

Yom Kippur 2017

By T.W. Tramm

YOM KIPPUR, or “Day of Atonement,” begins the evening of September 30th this year.

The most solemn and holy of the feasts, Yom Kippur was, in ancient times, the one day of the year the high priest was allowed to enter into the most sacred part of the Temple called the “Holy of Holies.” Standing before the Ark of the Covenant, above which the Lord’s presence would appear in a brilliant cloud, the priest would perform an extensive set of rituals designed to atone for Israel’s sins for the year (Lev. 16).

Because the fall feasts are prophetic of the end of the age, the Scriptures describing the time of judgment are chock full of allusions to Yom Kippur. One example is Isaiah 63 where Jesus is seen executing wrath on God’s enemies:

“Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? ‘It is I, proclaiming victory, mighty to save.’ Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? ‘I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing’” (Isa. 63:1-3).

Here, phrases like “the day of vengeance” and “I trampled them in my wrath” point to the time of judgment. Notice Jesus’ garments are “red” and “blood spattered.” This is an allusion to the high priest on the Day of Atonement whose garments would become heavily stained with blood due to the many sacrifices. Blood, of course, symbolizes “atonement” in Scripture (Lev. 17:11).

Joel 2 links Yom Kippur to the end of the age as well:

“Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. Let the priests, who minister before the LORD, weep between the portico and the altar” (Joel 2:15-17).

Here, the bridegroom and bride are pictured emerging from their respective dwellings: “Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber” (v. 16). This might be seen as an allusion to the Rapture or Second Coming, depending on how one interprets the separate rooms. The references to a “holy fast” and “sacred assembly” point to Yom Kippur, as it’s the most sacred and holy of all the feasts and is the only appointed time on which fasting is mandated (Lev. 23:27, 32). Another allusion to Yom

Kippur is the “priests who minister before the Lord.” This is a picture of the high priest standing in the Holy of Holies once a year on Yom Kippur.

In Exodus, Yom Kippur is linked to the Lord’s return via the story of Moses and the Commandments. Consider the parallels: On Moses’ first trip down the mountain, he broke the tablets containing God’s commandments when he found the people worshipping the golden calf. After this “first coming,” Moses said to Israel, “Perhaps I can make ‘atonement’ for your sin” (Ex. 32:30). He then went back up the mountain to affect a new covenant. When Moses came down the second time, bearing the new tablets, his face was shining from being in God’s presence, similar to Jesus’ countenance in Revelation and Matthew (1:16; 17:2). This “second coming” of the Word of God occurred, prophetically, on the Day of Atonement.

The Book of Revelation is full of references to Yom Kippur. The following example alludes to one of the main rituals:

“And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel’s hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth...” (Rev. 8:3, 5).

The picture of the angel standing before the altar, offering up incense with a golden censor, recalls the ritual performed by Israel’s high priest on Yom Kippur (Lev. 16:12-13).

In addition to being connected to the time of judgment, Yom Kippur is linked to the year of jubilee. Recalling the picture of Jesus executing judgment in Isaiah 63, verses 3 and 4 reveal this is happening because the “year to redeem,” i.e. the jubilee year, had come:

“I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath [...because...] it was for me the day of vengeance; the year for me to redeem had come” (v. 3, 4).

The most explicit link between Yom Kippur and the Jubilee is, of course, found in Leviticus where God instructs Israel to sound the trumpet proclaiming the “year of redemption” on the Day of Atonement:

“Count off seven sabbath years—seven times seven years—so that the seven sabbath years amount to a period of forty-nine years. Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan” (Lev. 25:8-10).

That the Torah links Yom Kippur to the trumpet of jubilee explains why Jews refer to this feast as the day of the “Great Trump” and also Yom HaPeduth, or “Day of Redemption.” The latter title refers to the

belief that the earth will be redeemed and the resurrected dead will come back to inherit the Kingdom on Yom Kippur.

YOM KIPPUR 2017

Because it's believed that 2017 (5777) is a jubilee year, many are speculating about major prophetic events occurring on Yom Kippur. Some of this speculation stems from a buzz in the watchman community about Yom Kippur becoming the "New Year," or "Rosh Hashanah," in the jubilee year. The notion that the jubilee year begins on Yom Kippur, however, derives from an erroneous reading of the passage in which the jubilee trumpet is sounded on Yom Kippur (Lev. 25:9, 10). The fact that the trumpet is sounded on Yom Kippur has nothing to do with the start point of the year; it is merely the day on which the Jubilee is declared. One of the problems with shifting the beginning of the Jubilee ten days to the right (from Tishrei 1 to Tishrei 10) is that it creates confusion around the start and end points of the surrounding years.

God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33).

In actuality, the debate over whether the Jubilee begins on Tishrei 1 or Tishrei 10 is a moot point. In Exodus we're told the year begins and ends in the spring, in Nisan (12:1-3). Additionally, nowhere in Scripture does the Lord retract this law or instruct Israel to observe a second New Year in the seventh month, Tishrei. The fact that the Jews have employed a civil calendar to reckon the years from the fall, as was the practice in ancient Babylon, does not change God's unalterable edict that Nisan 1 marks the beginning of the year. So while many are declaring that we are now, or soon to be, in the year 5778, the current biblical year doesn't end until March of 2018.

Having emphasized that the years begin and end in the spring, we should note that this has no bearing on the significance of Tishrei as a pivotal time in God's plan of redemption. The festivals of the seventh month, seven being the number of perfection, mark a prophetic turning and/or end point and thus garner more emphasis than the first day of the year (Nisan 1), to which the Bible ascribes no special ritual or observance.

Another theory currently being bandied about is that, in the jubilee year, the trumpet blast on Yom Kippur becomes the "last trump." This would, technically, be true if Yom Teruah and Yom Kippur were the only times that trumpets were sounded during the year. The reality, however, is that trumpets are sounded at every feast and at the beginning of each month on the biblical calendar (Num. 10:10; Ps. 81:3, 4). This, combined with the fact that the trumpet blast we're anticipating is the "trump of God" rather than a trumpet blown by man, means it's somewhat futile to try to pinpoint the day of the Rapture based on the timing or order of the various trumpet blasts.

Finally, some are suggesting a link between the controversial Revelation 12 Sign that occurred around the Feast of Trumpets and a possible Day-of-Atonement Rapture. The Hebrew name for Trumpets, Yom Teruah, literally means a "day of shouting," as in a loud cry. The purpose of Yom Teruah, therefore, is to

make a loud noise by crying out, or by sounding a trumpet, to awaken us from our spiritual slumber. This reminds us of the midnight cry in Matthew 25: “At midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’” Some are suggesting that the Revelation 12 Sign occurring on the heels of Yom Teruah this year may have fulfilled the prophecy of the midnight cry in Matthew. The great sign in the heavens was the final warning blast—the shot heard round the world via the internet and even secular media—that Jesus is coming. It’s been pointed out how the sign occurred exactly seven days before Yom Kippur, paralleling the seven-day warning given Noah before the Flood began: “Then the Lord said to Noah, ‘Go into the ark, you and all your household ... For in seven days I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights ...’” (Gen. 7:1, 4). Could the seven days between the Revelation 12 Sign and Yom Kippur be a parallel to the Flood story and, therefore, a partial fulfillment of Matthew’s prophecy, “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man” ?

To summarize, I do not believe that Yom Kippur marks the end of the jubilee year, which, biblically, occurs in the spring. Yom Kippur is, however, a pivotal date pertaining to the year of redemption. Of all the festivals, God chose this particular day to “proclaim liberty throughout the land” (Lev. 25:9, 10).

There is a prophetic reason for this.

What is the reason?

No one can say, for certain. What we do know is that to set a date by saying the Rapture will occur on Yom Kippur would be foolish. It would be equally foolish, however, to discount the possibility of a Yom-Kippur Rapture based on preconceived notions about the feasts of the Lord. The truth is that we see unfulfilled prophecy as through a dark piece of glass (1 Cor. 13:12), and any feast scenario that we, as imperfect human beings, might imagine is prone to error. The one thing we can rely on is the plain Word of God, and Scripture emphasizes often and in numerous ways that we don’t know the day of His return (Matt. 24:36). In fact, Jesus says He is coming at an hour we think NOT (Matt. 24:44; Mark 13:33). There is even a special admonition for the servant who assumes his master is delaying (perhaps until next year’s favored feast) and begins to beat his fellow servants and drink with the drunkards: “The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 24:50, 51).

So let us be looking up today, tomorrow, on Yom Kippur and, if necessary, each day after. Despite our best efforts to map out the remaining feast fulfillments, God has His own plan, which may or may not match ours.

The thing we *can* be certain of, based on the signs all around, is that our redemption is near.

Jesus is coming very soon!

Are you ready?