

THIRTY-THIRD MESSAGE:
HOLY ASSEMBLY FOR THE DAY OF COVERINGS
Leviticus 23:26-32

Introduction

The subject of the fourth MESSAGE concerning Israel's appointments with Jehovah was to specify a holy assembly for the Day of Coverings. That day already had been described in MESSAGE 20 (Lev. 16). The MESSAGE of that chapter is summarized in this MESSAGE. It adds only one new instruction, which is that a holy assembly was to be held on that day. The purpose of this MESSAGE was to list the Day of Atonement among the occasions when holy assemblies were to be held.

This MESSAGE also has no sub-topics.

CHAPTER XXIII

Verse 26. **And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying,**

A new MESSAGE to Moses from Jehovah was introduced by this verse. It continued the theme of all the MESSSAGES in Chapter 23, which is identifying when holy assemblies were to be held in Israel.

Verse 27. **However, on the tenth [day] of this seventh month [is] the Day of Coverings. It must be a holy assembly for you, and you shall afflict your souls and present a fire-offering to Jehovah.**

However. The word with which this MESSAGE begins is an adverb of contrast that means "however" or "on the other hand." It drew a contrast between the celebration mentioned in the previous MESSAGE and the observance mentioned in this MESSAGE. The previous celebration was to be a day of boisterous joy. The observance mentioned in this verse, was to be a day of sorrowful repentance. The adverb that calls attention to the contrast between the two occasions shows the error of those who feel that the Feast of Noise-Making held on the first day of the seventh month was a kind of advance preparation for the observance mentioned here. The Memorial of Noise-Making did not forecast and prepare the observance mentioned here. Rather it was in stark contrast to the observance mentioned in this MESSAGE.

Beginning this MESSAGE with an adverb that contrasted it with the previous MESSAGE does show the close relationship between the two MESSAGES. Both MESSAGES deal with the theme of the holy assemblies of Israel, and this MESSAGE began at the point where the previous MESSAGE ended, adding to the impression that they both were delivered to Moses on the same day.

on the tenth [day] of this seventh month. The observance mentioned in this MESSAGE was to occur on the tenth day of the seventh month. MESSAGE 20 already had described an observance that was to be held on that day (see comments on Lev. 16:19a in MESSAGE 20). The observance mentioned in this MESSAGE had to be the same as the observance described in detail in Leviticus 16.

[is] the Day of Coverings. The name for the observance to be held on the tenth day of the seventh month was not given in Leviticus 16. The event is given a name in this MESSAGE for the first time. The name is "The Day of Coverings." The significance of that name was discussed in the Introduction to MESSAGE 20. The name has usually been translated into English as "Day of Atonement," but a more literal translation is "Day of Coverings (see Introduction to MESSAGE 20). It was a day when the nation was to be covered from the effects of its sins by repentance.

It must be a holy assembly for you. A holy assembly was to be held on that day. It was to be a time when the people of Israel were to gather

together for the special purpose of seeking covering from the sins of the nation (see comments on Lev. 23:2 in MESSAGE 30 under the heading in which you must call holy assemblies).

And you shall afflict your souls. This statement further confirms that the observance mentioned in this MESSAGE is the same occasion as that described in Leviticus 16, because that same expression is found in Leviticus 16:29 (see comments on Lev. 16:29b in MESSAGE 20 under the heading You must afflict yourselves, and you must not do any work). The Jews traditionally have interpreted that expression in a legalistic manner and defined it as refraining from sex and personal grooming. That interpretation is one example of why Jesus ended the observance of the ritual laws of Israel. The Jews ruined their significance by turning them into mere ritual observances, instead of spiritual experiences. Jesus abolished the rituals and ceremonies, as meaningful as they were in their original purpose, in order to restore emphasis on spiritual realities, which are completely independent of physical rituals. The verse says “afflict your souls,” not “afflict your bodies.” The correct interpretation of the requirement is to understand it in a spiritual sense to mean inner sorrowful repentance for sins. By being genuinely sorry for their sins, the Israelites could be covered from their sins and the dangers those sins brought to them.

and present a fire-offering to Jehovah. In this MESSAGE Jehovah only said a fire-offering was to be offered on that day. A major part of the instructions in Leviticus 16 had been describing the fire-offerings of that day. They were to consist of a special form of the sin-offering for the high priest and his family (see comments on Lev. 16:7,11-14), an elaborate form of the sin-offering for the nation (see comments on Lev. 16:15-22), and rededication-offerings for the high priest and for the people (see comments on Lev. 16:24-25). Later in Numbers 29:7-11, Jehovah specified another additional rededication-offering, homage-offering, and sin-offering for that day.

Verse 28. **And you must not do any work on this same day, because it [is] a day of coverings to cover over you before Jehovah your God.**

And you must not do any work on this same day. No work of any kind was to be done on the Day of Coverings, which was a stricter requirement than the requirement for other sabbath days. Other sabbaths required ceasing from occupational work. The Day of Coverings required ceasing all secular activities, including household duties.

because it [is] a day of coverings to cover over you before Jehovah your God. The purpose for the special restrictions for the day was to allow the Israelites time to concentrate only on receiving covering for their sins.

Verses 29. **Because any person who is not afflicted on this same day shall be cut off from his people.**

Any person who refused to participate in sorrowful repentance for their sins on the Day of Coverings, was not only not to receive covering. He also was to be “cut off from his people.” That expression means he was to suffer the death penalty. A person who refused to repent of his sins showed himself to be in rebellion against God. He had broken the solemn covenant that Israel had made with God. Therefore, he did not belong among God’s people, and he needed to be removed from them by execution. That stern penalty was necessary to preserve the special relationship Israel had with God, so they could accomplish the special purpose He had for them (see comments on Lev. 7:20 in MESSAGE 7, Introduction to MESSAGE 20, and comments on Lev. 20:2 in MESSAGE 20). In MESSAGE 20, Jehovah had said that observing the Day of Coverings was a permanent statute, but He had not described the penalty that was to be imposed for failing to observe the day (see comments on Lev. 16:24 in MESSAGE 20).

Verse 30. **And any person who does any work on this same day, I will destroy that person from among his people.**

Jehovah instructed the Israelites to destroy any person who did any work on the Day of Coverings. That statement confirms that “cut off from among his people” means applying the death penalty. Any person who did any kind of work on the Day of Coverings showed that he did not have a repentant spirit and was in rebellion against God. He had broken the covenant and deserved to suffer the death penalty.

Unfortunately, the Israelites did not obey God’s many commands concerning “cutting off” people who deliberately rejected God’s commands and broke the covenant with a high hand. Israel’s failure to observe the commandments concerning “cutting off from among their people” led to the apostasy of the nation and their banishment from the blessings God had promised them. They will only be fully restored to those blessings when they finally fully commit themselves to God. The New Testament reveals that day will come when Jesus returns.

Verse 31. **You must not do any work [is] a statute for an age through your generations in all your dwellings.**

The requirement not to work on the Day of Coverings was a statute to be observed on and on from generation to generation wherever the Israelites might live. The expression “for an age” does not mean strictly forever, and it leaves open the possibility that God someday might cancel that requirement, which he did in Jesus (see comments on Lev.3:17 in MESSAGE 1). Paul became the chief interpreter and promoter of that understanding, but he made it explicitly clear in the book of

Galatians that he learned it only by its being revealed to him by Jesus directly and personally and that he grew in his understanding of it only through studying the Old Testament Scriptures. Canceling the ritual laws of Sinai was done by the authority of Jesus, and Jesus alone.

Verse 32. **It [shall be] to you a sabbath of sabbaths. You shall afflict yourselves on the ninth [day] of the month at evening. You must keep your sabbath from evening to evening.**

It [shall be] to you a sabbath of sabbaths. Ceasing from all kinds of work was called “a sabbath of sabbaths” or “a sabbath of a sabbath”). The expression means a special sabbath among sabbaths, similar to the Hebrew expression “holiness of holinesses” and to the American expression “a man’s man.” The Day of Coverings already had been called “a sabbath of a sabbath” in MESSAGE 20. The weekly sabbath and the Day of Coverings were two of the only three occasions called a “sabbath of a sabbath.” The third occasion was the sabbatical year (see comments on Lev. 16:31 in MESSAGE 20 under the heading a sabbath of a sabbath it must be to you, and you shall afflict yourselves). The death penalty already had been prescribed for doing secular work on the sabbath day (Ex. 31:15; 35:2).

You shall afflict yourselves on the ninth [day] of the month at evening. You must keep your sabbath from evening to evening. The observance of the Day of Coverings was to begin at dark when the ninth day of the month ended, and it was to last until dark on the tenth day. The Israelites divided their days at the end of dusk when full darkness began rather than at midnight, as we do. So the day was to be observed for the full 24 hours from dark to dark of the specified day.

Application

Jehovah God is sovereign over all the nations of the earth and not just over people as individuals. Church and state are two human institutions. God has provided that they should be separate authorities, to avoid the oppression that comes from too much concentration of power in one authority. However, God's authority is not separated from anyone or any authority. He is Lord over all principalities, kingdoms, thrones, authorities, and powers. Any nation that rejects Him eventually will be destroyed. The history of the nations of the world proves that no nation that continues to reject Him can continue to prosper. Even Israel time and again made the mistake of substituting its own wisdom for faith in God and paid the price for its rebellion. Since nations as well as individuals tend to drift away from God into self will, every nation from time to time needs a time of renewal in faith and commitment to God, or it will drift into sinful apostasy.

America is experiencing a time of arrogance, like all other nations of the world have done through history. Powers and authorities in our land are insisting that a nation must be totally secular and that religion is a purely individual affair. Many are working hard to banish faith in God from public life in America. Others are insisting that all religions are the same, and a nation must treat every religion alike. It is true that in a democracy, laws and requirements must be equal and the same for all; however, a nation that does not honor the true God is doomed to experience His wrath. Honoring the true God in a democracy cannot be established by laws. It can only be done when the majority of the people voluntarily and sincerely love and worship the true God. The majority in America no longer has that kind of loyalty to God. We are walking the road toward disaster. America desperately needs to experience the kind of repentance that the Day of Coverings was designed to foster in Israel. We need to pray and work for awakening in America.

Some have begun to say that the road back to faith in God comes in three steps: (1) Revival of the people of God. (2) Awakening of the people of the nation to their need for God. (3) Reformation of the life of the nation through change in the way the majority lives. Let us pray for the Lord to hasten the day when America will be sincerely restored to the true God and will be covered from the effects and consequences of all our sins.