say.

It does not say, "I will abandon Israel."

It does not say, "I will become the God of another people instead."

It does not say, "I will remove My instruction and replace it with lawlessness."

Yehovah says:

My Torah will be written within them.

The issue moves to the heart.

The covenant relationship becomes internalized.

And then comes this extraordinary promise:

> *"For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."*

Jeremiah 31:34

Now place Jeremiah 31 beside Yom Kippur.

Do you see the question?

Yom Kippur is repeated year after year.

Jeremiah looks toward a covenant characterized by a remarkable declaration:

> ***"Their sin I will remember no more."***

How will Yehovah bring that about?

Let Jeremiah Ask the Question

This is where I want to speak directly to the Jewish reader who may have been told that considering Yeshua means abandoning Israel, Torah or the God of your fathers.

I am asking you to do the opposite.

Go deeper into Israel's Scriptures.

Read Jeremiah 31 for yourself.

Ask why Yehovah promised a New Covenant with Israel and Judah.

Ask why the covenant made in the Exodus is explicitly contrasted with what is coming.

Ask why the new promise involves Torah written upon the heart.

Ask why forgiveness of iniquity stands at its center.

Then go back to Leviticus 16 and ask why the blood, priest and two goats had to return every year.

And then read Isaiah 53.

Do not begin with a church.

Do not begin with a rabbi.

Do not begin with me.

Begin with the text.

If these passages belong to the Tanakh—and they do—then every Jewish person has the right to ask what they mean.

The Servant and the New Covenant

Jeremiah is not the only prophet who points toward something greater.

Isaiah speaks repeatedly of the Servant of Yehovah. In Isaiah 42:6, Yehovah says of His Servant:

> *"I, Yehovah, have called You in righteousness... and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles."*

Again in Isaiah 49:6, the Servant's mission reaches beyond Israel:

> *"I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth."*

Here the threads begin coming together.

Israel.

Covenant.

Servant.

Nations.

Salvation.

And then Isaiah 53 introduces the Servant who bears iniquity.

This is why I cannot treat Yom Kippur merely as an ancient ceremony. The Torah establishes categories that the Prophets later develop. Blood. Atonement. Bearing iniquity. Covenant. Cleansing. Israel. Nations. Forgiveness.

The Tanakh itself creates the expectation.

The question is whether someone has come who brings these strands together.

Now Consider Yeshua of Nazareth

Only now do I want us to turn toward Yeshua.

Not toward centuries of Christian history.

Not toward antisemitism committed under Christian banners.

Not toward religious art that made a Jewish Messiah appear detached from His own people.

Look instead at Yeshua of Nazareth as a first-century Jewish man living among Israel, reading Israel's Scriptures, attending Israel's feasts and speaking about Israel's God.

On the night before His death, Yeshua took the cup and connected His approaching death with the **New Covenant**.

For someone who knows Jeremiah, that language should immediately demand attention.

Yeshua was not inventing the concept.

Jeremiah had already announced it.

The question becomes:

Why would Yeshua connect His death with Jeremiah's promised New Covenant?

That is a question worth investigating.

When Messiah Enters the Yom Kippur Picture

The letter to the Hebrews then takes the language of Leviticus and applies it directly to Messiah: "Messiah came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands" (Hebrews 9:11).

If you have stayed with me through Leviticus, those words should now carry enormous weight.

Messiah as High Priest? Messiah connected with sacrifice?

A greater sanctuary? Atonement?

Blood?

These are not foreign concepts imported into the biblical story. They are the language of Torah being used to explain the significance of Messiah.

Hebrews continues that Messiah entered "not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood... once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12).

The argument is not that Torah was meaningless.

The argument is that Torah was teaching us how to recognize the greater reality.

Once for All

"Once for all" becomes one of the great declarations surrounding Messiah's priestly work. The Levitical High Priest entered repeatedly; Messiah's sacrifice does not require repetition. The Levitical priest offered the blood of another; Messiah offered Himself. The earthly High Priest first needed atonement for his own sin; Yeshua did not. The Levitical priest entered an earthly sanctuary; Messiah entered the heavenly reality.

Hebrews declares, "For Messiah has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Hebrews 9:24).

For centuries Israel watched the High Priest disappear behind the veil carrying sacrificial blood. The people waited outside while their representative entered on their behalf. Then Yeshua came, and the followers who believed Him to be Messiah understood His death and resurrection through precisely these categories.

The question that had been echoing through every Yom Kippur was being answered.

Is there a greater High Priest?

Is there a greater sacrifice?

Is there a greater sanctuary?

Is there an atonement that does not have to be repeated every year?

Is there One who can both provide the sacrifice and bear away the sin?

The New Covenant writings answer:

Yes.

And they identify Him as Yeshua of Nazareth.

Do Not Stop at the Blood

Yet I want to challenge you not to stop here. We can become so focused upon the mechanism of atonement that we forget its purpose. The blood is essential. Forgiveness is essential. Cleansing is essential. Reconciliation is essential. But none of them is the final destination of the biblical story.

Remember where we began:

> *"I brought you to Myself."*

Remember the sanctuary:

> *"That I may dwell among them."*

Why atonement? Because Yehovah desires to dwell with His people.

Why cleansing? Because Yehovah desires to dwell with His people.

Why forgiveness? Because Yehovah desires restored relationship.

Why does the sin have to be carried away? Because sin is the barrier.

Why the New Covenant? Because Yehovah promised to write His Torah upon the heart and remember sin no more.

Why Messiah? Because Yehovah is restoring what sin destroyed.

This is why I believe Yom Kippur cannot ultimately be understood apart from Sukkot. Yom Kippur deals with the barrier; Sukkot reveals the destination. Yom Kippur confronts sin; Sukkot celebrates dwelling. Yom Kippur brings us to atonement; Sukkot takes us toward the joy of His presence.

THE GOAL OF ATONEMENT IS HIS PRESENCE.

That truth has changed the way I see the entire biblical story. Yehovah is not merely assembling forgiven people who remain at a distance from Him. He desires a people among whom He can dwell. From Eden to the Tabernacle, from the Tabernacle through the Prophets, from the promise of the New Covenant to Messiah, and ultimately toward the restoration of all things, the story is moving toward presence.

Hear Yom Kippur Again

Before leaving this chapter, imagine Yom Kippur again, not through the lens of what Christianity or Judaism later became, but through the Torah itself.

The nation stops.

The High Priest prepares himself.

The bull is offered for the priest.

Two goats stand before Yehovah.

The lot is cast.

One goat is killed.

Its blood passes behind the veil.

The living goat remains.

The High Priest places both hands upon its head.

The iniquities, transgressions and sins of Israel are confessed.

The goat bears those iniquities away into the wilderness.

The sanctuary is cleansed.

The people are declared clean before Yehovah.

Then another year comes.

And they do it again.

Can you hear the questions rising from the repetition?

Is there a sacrifice that will never need to be repeated?

Is there a High Priest who does not require atonement for Himself?

Is there a cleansing capable of reaching the heart?

Is there someone who can bear our iniquities?

Is there a covenant in which Yehovah can say, **"Their sin I will remember no more"?**

Can the separation produced by sin finally be overcome?

And ultimately:

CAN YEHOVAH DWELL FULLY WITH HIS PEOPLE?

The answer is not found in ignoring the Torah.

The Torah gives us the question.

The Prophets deepen the question.

And I have become convinced that Yeshua provides the answer.

Why I Believe Yeshua Is Israel's Messiah

I want to finish this first chapter personally.

I do not believe Yeshua is Messiah because Christianity told me I must believe it. My conviction has deepened as I have studied the Torah, the Prophets and the writings of Israel and then examined Yeshua through the patterns those Scriptures establish.

The deeper I go into Torah, the more I see Messiah.

Yom Kippur is one of the places where that conviction becomes particularly powerful for me.

I see a holy God who desires to dwell with His people.

I see sin creating separation.

I see Yehovah Himself providing the means of atonement.

I see blood given upon the altar.

I see a mediator entering on behalf of others.

I see a sacrifice dying for the people.

I see another goat bearing confessed iniquity away.

Then I hear Isaiah speak of a righteous Servant upon whom Yehovah lays the iniquity of others.

I hear Jeremiah promise a New Covenant to Israel and Judah in which Yehovah will forgive iniquity and remember sin no more.

And then I encounter Yeshua of Nazareth.

I cannot simply dismiss those connections.

The Questions That Became Convictions

As I have studied Yom Kippur, certain questions have become deeply personal convictions for me.

Why does Torah establish that atonement requires Yehovah's provision rather than humanity's invention?
Because reconciliation begins with Him. That is exactly what I see in Messiah: Yehovah providing what I could never provide for myself.

Why does the High Priest need a sacrifice for himself?
Because the earthly priesthood could never be the final answer. I need a mediator who is not himself under the same guilt he is trying to resolve.

Why does the sin offering die?
Because sin and death are inseparably connected, and atonement is costly.

Why does the living goat bear the iniquities away?
Because forgiveness is not merely acknowledging guilt; Yehovah desires to remove what separates His people from Him.

Why does Isaiah describe a righteous Servant bearing the iniquities of others?
Because the prophetic story is moving beyond animals toward a person.

Why does Jeremiah promise a New Covenant to Israel and Judah?
Because Sinai was not the final chapter of Israel's covenant story.

Why does that covenant promise include, "Their sin I will remember no more"?
Because Yehovah intends to deal with sin at a depth the annual repetition of Yom Kippur anticipated but did not finally complete.

Why did Yeshua connect His death with that New Covenant?
For me, this is impossible to dismiss as coincidence. He deliberately placed His approaching death inside Jeremiah's prophetic promise.

Why do His Jewish followers describe Him as both sacrifice and High Priest?
Because they understood His death through the Scriptures of Israel, not through a religion disconnected from them.

And finally:

Why does all of this matter to me personally?

Because I do not merely want information about Yehovah.

I want to know Him.

I Want to Know the Creator

This is where Yom Kippur reaches beyond theology and touches my heart.

I can study Hebrew.

I can study covenant.

I can analyze sacrifices.

I can discuss priesthood.

I can debate interpretations.

I can teach prophetic patterns.

But if I finish all of that and remain distant from the One who said, **"I brought you to Myself,"** then I have missed the purpose.

My faith in Yeshua has not caused me to love the God of Israel less. It has caused me to see more clearly the extraordinary lengths to which Yehovah has gone to reconcile us to Himself.

I see His holiness more clearly.

I see the seriousness of my sin more clearly.

I see His mercy more clearly.

I see His covenant faithfulness more clearly.

I see His love for Israel more clearly.

And I see His purpose for the nations more clearly.

Most of all, I see His desire for relationship.

Yom Kippur tells me that the Creator does not simply stand at a distance demanding that I somehow find my own way back to Him.

He provides the way.

He provides the atonement.

He provides the cleansing.

He provides the covenant.

And I believe He has provided the Messiah.

His name is Yeshua of Nazareth.

An Invitation to the Seeking Reader

If you already believe in Yeshua, I hope Yom Kippur causes you to love Him more deeply, not as the founder of a religion detached from Israel, but as the Messiah whose work is illuminated by Torah and the Prophets.

If you are Jewish and do not yet believe Yeshua is Messiah, I am not asking you to abandon your people. I am not asking you to become culturally Gentile. And I am certainly not asking you to stop asking questions.

I am asking you to ask more questions.

Read Leviticus 16.

Read Isaiah 53.

Read Jeremiah 31.

Put them beside one another.

Ask Yehovah to show you what is true.

Ask why blood is necessary.

Ask why there are two goats.

Ask why one dies.

Ask why the other bears Israel's iniquities away.

Ask why Isaiah describes a righteous Servant bearing iniquity.

Ask why Jeremiah promises Israel a New Covenant.

Ask how Yehovah intends to fulfill His promise to remember sin no more.

Then read the accounts of Yeshua for yourself.

Not the Yeshua of religious prejudice.

Not the Yeshua of medieval persecution.

Not the Yeshua presented as though He were opposed to Israel.

Meet the Jewish Yeshua of Nazareth in the Scriptures and ask one question:

Could He truly be the Messiah our Scriptures have taught us to expect?

That question changed my life.

And my prayer is not that you accept my answer merely because I have written it in this book.

My prayer is that you seek Yehovah for the answer yourself.

Because this entire journey through the appointed times is ultimately about something far greater than winning a theological argument.

It is about knowing Him.

The heartbeat of Exodus reaches all the way through the biblical story:

> *"I brought you to Myself."*
>
> *"That I may dwell among them."*

Jeremiah adds:

> *"I will be their God, and they shall be My people."*

And the story ultimately reaches its destination with the declaration:

> *"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them."*

That is where Yom Kippur is taking us.

The blood is not the destination.

The sacrifice is not the destination.

Even atonement is not the destination.

THE GOAL

OF

ATONEMENT

IS

HIS PRESENCE.

Yom Kippur deals with the barrier.

Messiah opens the way.

And the Creator is calling us to Himself.

About the Author

Dr. Kenny Russell is a Scottish-Israeli author, Bible teacher, broadcaster, and international speaker with more than 30 years of ministry experience. As the founder of **BulldozerFaith™ and Gottalife Ministries International**, he has dedicated his life to proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom, teaching the Scriptures from a Hebraic perspective, and helping people discover the faithfulness of Yehovah and the Messiah, Yeshua of Nazareth.

Living and ministering in Israel, Kenny writes with a passion to connect the Torah, the Prophets, and the New Covenant Scriptures, encouraging both believers and those searching for truth to return to the Word and personally know the Creator.

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