

# How to Observe the Day of Atonement

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How do Christians observe the Day of Atonement, when the New Testament offers us little information on how to keep this festival? By examining the Old Testament instructions about this festival, primarily found in Leviticus 23, through the lens of the New Covenant. We will gain a deeper understanding on how to observe the Day of Atonement as a New Covenant festival.

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves and present a food offering to the Lord. And you shall not do any work on that very day, for it is a Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the Lord your God. For whoever is not afflicted on that very day shall be cut off from his people. And whoever does any work on that very day, that person I will destroy from among his people. You shall not do any work. It is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwelling places. It shall be to you a Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict yourselves. On the ninth day of the month beginning at evening, from evening to evening shall you keep your Sabbath" (Leviticus 23:26-32, All scriptures quoted are from the *English Standard Version* unless otherwise stated)

## Old Testament References

Leviticus 23:26-32; Numbers 29:7-11; Leviticus 16; Exodus 30:10

## New Testament References

Acts 27:9; Hebrews 9 and 10

## Tenth Day of the Seventh Month (Leviticus 23:27,32)

We observe the Day of Atonement on the tenth-day of the seventh month of the sacred calendar (Leviticus 23:27, 32; 16:29; Numbers 29:7).<sup>1</sup> Biblical days start and end in the evening, or at sundown, not midnight.<sup>2</sup> For example in 2017, the Day of Atonement falls on September 30th. Therefore, we begin observing Atonement at sunset, September 29th, and ending it at sunset on September 30th.

## Holy Convocation (Leviticus 23:27)

God commands that we observe this festival by gathering with others in a "holy convocation" or "sacred assembly" (Leviticus 23:27; Numbers 29:7). From Hebrews 10:23-25, we see that "assembling together" (*New King James Version*) helps us to motivate and encourage one another. According to 1 Corinthians 14:26-31, what transpires when we "assemble" (*New American Standard Version*) must lead to our edification, learning, and encouragement.

## A Day of Afflicting, Humbling and Denying Self (Leviticus 23:27, 29, 32)

The Day of Atonement is a day to afflict, humble and deny ourselves before God (Leviticus 23:27,29,32; 16:29, 31; Numbers 29:7). We do this by fasting (Ezra 8:21; Psalm 35:13), which means avoid the consumption of food and drink (Esther 4:16), from sundown on the ninth-day of seventh month until sundown on the tenth-day (Leviticus 23:32).

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<sup>1</sup> Most Christians who observe the biblical festivals use the Calculated Hebrew Calendar. Modern Judaism uses this same calendar.

<sup>2</sup> In the Bible days start and end in the evening or at sundown. The Book of Genesis describes the days of creation with the term, "there was evening and there was morning," then the descriptive words "the first day," or "the second day," all the way to seventh day. For whatever reason we fail to see the term "there was evening and there was morning," used in reference to the seventh day, which scripture identifies as following the sixth day (Genesis 1:4-5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31; 2:1-2).

### *Right and Wrong Way to Fast*

There are right and wrong ways to fast. Isaiah 58:1-5 describes some of the wrong ways to fast: 1) fasting for show, 2) fasting to try and impress God, 3) fasting to force God to notice us and hear our prayers. This selfish type of fasting does not change us and results in hurting other people. Verses 6-12 describe the right way to fast. This is fasting with repentance at its core (Isaiah 58:1), and leads to a change of heart and behavior.

Prayer is an important part of fasting (Nehemiah 1:4; Psalm 35:13; Luke 2:37; 5:33; Acts 13:3; 14:23), and we should set aside extra time for prayer on this day. For our prayers to be answered, we must be fasting the right way (Isaiah 58:4,9).

When we observe the Day of Atonement we need to apply Jesus' instructions on prayer, and fasting found in Matthew 6:5-18. Although others may know we are praying and fasting on this day, we shouldn't draw attention to this fact.

### **Present an Offering to the LORD (Leviticus 23:27)**

*Old Covenant Day of Atonement Sacrifices*

Daily Offerings (Numbers 28:1-8)

Day of Atonement Offerings (Numbers 29:7-11)

Day of Atonement Offerings (Leviticus 16)

*New Covenant Spiritual Sacrifices*

As Christians and members of the New Covenant Holy/Royal Priesthood we no longer make physical sacrifices or offerings as dictated by the Old Covenant (Hebrews 9:1-14; 10:1-14); we now offer up spiritual sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Romans 12:1-2), involving personal acts of sacrifice to God and fellowman. Sacrifices such as prayer (Psalm 141:1-2; 1 Timothy 2:8), verbally expressing praise and thanks to God (Hebrews 13:15), doing good for others (Hebrews 13:16), sharing what we have with others (Hebrews 13:16; Philippians 4:18), being humble (Psalm 51:16-17), martyrdom (2 Timothy 4:6; Philippians 2:17), and making converts (Romans 15:15-16). The Day of Atonement reminds us we have a responsibility to offer ourselves in service to God and fellowman.

### **A Sabbath Day of Solemn or Complete Rest (Leviticus 23:28, 30-32)**

Like the weekly Sabbath (Leviticus 23:3), we observe the Day of Atonement as a day of rest in which no work is permitted (Leviticus 23:28, 31-32; 16:29, 31).

Although the New Testament offers little information on how to observe the Day of Atonement. We have seen that by examining the Old Testament instructions about this festival, through the lens of the New Covenant. We can learn how to observe a New Covenant Day of Atonement.