

YEAR OF THE MESSAGE: Moses  
*Law and Order: Divine Intent*  
**The Day of Atonement: Ever Seen a Scapegoat?**  
**Leviticus 16:1-10, 20-22**

Intro: Part of the requirements for the Day of Atonement are spelled out in Leviticus 23:26-32. Here the Hebrews are told that they must deny themselves on the Day of Atonement. They can do no work, and they are to fast for a 24-hour period.

We begin the Lenten Season this Wednesday, Ash Wednesday. Baptists have never been big on the liturgical calendar. We have always been big on FREEDOM in Christ and freedom from the law. We emphasize the INDIVIDUAL and his privilege and responsibility to stand before God and give his own account.

But I think that periods of fasting have spiritual and physical benefits that are undeniable.

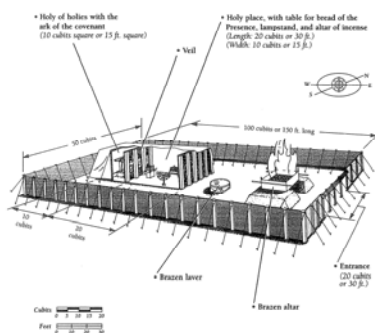
I am going to do something of a fast during this Lenten season, this coming Wednesday through Easter. I will be seeking to lose some weight. I will also be seeking to draw closer to God, reminding myself of my devotion to Christ when I feel hungry.

You are under no obligation, of course, but I invite you to join me by adding some kind of fast to your Lenten Season this year. Do it as a reminder of the bounty God provides every day.

Today we read about Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Yom Kippur is the climax of the [Yamim Noraim](#) ("Days of Awe"), and with [Rosh Hashanah](#) forms the Jewish [High Holy Days](#). The date is chosen based on [Leviticus 23:27](#) which decrees a strict prohibition of work and affliction of the soul upon the tenth day of the seventh month, later known as [Tishrei](#). This year it will be October 8-9, sundown through sundown, as the Jews reckon days.

Two great invitations are extended to us through the Day of Atonement, the invitation to come into God's presence and the invitation to leave behind our sins forever. These two invitations are addressed and their fulfillments provided in the ceremonies and sacrifices of the Day of Atonement.

**I. COME INTO GOD'S PRESENCE:** *Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses in the Most Holy Place—v1*



The place of worship in the wilderness was a tent called The Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle). It was actually a compound set up in the middle of the camp of the Israelites. Inside the compound was a tent, and

inside that tent there was the Holy Place first with the table and the lampstand and the Holy of Holies with the Chest of the Testimony (Ark of the covenant). Access to the Holy of Holies was provided once a year on the Day of Atonement. This was because God was present in the cloud above the Mercy Seat (atonement cover), and he controlled his own calendar and space.

The Ark of the Covenant or the Chest, as Eugene Peterson calls it, has upon it the mercy seat or the “Atonement-Cover.” This was the place where God chose to make his presence known to the High Priest once a year on the Day of Atonement.

**A. Access to God is desired.**

1. Because we want to know where we came from
2. Because we want to know why we are here
3. Because we want to know where we are going
4. Because we want to know ourselves and our world
5. Because we want to live life fully, joyfully.
6. Because we want to know how to love one another and to live in peace and fulfillment.

**B. Access to God is needed.**

1. Because we are lost and want to be found.
2. Because we are hopeless and want hope
3. Because we are plagued by despair and depression.
4. Because our problems seem insurmountable, our challenges seem beyond our abilities, and our relationships spin out of control and appear to be damaged beyond repair.
5. Because we struggle to figure out our place in the world.
6. Because we are conscious of ourselves and of others, but that consciousness in itself provides no answers to our existence.

**C. Access to God is limited.** The mountain burns and roars.

1. Because he is Mentally above us—all knowing
2. Because he is Spiritually above us—all present (God is Spirit. This means that he is everywhere but not that he is accessible to us any time.)
3. Because he is Physically above us—all powerful. He sits on the throne of this Universe. He is in the control room.
4. Because he is Morally above us—holy. This is the real distance we feel when we come to God.

**D. Access to God is provided**

1. Access comes on his terms, not ours. We do not make up these rules. God makes the rules. God says when and where and how we will come to him.
2. Access to God comes at a price. When I read about all of these animals that are slain in the Old Covenant, I think about the money, the value, that they represented to these herdsmen. These sheep, oxen, and goats represent the wealth of the Hebrews. It is very expensive for them to come to God.

When you read these descriptions in the Old Covenant of animals being slain, you think, “Poor animals.” But anyone who raises livestock for a living thinks, “Poor rancher.” This is a blow to him and his family.

The moneychangers in the temple in the days of Jesus are there because it is expensive to come before God in the Old Covenant. They have to have a sacrifice. Mary and Joseph offered two doves to God because they were poor (Luke 2:24). The wealthy worshippers would offer more expensive animals. Pigeons and doves were the cheapest blood sacrifices available, but they were still expensive to those who lived hand to mouth.

3. Access to God requires the shedding of blood. Leviticus 17:11-14 teaches that the “life of every creature is in its blood.” The Hebrews are forbidden to eat or drink blood because blood is the element of sacrifice and the key ingredient of access to God.

God is teaching his people about the nature of his HOLINESS. He is absolutely repulsed by sin. He hates sin. Disobedience and rebellion against God have the most serious consequences imaginable. Blood sacrifice was the most dramatic way in the ancient world to convey the costliness of transgression AND forgiveness.

**II. The Second Invitation of the Day of Atonement: LET GOD TAKE AWAY YOUR SIN**—*The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place*—Lev. 16:22.

**A. Constant sin presence:** *My sin is always before me*—Psalm 51:3. No dilemma plagues us humans more than our sinfulness. We suffer from guilt, insecurity, anger, bitterness, sloth, and greed in large measure because of our moral shortcomings.

**B. Self-help methods of dealing with sin.**

1. The first one is BLAME. We blame others for our failures, mistakes, and mess ups. We even blame God.

2. The second one is COMPENSATION. We seek to compensate for our mistakes by being really nice to the people we hurt or wound. The idea here is that we will BALANCE our sin with good deeds that make up for them. As long as we feel that our good deeds outnumber our bad, we have a measure of contentment about our behavior and being and so create self-righteousness.

3. The third is DENIAL: I deny that I am a sinner or that sin even exists, leaving no absolute right or wrong in the world.

None of these helps very much. We still feel just as condemned, inadequate, guilty, and ashamed as we did before our self-help.

**C. God’s way--forgiveness.** God established a ceremony that served as a powerful drama and illustration of his love and forgiveness. It happened on the Day of Atonement.

Two animals were chosen for that particular day. One of them died. The other was driven into the wilderness so far that it could never return to the herd.

1. The first animal died—a blood sacrifice for sins. *Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*—Hebrews 9:22.

2. The second animal was driven away and carried the sins of the people away from the camp forever. This was the SCAPEGOAT who took away the sins of the people.

The ceremony conducted by the priests every year on that day pictured how God removed the sins of the people. The remission of sin required the shedding of blood.

3. Forgiveness is a big issue for all of us because we are all sinners. We need forgiveness from one another and from ourselves. But mostly we need forgiveness from God. Here is the way forward for all the guilty ones.

**D. Jesus is our Blood Sacrifice, our Scapegoat, and our High Priest.**

He is the MAKER and the MATTER of our atonement.

1. He is the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the earth—  
Revelation 13:8.

2. He is *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*—John 1:29: the Baptist's introduction of Jesus.

3. He is the High Priest who makes intercession for us:  
Hebrews 9:11-12 *When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. 12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.*

CONCLUSION: Enter into God's presence through the "blood of the everlasting covenant (Hebrews 13:10), that is, through placing your faith in the work of Christ upon the cross.