



Minutes With Messiah

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A Celebration Out of Time

The last day of *Succoth*, the Feast of Booths, is commonly called *Hoshana Rabbah* (the Great Hosanna). The ceremony dates back at least to the Maccabean period, about 165 BC, and is related to a ceremony praying for rain for the following year.

As on the other days of *Succoth*, the celebrants carry the "four species," the representatives of the types of plants specified in Leviticus 23--myrtle, citron, willow, and palm. They parade around the synagogue seven times quoting Psalm 118:25: "Save now [Hosanna], I beseech thee, O Lord: O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity." The days is called the Great Hosanna because it is repeated seven times, rather than once.

Succoth, and therefore *Hoshana Rabbah*, always come in the fall, the first day of *Succoth* coming four days after Yom Kippur. This year (2000) *Succoth* begins on October 14, and *Hoshana Rabbah* falls on October 20.

Imagine the surprise of the Jewish leaders, then, when one *spring*, a week before Passover, the ceremony was enacted on the streets of Jerusalem. The crowd was lining one particular street, carpeting the road with palm (and possibly myrtle and willow) branches, and shouting the Hosanna, along with the following verse of Psalm 118: "Blessed be he that cometh in the name of

of the teachers even associated this with Zechariah 9:9.

It was strange that the people were celebrating six months out of phase. It was strange, but it was appropriate. It is said that *Rosh HaShanna* is the Day of Judgement, when God decrees what will happen the following year. After the ten days of repentance, He seals what he has written (and presumably revised) on the Day of Atonement. Ten days later, on *Hoshana Rabbah*, the gates of judgement are closed for the year. In a similar way, Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem was really the closing of the gates to any other path except to the cross. He would pray later "let this cup pass from me." (Matt 26:39) However, the people's reaction in a Great Hosanna on his entry into the city had such an impact on the rulers (Lk 19:47; Jn 12:19) that he could no longer turn back.

The *Hoshana Rabbah* out of time, though, celebrated not only the sealing of Jesus' path to the cross, but the sealing of the way of salvation for all people for all time.

But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. (Heb 9: 26-28)

The people were
celebrating six months
out of phase.

the Lord: we have blessed you out of the house of the Lord." Not only were they celebrating out of season, they were shouting the Hosanna before a young, troublesome Rabbi who was entering Jerusalem on a donkey, and equating him to the messiah. Maybe a few

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Yom Kippur: The Day of Covering

And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil: And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not: And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times. Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the veil, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat: And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness.” (Le 16:12-16)

In what may be one of the most significant puns of the Bible, the book of Micah notwithstanding, Moses describes the duties of the

The blood of covering is put on the covering.

High Priest on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). Actually, we should call it “the Day of Covering,” for that shows the play on words more clearly. As shown in the passage above, the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) enters the Holy of Holies with a censer and a bowl of blood. Incense is put on the censer to make enough smoke to hide the “mercy seat.” Then blood from the bowl is sprinkled on that “mercy seat.” But there is the pun, because what the King James Version of the Bible translates as mercy seat is a word with the same root as Kippur, *kapporeth*, or covering. Thus the blood of covering is put on the covering.

This subtle play on words and the ceremony surrounding it may reveal special aspects of our atonement in Christ. The writer of Hebrews seemed to think the same, as he compared the Messiah to the *Kohen Gadol* and to the sacrifice made for atonement.

The censer

The first thing the High Priest did after going into the Holy of Holies (or according to some authorities, before going in) was to put incense on the golden censer he held. Incense was important in the temple area to hide the scent of blood, but this was not the reason this time. Incense was put on the coals at this time, according to the scripture, so that the smoke will hide the *kapporeth*, that the bearer of the blood not die. Why would he die without the smoke? The *shekinah*, the glory of God, sat on the mercy seat. No one except Moses was allowed to see God and live. (Judges 6:22-23; Isa 6:5) If the High Priest didn’t hide the mercy seat with incense smoke, he would die and the atonement would not take place.

In contrast, our High Priest, Jesus the Messiah, entered the Holy of Holies and opened it so that we may all enter in without fear. Probably this was the symbolism in the “veil” of the temple tearing from top to bottom at the moment of His death. Because he made atonement forever, we can approach the glory of God without fear.

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (He 4:14-16)

The covering

Atonement is made at the mercy seat. They both come from a word meaning “covering” as noted above. What is the significance of these words being the same? I think it has to do with the nature of the

covering of the ark. What did the mercy seat do? It covered the *aron*, the ark of the covenant. Why did the box need a cover? It obviously wasn't to keep people out, for after it was built things were added to the contents. It could not have been to keep things in, because the care with which the ark was carried would prevent their falling out. Another option is that a lid was put on it to preserve what was inside. God then "sealed" the ark against casual opening by his presence between the angels of the mercy seat.

What does this have to do with atonement? Atonement is also a covering—a covering of sin. Sin is a blemish on the soul, a laceration of the spirit. If left alone, it will allow all manner of infection in. Soon the soul becomes so contaminated that death is inevitable unless God performs a radical healing, as he does in baptism. To keep the infection from coming back each wound must be covered. This covering is atonement, made to preserve the soul inside.

The blood

The third aspect of Yom Kippur, and probably the most obvious, is the blood. Not all sacrifices were blood sacrifices. However, every sacrifice that related to consecration, forgiveness, or atonement were necessarily blood sacrifices. Without the blood, atonement could not be made. A sacrifice was first made for the High Priest, to atone for his sins. Only after that atonement was made could he make atonement for the sins of the people of Israel. On the other hand, the great *Kohen Gadol*, the Messiah, did not need to atone for his own sins and used his own blood to atone for ours.

But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people . . . which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of

goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (He 9:7,9,11-14)

Many is the time I have heard preachers talk about the sins of Israel being "rolled foward" until the sacrifice of the Messiah. This is a phrase not found in the Bible. In fact, it may even be a concept not found there either. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews, in the passage quoted above states emphatically that the blood of bulls and goats was

Atonement is a covering made to preserve the soul.

effective for sanctifying and purifying, making all but the conscience perfect. Atonement was effectively made year by year.

Then what is the difference between the atonement under the law and the atonement made by the Messiah? The atonement made by the priests covered the sins of the people. The infection could be held out; God no longer saw them as having sinned. However, their consciences were continually made aware of sin. And there is the difference between Christ and the blood of bulls and goats. Both were effective in the purifying of the flesh, but only Messiah can purify the conscience. Because His sacrifice was made once, there is no reminder of sin. Those dead works can be forgotten, enabling us for greater service to God.

Thank You, Very Much.

This issue of *Minutes With Messiah* completes one year of publication. To those who have complimented me, made comments about my articles, and especially prayed for me, I express my thanks. To those of you, in Albuquerque and elsewhere, who have been using this as a means of teaching the Gospel to others, I express my utmost thanks, because that is the purpose for which I have been writing. If I have served God, as I intend to continue doing through this avenue, I am humbled and grateful for the opportunity.

Please continue to pray for this effort. If it has been of value to you, please give me names of others to add to my mailing list, so they may benefit as well.

Succoth: The Feast of Booths

Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath. Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. (Le 23:39, 42-3)

When God appointed a feast for the Jews to follow the harvest, He decreed that they should dwell for seven days in booths during that feast. This was to show new generations that He had made Israel dwell in tents after bringing them out of Egypt.

Several questions could be raised. Why remind people of the obvious, that they dwelt in tents as they travelled from Egypt to Canaan? Why does this reminder not come during *Pesach*, the celebration of the exodus? The farmers have toiled in the heat to harvest their crops; why live in booths now when it is cooler rather than then, when it might have been more comfortable? What does living in tents have to do with bringing the first fruit of the harvest?

There is a deeper meaning to living in the tents that just reminding Israel that the expected living arrangements would be tents. That deeper meaning is also related to the harvest, more than to the miracles of the beginning of the exodus. The timing of the requirement to live in *succos* (booths) is important.

Historians have told us that the movement from man as a “hunter-gatherer” toward “civilization” was keyed by the development of agriculture. That is, until man learned to plant crops he had no opportunity to form cities and no time to develop the arts and technology. What man has become is largely a result of his learning to manipulate his environment. He can settle in one place, rather than follow the game, and he can form large groups tied to a particular land, such as towns, cities, even nations.

What better time for God to remind us of our temporary nature than when we are celebrating our permanence? Now that you have land to grow crops, now that you have the land for a national inheritance, you must remember that it was not always so. God made you dwell in tents before He gave you the land. Your ancestors knew they were traveling toward a goal, not having attained it. After the days of repentance,

when one brings the first fruits of his crops, he is tempted to say “I have it made. My sins are atoned for, my work has produced all this bounty. I have attained the goal.”

Instead, God reminds us that Israel lived in tents. They stopped for long periods on their journeys, but they lived in tents. By tying the Feast of Tabernacles to the bringing of the first fruits, God is saying, “You have it good, but you aren’t there yet. I have a better place waiting for you. Remember, though you build houses you are still living in the tents you know as your bodies. Stay on the path to the real Promised Land.” (The first day of Succoth this year is October 14.)

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