

Lord of the Sabbath

Program #33

Day of Atonement

Kenny Kitzke

LawstSheep Ministries

Nine days after Yom Teruah comes Yom Kippur. It is the fifth commanded annual holy day Sabbath on God's sacred calendar for His people. It is also known as the Day of Atonement. In Judaism, Yom Kippur is the most solemn holy day of the year. Do you know why?

I have met Sabbath-keeping Christians who, although they keep ALL the Feasts of the LORD, don't regard the Day of Atonement as the most important annual holy day. A few see no reason to still keep it holy at all once Jesus became their "atonement." But, why does God say He wants His people to observe this holy day forever?

A good place to start our search for answers to these questions is the word of God. What precisely did the LORD command be done on the Day of Atonement? We find it in Lev. 23: 27-32:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Also the tenth day of this seventh month, shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God. For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people. And, any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people. You shall do no manner of work; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. It shall be to you a Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls on the ninth day of the month, at evening, from evening to evening, your shall celebrate your Sabbath."

We see in this statute of God a number of requirements typical of the holy days of the LORD. There is to be a holy convocation; a proclaimed assembly. It should be a Sabbath of rest from your normal weekly vocation or work. This is a statute forever in all your generations and in all your dwellings. An offering made by fire should be made. If you don't obey the statute, you will be cut off from the people who are obedient to God.

However, there are four things unique to this holy Sabbath day:

- 1) you are to afflict your soul
- 2) you are to observe the entire day afflicting yourself for a full twenty-four hours
- 3) you are to do "no manner" of work
- 4) if you refuse to obey, the LORD will destroy you!

What does it mean to "afflict your soul"? The Hebrew word translated "afflict" is Strong's # 6031, "anah." Anah carries the idea of depressing, weakening, denying or

humbling yourself. In Judaism, the custom is to afflict oneself on the Day of Atonement by fasting from all food and drink. Whether such a total fast is a suitable affliction of your soul, I cannot say for sure. However, fasting from food or drink is unique to this holy day. On other holy days, which are part of one of the Feasts of the LORD, consuming food and drink is clearly intended.

Whether by inspiration of the word of God, or by the Holy Spirit of God, or just by custom, we can see that historically, and even at the time of Jesus, the practice of affliction included a complete fast. Even after Jesus had ascended to heaven we see the Apostle Paul still referring to a holy fast. This is found in Acts 27: 9:

Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous, because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, saying, 'Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives.

Most Bibles have the word “fast” capitalized. Why? It refers to the Holy Fast of the LORD’s Day of Atonement. Paul is still referring to a Day of Atonement that had been observed. Would he do that if the Day of Atonement had been done away by the resurrection of Jesus?

Since the Day of Atonement occurs in September or October on our Gregorian calendar, and had already passed, it suggests the ship carrying Paul to Rome is sailing in October or November. This is a time of increasingly dangerous seas. Typically by mid-November, sailing was so hazardous that all sea travel would stop until winter had passed.

The second point about the affliction is that it is to be endured from evening to evening, a full twenty-four hour time period. If you have never fasted completely of food or drink for twenty-four hours straight, you will never forget your first celebration of the Day of Atonement!

In my own fellowship, we typically assemble for our Day of Atonement holy convocation late in the afternoon (trying not to breathe directly on one another). After sunset we typically head for a restaurant and gorge ourselves with food and wine in a festive atmosphere. This is appropriate recognizing that if we have sincerely afflicted ourselves as required for twenty-four hours, and repented of our sins, we believe the LORD has accepted our offering, atones us and keeps our names written in the Book of Life.

This verse referring to “from evening to evening” for the Day of Atonement is an explicit scripture showing that days on God’s calendar begin and end at evening, or at sunset, and NOT at midnight or sunrise.

The third unique requirement for the Day of Atonement is to do NO “manner” of work on this day. There is an extra emphasis on prohibiting work or labor on the Day of Atonement. For example, for some of the holy days during the Feasts of the LORD, one

could at least heat and serve food and drink although the preparing and cooking of the food was done the day before the Sabbath (the preparation day). Since no eating or drinking is permitted, even that type of work related to having a fellowship meal would be forbidden on the Day of Atonement.

The last unique thing about the Day of Atonement is that the LORD Himself promises to destroy those who will not obey His statute. With this in mind, it is not difficult to see why Yom Kippur is viewed by Judaism as its most solemn and serious holy day each year.

This thought of being destroyed for not obeying God fits quite well with the big picture of whether one will or will not enter heaven. As we learned in the last two programs about Yom Teruah, this is a time to awake and return to God, while the gates of heaven are still open. For the Day of Judgment is coming on Yom Kippur, when the gates to heaven will be closed, and the unrighteous will be condemned and destroyed. This IS serious stuff! Way more serious than simply fasting for a day. We are talking about eternal life or death. Isn't it appropriate that once a year we get very serious about what God requires of His people to enter into heaven with Him?

The idea of denying oneself with a solemn and serious fast is closely connected with drawing close to God and His will, in a humble and obedient manner, in both the old and the new testaments. Jesus warned His disciples not to fast as the hypocrites do with a sad countenance to impress men with your religious devotion. Instead, listen to His command to His disciples in Matt. 6: 17-18:

But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

Was Jesus talking about the Day of Atonement here? We can't tell for sure from the text. Fasting was part of the spiritual life of a God-fearer; just like prayer. Fasting one day a week was common in the time of Christ. There are even discussions by Paul concerning on what day of the week to fast. And, we have the famous declaration of the pious Pharisee in Luke 18: 12 who boasted that he fasted twice a week.

I see a hint by Jesus that He is referring to the Fast for the Day of Atonement. This is because of the mention of the secret place where the Father dwells. Indeed no greater focus on the place that God dwelt among His people is found in any other day of the year. This was the holy day, once a year, that only the high priest of Israel could enter into the "secret" Holy of Holies in the Temple, the House of God on earth.

In a sense, I willingly and cheerfully depress and deny myself before the Father on this holy day. Further, it is not just a personal fast, it is a fast for all the people of God. In the assembly, I believe it is edifying to remember Jesus in His fast of forty days and forty nights. As we struggle to refrain from food for just one day, can we imagine the state of hunger that Jesus must have been in after forty such days of fasting?

And, in this weakened condition, Satan tempts Jesus when He is alone in the wilderness. But, Jesus, even weakened, resists Satan and his temptations and remains steadfast with God and keeps His commandments. Is there a message in this for us each Day of Atonement? Should we be aware and determined deep in our hearts that we must resist Satan and endure to the end even when weakened physically, mentally or spiritually before the gates of heaven are closed to us? Is it not a good and pleasing offering before God?

We could probably spend the rest of the program on the way a personal or collective fast was used in turning to God and His ways. But, I must move on to the other rich meanings of the Day of Atonement. If you care to see this fast connection more clearly, I suggest you study Joel, Chapters 1-2, or even the example of the Ninevites in Jonah Chapter 3.

While a twenty-four hour communal fast by all the people of God may be a suitable sign of affliction, I personally believe that more is intended by God. A fast of food and drink certainly afflicts the body. But, the command is to inflict the soul. To me, this implies afflicting body, mind and spirit.

I believe the entire community of believers needs to humble themselves before the Father also in thought and in heart of their insignificance compared to God, our Father. We need to acknowledge how we are totally dependent in this life, and the eternal life to come, on Him. Only by His grace do we have life. And, only by belief and faith in His Son, and His Son's atoning sacrifice for us, can we inherit eternal life in heaven.

We can see through the prophet Isaiah the reaction of God to a fast that is solely physical or done reluctantly to be seen by men or done hoping to place an obligation on God to notice and reward a rather meager affliction of going hungry for a day. In Isaiah 58, we get perhaps the best understanding of the kind of fast that pleases God.

It becomes obvious that the Day of Atonement helps us bring to mind and remember what God expects of His people EVERY DAY. An idea that giving of themselves and giving up of their physical pleasures to help the less fortunate is the kind of sacrifice that God wants from His people AS A WAY OF LIFE. His people will observe the Day of Atonement out of awe for the Father and in love for our brethren and neighbors, not just out of fear of judgment and destruction, real as they may be.

Listen to our LORD's explanation of how Israel had perverted His commanded Holy Fast Day and would taunt the LORD besides in Isa. 58: 3-5:

Why have we fasted, they say, and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice? In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high. Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his

soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?

Indeed, our Father is not looking for a ritualistic obedience in abstaining from food. The Holy Fast has a spiritual intent of denying oneself AND treating others as more important than yourself. We remind ourselves once a year on the Day of Atonement of what our sacrificial attitude should be every day of the year. Jesus called it picking up your cross.

We see the spiritual intent of the Fast that pleases God in Isa. 58: 6-7:

Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free. And that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?

Sounds a lot like the words of the Lord of the Sabbath, doesn't it? Here we see the true self-denial among God's people and the church of God that pleases Him. It is not the mere appearance of righteousness and obedience that matters to God. It is being righteous in every thought, word and deed that matters. This is what we should learn from keeping the Day of Atonement, as we draw close to God and His will for our lives.

God is projecting that when His people fast in the way that pleases God, he will indeed hear their prayers and reward them. This will happen to Israel in the future when Jesus, their Messiah, returns on the Day of Atonement to be "one with them" and they will finally believe on Him and confess Him. Read carefully and comprehend what the LORD says specifically about them keeping His Sabbath in Isa. 58: 13-14 so that He will cause them to ride on the high hills of the earth as His blessed people:

If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Indeed, there is coming a time for Israel when they will once again have God dwelling among them and ruling from Jerusalem as King of kings. It will be the Kingdom of God on the earth as it is in the kingdom of heaven where the Father dwells. This day is coming, my friends. Are you repenting and watching for it? I just can't wait until we will all be there in the Kingdom with Him calling His Sabbath honorable and our delight.

Now, let's hear a song of praise to the Lord of the Sabbath and raise our voices and spirits in song and praise of Him who made the Sabbath days for man. Please sing along with Melissa Ising the third verse and chorus of "Remember the Sabbath Day *to keep it holy*:"

Verse

We keep this weekly Holy Day with honor:
He raised us up to ride earth's highest peak
And gave us blessings promised to our fathers,
We worship God the seventh day of the week.

Chorus

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy:
A rest for the people of God, a true delight.
The Son of Man, He reigns as Lord of the Sabbath,
And shows His brethren how to do what's right.

There is another important connection made here for those in power and plenty to do what is right and Fast in the sight of our Lord. That is, the powerful people letting the oppressed go free. Did you know the incredible imagery and symmetry of the number seven in God's will? It is not only the seventh day of the week that is a Sabbath. It is the seven annual holy day Sabbaths that the LORD made for us to observe with honor and with delight. On this Day of Atonement, our affliction and fast could make us dour. In fact, we delight as we understand its true and prophetic meaning for the people of God.

Did you also realize that God designated every seventh year as a "year of release?" What was to be released every seventh year? And, have you heard of the Jubilee Year of God? Do you have a comprehension of just what that is all about? Have you ever celebrated the Jubilee of God? Do you know when the next Jubilee Year of God will fall? I hope to do a program with a special guest just on the Years of Release and Jubilee and their meanings later in the year. I was amazed to learn what God revealed He has in mind for His people.

For now, I just want to point out that the year of Jubilee begins on the Day of Atonement. Let's check it out in Lev. 25: 8-11:

And you shall count seven Sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years; and the time of the seven Sabbaths of years shall be forty-nine years. Then you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet sound throughout all your land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee to you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of your shall return to his family.

This is a prophecy of the time when the lost and scattered tribes of Israel will return to the land possessed by their fathers and given to them by the LORD. This is at the time of the return of Jesus as King over all the earth when the law of God, including His Sabbaths, will go out from Jerusalem to the whole world.

I tell you sincerely, the things revealed in the Feasts and Holy Days of the LORD are so rich in meaning, and so full of knowledge of the plan of God, that I can only feel regret for those who have not paid attention to the Lord of the Sabbath and the days He created holy just for man. I feel very blessed to gladly receive what the Lord made for me.

I suspect that for those listening, or reading these words, you would have noted an obvious reference to the Lord of the Sabbath and why He came to earth. We can see the link to the holy Sabbath, the Day of Atonement and the Jubilee, in His very words found in Luke 4: 16-21:

So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Wow! This just overwhelms me. Do you see how the Lord of the Sabbath is connected to the very Holy Sabbaths that He created? Have you ever understood why these Sabbaths were important not just to Jesus but to you and me as the people of God? Do you see the reference to proclaiming liberty to the captives of Israel and the Jubilee?

You may have also caught the similarity with the seven times seven of years to the seven times seven days associated with Pentecost, another annual Feast and holy day of the LORD. Yes my friends, the Sabbath was made for man and for Christians who follow the Lord of the Sabbath. What a blessed way to learn about Him and God's plan and an opportunity each year to teach your children and any new converts who once were lost sheep, but now have been found in Christ. Amen!

But, there are more things of great interest and understanding that we can find in keeping the Day of Atonement holy to the LORD. One is the role of the high priest of God in this day. Let us see what the LORD commanded His chosen high priest, Aaron, the brother of Moses, to do on each Day of Atonement as found in Lev. 16: 30-34:

For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. It is a Sabbath of solemn rest for you, and you shall afflict your souls. It is a statute forever. And the priest who is anointed and consecrated to minister as priest in his father's place, shall make atonement for the Holy Sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tabernacle of the meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. This shall be an everlasting statute for you, to make atonement for the children of Israel, for all their sins, once a

year.

Be aware that in the preceding paragraphs, we find a number of things that only the high priest of Israel could do on the Day of Atonement. Aaron is instructed to come just this one day each year into the Holy Place where the LORD would appear in a cloud above the mercy seat in the Holiest place.

For Jews following Judaism, there is a critical missing element of Yom Kippur. There is no Temple in Jerusalem where God now dwells among His people. They cannot have their high priest enter the Holiest place to sprinkle the blood of atonement on the mercy seat to cleanse the high priest, the Levitical priest hood, the Sanctuary, the nation and children of Israel along with any stranger that dwells among them.

So, in this situation, the Jew cannot follow the written Torah of God, the Most High. However, for the Christian, we can celebrate the Day of Atonement for we have our High Priest dwelling in us and among us. For we are His temple not made with human hands. This is a mystery and a stumbling block to the Jew, and foolishness to the Gentiles.

Jesus is our High Priest. He is not of the tribe of Levi. He is of the order of Melchizedek, a different priesthood. He does not have to enter the Temple made with hands to offer the blood sacrifice before the LORD. He has entered the Temple of God in heaven and is before the Father having entered once with His own blood. He became our permanent atonement. Our high priest meets our need--one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners and exalted above the heavens. It is to remember and worship Him that we keep the Day of Atonement holy. Praise God for His grace and mercy to us!

Well, my time is up for today. But, next Sabbath we will look at the two goats that the high priest was to select on the Day of Atonement. What are these goats about? What did they mean for Israel and for the Jews of Jesus' day? What do they symbolize for Christians today? This is a highly controversial subject. I will not hide from it. I hope you will be listening next week at this time on this station. Until then, this is Brother Kenny praying that the Lord of the Sabbath will be gracious to you.