

Bringing a Sacrifice to the Lord

In weeks reading from Parashat Acharei Mot (*Vayikra / Leviticus 16:1-18:30*), the Lord spoke to Moshe following the death of Aaron's two sons saying *16:2* "... *Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at any time into the holy place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, or he will die; for I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.*" (NASB) The scriptures say Aaron is to take a bull for the Sin offering and a ram for the Whole burnt offering and that He is to perform a mikvah (ritual bath) prior to putting on the holy garments (*16:3-4*). Two goats are presented at the entrance to the Ohel Moed (אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד, Tent of Meeting) one is used as a sacrifice and the other for the Azazel (לְעִזָּאֵזֶל, Scapegoat). Lots are cast for the goats; the lot falls upon the Sin offering. The Lord then commands the people to bring their offerings to the Lord, to not slaughter the ox, lamb, or goat in the field outside the camp, the person who does such and does not bring the animal as a peace offering is guilty and is to be cut off from his people (*17:1-5*). The scriptures also state *17:7* *'They shall no longer sacrifice their sacrifices to the goat demons with which they play the harlot. This shall be a permanent statute to them throughout their generations'* (NASB) The Torah continues saying that the Life of the blood is in the flesh and it (the blood) has been given to make atonement for our souls (*17:11*) therefore no person is to eat the blood of any animal (*17:12-16*). The Lord instructs Israel to not do what is done in the Land of Egypt, nor what is done in the land of Canaan (*18:1-5*). The commands against incest (*18:6-20*) and homosexuality (*18:22*) are given. Intercourse with an animal is also prohibited (*18:23*), for these are the reason the nations are being destroyed before Israel (*18:24*). The Parashah concludes stating that we are not to keep any of the customs of the nations which are an abomination before God (*18:30*).

Reading *Vayikra / Leviticus 17:1-4*, how might we apply these Scriptures to our lives today?

ספר ויקרא פרק יז

א וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: ב
 דַּבֵּר אֶל-אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל-בְּנָיו וְאֶל כָּל-
 בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם זֶה הַדְּבָר
 אֲשֶׁר-צִוָּה יְהוָה לֵאמֹר: ג אִישׁ אִישׁ
 מִבֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁחַט שׂוֹר או-
 כֶּשֶׁב או-עֵז בַּמַּחֲנֶה או אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁחַט
 מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה: ד וְאֶל-פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד
 לֹא תָבִיאוּ לְהִקְרִיב קֹרְבָן לַיהוָה לִפְנֵי
 מִשְׁכַּן יְהוָה דָּם יִחֹשֵׁב לְאִישׁ הַהוּא דָּם
 שִׁפְךָ וּנְקַרְתָּ הָאִישׁ הַהוּא מִקְרָב עִמּוֹ:

Vayikra / Leviticus 17:1-4

17:1 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 17:2 'Speak to Aaron and to his sons and to all the sons of Israel and say to them, 'This is what the Lord has commanded, saying, 17:3 'Any man from the house of Israel who slaughters an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or who slaughters it outside the camp, 17:4 and has not brought it to the doorway of the tent of meeting to present it as an offering to the Lord before the tabernacle of the Lord, blood-guiltiness is to be reckoned to that man. He has shed blood and that man shall be cut off from among his people. (NASB)

Reading the Hebrew Scriptures, frequently the word slaughter (יִשְׁחַט) is men-

tioned with regard to killing or eating. In the Torah, it is generally referring to the ritual slaughtering of the animals. Moshe gave the command saying the people are to bring the animal before the Tent of Meeting to be slaughtered. Those who do not are to be cut off from among the people. It is within this context that we find the connections between slaughtering, eating, and the covenant of God. Take for example in *Acts 10:13* God shows Peter the sheet with the animals and then tells Peter *Θυσσον και φαγε* meaning “sacrifice and eat.” *Acts 11:7* also repeats the phrase *Θυσσον και φαγε* “sacrifice and eat.” The Lord shows Peter the animals and then commanded him to “kill and eat” literally telling Peter to “sacrifice and eat” where the Greek word here for “kill” is *θῦσον* “thuson” implies to “ritually slaughter” the animals. This is consistent with setting the animal apart for the Lord as holy (i.e. those that may be eaten), or in other words, to bring the animal before the Lord at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. While thinking on the idea of “Sacrifice,” and how this applies to us today, with regard to the words of Moshe in this week’s reading, let’s look at these Scriptures from the perspective of the rabbis from *Midrash Rabba Vayikra, on Parashat Acharei Mot, Part 1 and 2* (מדרש רבה (ויקרא פרשה כב סימן א-ב).

Midrash Rabba Vayikra, Parsha 22, Part 1

“What man soever there be of the house of Israel, that kills an ox, or lamb, or goat (Vayikra / Leviticus 17:3). This bears on what is written in scripture: and the superfluities of the earth are included (Ecclesiastes 5:8)...”

In the opening lines of the rabbinic commentary *Midrash Rabba Vayikra, Parsha 22, Part 1*, the rabbis make a reference to Ecclesiastes chapter 5. While studying midrash, many times a reference is made from Scripture as a proof text were only a portion of the Scripture is provided. The purpose is to enable the reader to understand that this verse from *Vayikra / Leviticus 17:3* is being taken in the context of *Ecclesiastes 5*. Therefore, it is important to read through a portion of *Ecclesiastes 5* in order to get the whole meaning (context) of the midrashic thought process.

Ecclesiastes 5:6-8

*5:6 Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands?
5:7 For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God.
5:8 If you see oppression of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be shocked at the sight; for one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them. (NASB)*

Note the context of what is taking place in Ecclesiastes. *Vayikra / Leviticus 17:3* is referring to the importance of bringing a sacrifice before the Lord in the prescribed manner, and *Ecclesiastes 5* is speaking of not doing so and saying to the angel of the Lord “oops

I made a mistake.” (i.e. *oops I didn't bring the Sacrifice to the Tent of Meeting as Moshe commands*) This may be understood as suggesting the person has a sort of disregard or light-hearted attitude for what the Lord is calling one to do. Ecclesiastes says “*Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands?*” The midrash is trying to draw in the idea of oppressing the poor, and the denial of justice and righteousness into the context of the command of God and bringing a holy sacrifice. *Midrash Rabba Vayikra, Parsha 22, Part 2* continues from Part 1 saying the following:

Midrash Rabba Vayikra, Parashah 22, Part 2

“... The king is the Holy One blessed be He, of whom it is written, the Lord reigns; He is clothed in majesty (Tehillim / Psalms 93:1). That makes himself servant to the field, that is, to Zion, of which it is written, Therefore shall Zion be plowed as a field (Micah 3:12). Accordingly, He that loves silver will not be satisfied with silver (Ecclesiastes 5:9). He who loves the commandments will not have his fill of the commandments. Nor he that loves abundance, with increase, that is to say, any one who covets and is greedy for the fulfillment of religious acts and has not to his credit a religious act designed for future generations, what benefit has he? There is proof that this is so. For Moshe, surely, performed every so many religious deeds and acts of righteousness, and had ever so many good deeds to his credit, yet he performed a religious deed designed for future generations, as is proved by the text, Then Moshe separated three cities beyond the Jordan (Devarim / Deuteronomy 4:41).”

Midrash Rabba Vayikra, Parsha 22, Part 2 introduces a few interesting and strange concepts speaking of a person who “*performs religious acts for future generations*” and makes a comparison of “*one who covets and is greedy for religious acts in order to serve his own purposes.*” What does it mean to do/perform religious acts for future generations? In the midrashim, the rabbis say that the purpose of performing religious acts (*maaseh ha'mitzvot*) is to earn merit that can be passed on to future generations. The idea is that God rewards measure for measure, even to the smallest detail. The *Talmud Bavli Bava Metziah 86b* explains that “*whatever Abraham did on his own, God rewarded his children directly.*” This might be understood in the sense that the blessing comes when we do what is right, living in righteousness and justice, studying God's Word and passing that on to our children (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 6:5-7*) verses those who do what is wrong, living in unrighteousness, robbing and cheating people, and their children learn to do the same. There is a parallel found in the Apostolic Writings and what the Apostle Paul wrote in *Galatians 6*.

Galatians 6:6-10

6:6 The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. 6:8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who

sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 6:9 Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. (NASB) ז אל תתעו) ו המלמד בדבר יחלק מכל טובו למלמדהו: ח הזרע בבשרו לא יתן אלהים להתל בו כי מה שזרע האדם אתו יקצר: ט ואנחנו יקצר כליון משברו והזרע ברוח יקצר מן הרוח חיי עולם: ט (בעשות הטוב אל נחת כי נקצר בעתו אם לא נרפה):

It is instrumental to look at the Hebrew translation of these verses, and it is interesting that the Apostle Paul states *“hazorea bivsaro yiatsor kilyon mivsaro, v’hazorea ba’ruach yiktso min ha’ruach chai olam.”* (6:8 *For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. NASB*) Paul parallels doing what is good, to sowing in the spirit and reaping eternal life whereas the counterpart of that is sowing to the flesh reaps corruption. Basically, the one who gives into the flesh will reap dishonesty and immorality. Note this is not simply a philosophical or theological thought exercise. If one gives into fleshly desires, one is cultivating immoral decisions, which corrupts the spirit. Moral impurity then leads to other immoral activities such as bribery, embezzlement (contentiousness), and not doing what is right in the proper time. Paul says that if you live by the Spirit, you will do what is right, and reap eternal life. If we are abiding in the Messiah, will we not choose what is right by the power of the Holy Spirit? If we live by the flesh, will the Holy Spirit give us the power to do what is right? In addition to this, it is important to note that Paul says *“hazorea”* (הזרע) which means *“Sowing.”* Sowing is derived from the root word Zarah meaning *“seed.”* In *Genesis / Bereshit 26:4*, the Lord told Isaac that *“in his seed”* all the nations of the earth will be blessed, repeating the covenant blessing the Lord had given to his father Abraham. Note the connection of the *“seed”* (זרע) with sowing (doing), with children, and the covenant. The connection to the Torah Portion for this week is in what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans in *Romans 12:1*:

Romans 12:1

12:1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. (NASB)

Paul says to offer your body as a holy, and living sacrifice unto the Lord and this is our spiritual service of worship. So the question is, *“Am I living for future generations”* like the rabbis say? Am I sowing to the spirit, and are my children and others watching and learning what it means to live for the Lord? Am I offering my body as a living sacrifice for future generations? Or, are we going before God like *Ecclesiastes 5* speaks of saying to the Lord *“oops I made a mistake”* having a sort of disregard or light-hearted attitude for what the Lord is calling us to do? The Lord is telling us in the Torah portion to bring your sacrifice to Me and be serious about it. It is time to take your faith seriously! These are important things to think about especially as we are approaching Passover next week and celebrate our Savior, Yeshua the Messiah!