

The Hebrew Corner

A new beginning can often be a trying experience for an individual. People by nature tend to be creatures of habit, keeping to the patterns of living they have established in the past. However, some of the best, most rewarding experiences of our lives happen after a new beginning, be it the birth of a child, a promotion at work, graduation from college, and so on. This month's focus is on new beginnings in the bible, and some of the ways that God has instructed his people to follow when facing a new course of life.

In Genesis 1:1-2:3, the story of the creation of the universe and all living creatures is revealed. Genesis 1:1 is a statement of the first beginning and who was responsible for it:

'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.'

From the Hebrew, the word translated as beginning is raysheet (ראשית, ray-SHEET), meaning beginning, first, or chief. We see that God laid down a pattern to be followed: six days of work followed by a day of rest, the first sabbath, or in Hebrew, shabbat (שבת, shah-BAHT). He made light, land, and seas to provide the necessary support for the plants and animals that he would bring forth on the subsequent days. Then he created herbs, grasses, and trees, then marine animals, land animals, and finally, man. Then, on the sabbath day he rested. He instituted the weekly sabbath observance as a memorial to this new beginning.

In Proverbs, God provides us instruction on how he is to be honored

when we are blessed by him (Proverbs 3:9-10):

“Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the first fruits of thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.”

In Hebrew grammar, prepositions, unlike in English, are usually attached as a prefix to their object, so that the translation in the passage “with the firstfruits” is meraysheet (מראשית, may-ray-SHEET), where the mem (מ) is the preposition translated here as with, followed by raysheet, the word we encountered in the Genesis passage, translated firstfruits. This could simply be rendered, “honor God with the first of your increase.” In other words, before using any of your gain for yourself, honor God with a portion of it. In subsequent passages, we will see this directive developed further.

Turning to the Torah, we observe God speaking about the proper observance of another new beginning, that of the people of Israel entering the promised land of Canaan after 40 years of wilderness wandering. In Leviticus 23:9-11, God instructs the Israelites on a special type of offering to be given when they enter the promised land:

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.”

The Hebrew word rendered in the passage as firstfruits is the word raysheet that we encountered in the previous passages. The Hebrew word translated as wave is noof (נוף, NOOF), meaning to wave, or move to and fro. The wave offering was to start the feast of weeks and the counting of the omer (omer is the Hebrew for sheaf), as indicated in the following passage (Leviticus 23:15):

“And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete:”

Wave offering in Hebrew is tenufah (תנופה, tuh-noo-FAH), meaning swinging, waving, wave-offering, or offering. The Hebrew lexicon Brown-Driver-Briggs indicates that traditionally the wave offering was done by presenting the offering toward the altar by the priest, who would then bring it back to himself, symbolic of presenting the offering to God, and the God returning it back to the priest. Clearly the Lord wanted the new beginning of the Israelites in the promised land to be marked by an offering commemorating the provision and daily leadership that God had provided for them in their wilderness journey, and it was to be characterized by a horizontal wave motion.

In Numbers 15:18-21, God instructs Moses that the Israelites entering the promised land are to present a second special offering:

“Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land whither I bring you, Then it shall be, that when ye eat of the bread of the land, ye shall offer up a heave offering unto the LORD. Ye shall offer up a cake of the first of your dough for an heave offering: as ye do the heave offering of the threshing floor,

so shall ye heave it. Of the first of your dough, ye shall give unto the LORD an heave offering in your generations.”

In this passage, we again have the Hebrew word raysheet, here translated as first. This time the Lord required a heave offering to commemorate the new beginning. Heave is a translation of the Hebrew verb room (רום, ROOM), meaning be high, exalted, rise, or lift up. Therefore the heave offering, in Hebrew, terumah (תרומה, tuh-roo-MAH) was to be a lifting up of the offering to the Lord. So this special offering was to be characterized by a vertical lifting motion.

Taken together, these horizontal and vertical presentations of offerings bring to mind the type of sacrificial offering that Yeshua gave on the cross, with the horizontal post symbolizing the tenufah, and the vertical post representing the terumah. Strikingly, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is also identified in scripture as a firstfruits offering (1 Corinthians 15:20-23):

“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.”

Thus through the offering of Jesus, our Yeshua, on the cross, and his resurrection, we have the ultimate new beginning for all of mankind. To you the reader: if you have not yet received this offering, and experienced a new beginning of your own in Jesus, I encourage you receive this precious gift. To those readers who have,

I urge you to mark a new beginning with a firstfruits offering of your own to commemorate the grace of God in your lives. Praise God, and blessings to you all.