

THE FRIENDS OF ISRAEL TODAY

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Chris Katulka, Yom Kippur

The famous Jewish author and holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel recalled a night in Auschwitz 70 years ago on September 27, 1944 during Yom Kippur that the Jewish people were arguing whether or not to fast. They argued with one another because they were, after all, already starving to death, literally each of them near death living on small rations food. Among the Auschwitz prisoners was a teenager three days away from his 16th birthday. That young man would later write of that debate saying: “The Day of Atonement. Should we fast? The question was hotly debated. . . . In this place, we were always fasting. It was Yom Kippur year-round. But there were those who said we should fast, precisely because it was dangerous to do so. We needed to show God that even here, locked in hell, we were capable of singing his praises.”

Elie didn't fast that night because his father demanded he eat, and Elie says he was protesting God because of His silence during the Holocaust. However, many Jewish people did uphold the fast even as they were already starving.

Today I'm going to talk about Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement. It's is considered to be one of the most significant

Jewish holy days during the year. It's not a time of festivities or a time of celebration. It's a time of solemn introspection as Jewish people from all around the world fast and repent for the sins they've committed throughout the year.

To highlight the seriousness of this holy day among Jewish people, even during the Holocaust where many died of starvation alone, the fast was honored.

You know this raises the questions as to why some Holocaust prisoners in Auschwitz would desire during the Holocaust and Yom Kippur to fast and sing God's praises?

While Yom Kippur is a solemn day to pray, fast, and repent. It's also a day to praise God, and for some Jewish people, no matter what situation they are in.

You see Jewish people praise God because our Holy God provided a way. He provided a way for sinful/corrupt humanity to have a relationship with Him. Our God broke through time and space and fought to make sure He could "dwell" among His people. The Day of Atonement is important because a Holy God cannot have a relationship with defiled and unclean people. The overarching theme of the Day of Atonement is holiness.

Listen to this amazing verse from Leviticus 20:26 that really sums up the significance of God's desire for His people to be holy: "And you shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine."

The beauty of the Day of Atonement is that God in His grace realized His people could never maintain a holy status so He provided a means, a way, a day created on the Jewish calendar specifically for the atonement of their souls, and the forgiveness of sins. Instead of allowing His people to wallow in their sins, year after year, He created Yom Kippur to help restore the relationship between Himself and His people... Israel.

Now the Day of Atonement from the Scriptures didn't not provide a permanent fix for the Israelites. The name of the day Yom Kippur, literally means the day of covering or concealing, which means the Israelites sins were only being concealed by the blood sacrifice of a goat, and the transmission of sins to a scapegoat.

The Day of Atonement was special because, not only were sins forgiven, but the High Priest of Israel was permitted to enter into the Holy of Holies. Folks, the Holy of Holies was the very throne room of Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was so holy that if you simply walked in unannounced on your terms you would be struck down. This actually happened to the sons of Aaron

the High Priest... Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10 when they entered the Holy of Holies on their terms and God struck them down.

On Yom Kippur the High Priest was commanded to enter into the presence of God in order to make atonement for the sins of Israel. This act alone, I'm sure, would have been enough to cause the High Priest to enter into panic mode... because everything had to be done just right, one wrong move and he could end up like Aaron's sons, and there would be no forgiveness for the people of Israel.

All of this changed, however, when Jesus died, was buried, and resurrected from the dead.

Jesus handled every element and concept of Yom Kippur in Himself. He became the High Priest, the perfect High Priest who could come before God without any concern because He was sinless. The blood of the sacrifice He brought to God was His own blood, and He was also the scapegoat on which all sin was placed.

Because of who Jesus is, His sacrifice is once for all. There is no need any more for annual sacrifices for sins... His sacrifice finished the need for any future sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins.

But here is where the rubber meets the road... here is why the Day of Atonement and Christ's sacrifice is so important for believers. You and I now have access... we have access to enter into the presence of the Holy God.

Remember earlier I said only the High Priest could enter the holy of holies once a year and the Israelites waited outside in great anticipation. Now, because of Christ, we can go in, we can enter into the presence of God... into the Holy of Holies.

Listen to what the writer of Hebrews says in chapter 10:18

“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh.” Did you hear the most important word in that verse?

The word that stands out to me is “Boldness”

Because of Christ our High Priest and our Sacrifice... we can now have the boldness and confidence to walk right into the presence of our great God. And it's there we give thanks to our God for his grace, and we praise Him for His compassion. It's there we offer up our prayers, and our needs as His children.”