

The Hebrew Corner

In the book of Isaiah, the prophet describes a serious problem that God has revealed to him (Isaiah 1:22):

“Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water:”

Here Isaiah is speaking of the nation of Judah, but it could be generally applied to nations, groups of people, or the individual. The English word dross in the passage is a translation of the Hebrew word seeg (סֵיג, SEEG). Dross is defined in the Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary as “the scum that forms on the surface of molten metal.” Unfortunately, we all have hidden dross inside of us compared to God. He is the absolute standard of purity and righteousness, described in the book of Psalms as follows (Psalm 12:6):

“The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.”

We cannot hope to attain his level of purity on our own, but we are challenged by this passage from the B'rit Hadasha (James 4:8):

“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.”

The key is to draw near to God, so that he can purify us, as indicated in Malachi 3:1-3:

“Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the LORD, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.”

The word above translated as refiner is from the Hebrew word tsaraf (צָרַף, tsah-RAHF), which means to refine, melt, or purge away. This purification comes by fire, as the following passage attests (Zechariah 13:9):

“And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.”

The Hebrew word for fire is aysh (אֵשׁ, AYSH). This is the fire that purifies, that removes the dross from the precious metal, but the trial of fire that God puts us through is a trial of faith (1 Peter 1:3-7):

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God

through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:”

It is the testing under fire that purifies us, so when we go through valleys and difficult times, this is the essential trying of our faith that will make us clean and able to become the example of righteousness that God wants us to be. Yet as the earlier passage from the book of James indicates, it all starts by drawing near to God, who is ready to draw near to us. May you have a blessed month covered by the grace of God.