

The Hebrew Corner

The tearing or rending of clothing was commonly done in ancient Israel as a sign of grief or distress. Many examples of this are described in the Tanach. In the Torah, we see examples of this after Joseph's brothers had cast him into a pit, and he was taken away by the Ishmeelites, who brought Joseph to Egypt (Genesis 37: 29-34):

“And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes. And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child is not; and I, whither shall I go? And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood; And they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father; and said, This we have found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no. And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days.”

The root of the Hebrew word translated in the passage as rent (his clothes), is qarah (קרע, kah-RAH) meaning tear or rend. With Reuben we see only the tearing of clothes in distress, but with Jacob we see the tearing of clothes plus an additional sign of mourning, the wearing of sackcloth. Sackcloth in Hebrew is saq (שק, SAHK), which may be the word from which the English word sack is derived.

We encounter the rending of garments again in the book of Numbers. Ten of the spies that were sent out into the land gave an evil report of the land of Canaan, countered by the good report of

Joshua, son of Nun, and Caleb, son of Jephunneh. The congregation were persuaded by the ten spies, and were weeping and murmuring against Moses and Aaron, and conspired to replace Moses with a captain to lead them back into Egypt. The following was the reaction of the two men who gave the good report (Numbers 14:6-9):

“And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes: And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not.”

Here Joshua and Caleb react to the rebellion of the people with mourning. They have a spiritual insight into the power of God, and are not concerned with the physical stature of the people of the land.” However, the Israelites were seeing matters through the eyes of the flesh, which led to rebellion. This resulted in God's pronouncement of 40 years of wandering for them in the wilderness, in which none except Joshua, Caleb, and the children under 20 years of age would make into the promised land.

From scripture we see that even prophets sometimes viewed situations through the lens of physical reality, and reacted in a worldly manner, For example, in the following passage, Elisha reacts to his separation from Elijah in a very human way (2 Kings 2:11-12):

“And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces.”

Here we see Elisha reacting to the immediate circumstances of his separation from Elijah, and not experiencing the joy that should have been his in seeing his friend taken up directly into heaven to be with God. This is a lesson for all of us in trusting our faith in God that our departed loved ones who have received Jesus will be safe, and be taken care of by him. It is natural to grieve, but we must keep in mind the spiritual reality of the joy that our loved one is experiencing in the presence of God.

King David had such great respect for those that God had anointed, that even though Saul had repeatedly tried to kill him, he reacted in the following manner upon hearing of the deaths of Saul and his son Jonathan, his friend (2 Samuel 1:11-12):

“Then David took hold on his clothes, and rent them; and likewise all the men that were with him: And they mourned, and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the LORD, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword.”

The Hebrew word translated as mourned in the passage comes from the root safad (סָפַד, sah-FAHD), which can also be translated as wail

or lament.

However, in the B'rit Hadashah (New Testament), we see a tearing of fabric that is not a sign of mourning, but of the joy of the reunion of God with his people (Matthew 27:51):

“And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent.”

Upon the death of Jesus, the penalty for our sins was paid, and thus a way for sinners through Christ to come back into fellowship with God the father. No longer would the high priest need to go into the holiest place of the temple to make an atonement for the sins of the people. Now each one of us can approach God directly and fellowship with him. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus our Yeshua, the barrier between God and his people has been removed and the relationship restored for those who have faith and place their trust in Jesus. If you have not yet accepted Jesus into your life, and received forgiveness of your sins through his sacrificial death on the cross, I strongly urge you to do so. He will change your life, and give you a direction and inner peace that you have never experienced before, No more tearing of clothes, no more putting on of sackcloth needed, but instead the life in abundance that Jesus our Yeshua promised. May you have a blessed and grace-filled month!