

The Hebrew Corner

Animal sacrifice is prescribed in the Torah as a way to atone for sins, or to give thanks to God for his provision. Yet in various passages in the Tanach, the prophets indicate that this is not what he desires of his people. In the first passage, from the book of Micah, God makes this clear (Micah 6:6-8):

“Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

There are several important Hebrew words used in this passage. The word translated as sin is c'taah (חטאה, chuh-tah-AH), from the verb chatah (חטא, chah-TAH), which means to miss (a goal), to go wrong, or to sin. Soul in Hebrew is nephesh (נפש, NEH-fehsh), which means soul, life, or living being. To love in Hebrew is (אהב, ah-HAHV), and the word following, mercy, is a translation of the Hebrew word chesed (חסד, CHEH-sehd), which means goodness, kindness, or mercy. The Lord places here a high value on those who live a humble and righteous life, and who love doing what is good and kind to others. The sacrifices do not make up for the lack of these traits.

In the next passage, the prophet Samuel confronts King Saul with this message (1 Samuel 15:16-22):

“Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the LORD hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on. And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel? And the LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD? And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal. And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.”

The translation, to obey, comes from the Hebrew word shama (שמע, shah-MAH), which can also mean hear or listen to. We see the occurrence of the word sacrifice, which in Hebrew is zevach (זבח, ZEH-vahch). Here Samuel tells Saul that it is much higher value to God to to hear and to obey him, than to offer sacrifices to him. The latter does not make up for failure in the former, and so Saul (and in

turn, his family) lost his right to the throne.

In the next passage, God speaks similar words through Isaiah, the prophet (Isaiah 1:11-18):

“To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of the goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

Here God groups new moons and sabbaths and the keeping of feasts, together with sacrifices, as being futile attempts to gain favor with him. To wash in Hebrew is rachats (רחץ, rah-CHATS), which can also mean wash off, wash away, or bathe. For a person to become clean, God tells us that we need to repent of our evil deeds, and to learn to do well. He has provided the one way for us to become clean, through the sacrifice of his son Jesus, our Yeshua, and the gift

of the Holy Spirit, who dwells inside us, and guides us to do that which is pleasing to God, as demonstrated by how we treat those who are not as fortunate as us, as described in the passage above.

May you constantly learn how to better do the things that are pleasing to God, and may God bless you abundantly this month.