

REAL REPENTANCE



Of all the nations of the earth, none knew better than the Jewish people what sin was all about. They had been given the Law as a moral code, so they knew right from wrong, and understood what God expected from them. The pagan people living nearby didn't have that advantage, although that didn't excuse them. *"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Roman's 1:28)*

Of course the Jews failed to keep God's Law, which was actually unavoidable ever since the first man, Adam, plunged humanity into sin through his rebellion. They had a deeper understanding of God's standards but they were no better than the pagans in keeping them. The Jews knew God would judge and punish them, not just because He said so, but because they had an inner witness to that fact. They had a conscience that produced guilt and condemnation, not to mention fear of divine retribution. The pagans had that too, to a varying degree, but because the Jew had the Law, his conscience was more sensitive. He felt greater defeat, greater fear, and greater despair of ever

pleasing God. And so God gave the Jews hope. He gave them the tabernacle as a sacrificial system, so that their sins could be dealt with - at least temporarily - until the Supreme Sacrifice came along to permanently put sin away forever.

That was underlined every October when the Jews celebrated Yom Kippur, the day of atonement in the tabernacle. All 12 tribes of Israel would surround the tabernacle, waiting anxiously to have their sins from the previous year covered over by the blood of a sacrificial lamb. The high priest, Aaron, would make a blood sacrifice for himself first. This would make him holy so that he could enter God's presence with the blood from a spotless lamb slain for the people's sins. That blood would be sprinkled on the Mercy Seat of the golden Ark which rested in the Holy of Holies. If the sacrifice was acceptable to God, He would descend in a cloud over the tabernacle and the Jews would erupt into shouts of joy. A time of great celebration would follow. Once more they would feel close to God because He had forgiven them...but it wouldn't last. That's because this was only a stopgap measure that didn't ultimately solve the problem of sin. The animal sacrifice wasn't sufficient for that. It covered sin, but couldn't eradicate it. Over the next year, one by one, the sins would pile up once more, and so would the guilt and fear and condemnation. Next year the whole process would have to be repeated all over again.

The day of atonement was a shadow, a promise of a reality to come. Just as promised, Jesus, the Sacrificial Lamb, arrived. He brought conviction of sin and gave many warnings to the Jews not to reject Him as their Saviour. He would prove that He was the promised Righteous Lamb when He rose from the dead and ascended to His Father. Those who denied Him would receive the full and just penalty of their sins. However some would believe in Him and these would be rescued. First though, they would need to have their hearts prepared through the act of repentance. Real repentance. Not the phoney kind of the Pharisees, but the kind the Jews exhibited under the Old Covenant. The kind who saw they were sinful and deserving of punishment; the kind who longed passionately for God's acceptance and love; the kind who trusted in Him for salvation and deliverance. For such ones, it was fully about love - seeking a forever relationship with God. Jesus, Perfect Wisdom and Perfect Love, came of His own initiative to make us a New Creation so as to create a family just for Him. This is why He died on a cross, shedding His blood for our sin, rising from the grave to place His blood on the mercy seat of the heavenly Sanctuary, to declare us not guilty for eternity. He opened the door to heaven and now draws us by His love to receive the Life He bought for us, thereby causing us to be born again and transformed from sinner to saint. No longer is there any fear of judgement because we have been perfected by His Righteous Sacrifice.