

# **The Story of the Yahad, An Acceptable Sacrifice Atoning for the Land: The Day of Atonement Reinterpreted by Dorothy Peters (2002)**

According to the Hebrew scriptures, the Day of Atonement sacrifices effected atonement in two stages, first, for the high priest and his household, and second, for all Israel and the dwelling place of God, which temporarily bore the residual sin of the people. Because of their exile from the Jerusalem temple and sacrifices, the Yahad sectarians were compelled to reinterpret the Day of Atonement. Now, they themselves would be the acceptable sacrifice which would atone for the land, an atonement that would bring judgment upon wickedness, an atonement which was necessary in order for God to renew his covenant with them. Their story is embedded in 1QS VIII, 1-10a.

What did atonement have to do with judgment? What did the Day of Atonement have to do with the Yahad's Covenant Renewal ceremony? Attention to the nature of these relationships in the Qumran corpus has been meager in the secondary literature. Published research on how the Yahad exegeted its scriptures to formulate its theology of atonement to incorporate judgment and covenant renewal has been virtually nonexistent. The sectarians considered themselves to be the acceptable sacrifice which "paid" for their own iniquities and those of their ancestors, a sacrifice which incorporated confessional prayers, lustrations in atoning waters, and obedience to all of the Torah. They equated this acceptable sacrifice with the sacrifice that the high priest offered to effect atonement for himself and his household on the ancient Day of Atonement. This sacrifice would atone for the residual sin borne by the land, the dwelling place of God.

Furthermore, the Yahad radically reinterpreted the atonement for all Israel. No one outside the Yahad would survive this atonement. The wicked nations and apostate Israel would be destroyed in a holy war. The Yahad found a precedent in its scriptures and applied its unique brand of innovative exegesis. As in the days of Noah, wickedness would be wiped out, the land would be atoned for, and the way would be cleared for God to remember the land and renew his covenant with the righteous ones who remained.

Finally, the Yahad reinterpreted its scriptures and brought elements of the most important festival of ancient Israel into the most important festival of the Yahad, bringing together atonement, judgment, and covenant renewal. Confessional prayers from the Day of Atonement and lustrations in atoning

waters formed part of the Covenant Renewal and initiation ceremony. The future obliteration of the wicked, which was to be inextricably linked with the atonement of the land, was announced in a liturgy of cursings.