

PARASHAH: Vayak'hel (He assembled)
ADDRESS: Sh'mot (Exodus) 35:1-38:20
READING DATE: Shabbat
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(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

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Let's begin with the opening blessing for the Torah:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-‘Olam,
asher bachar banu m’kol ha-amim,
v’natan lanu eht Torah-to.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you, O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have selected us from among all the peoples,
and have given us your Torah.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

Our parashah starts out with some familiar instructions. Actually, the **contribution** (Hebrew: t'rumah) taken in verses 4-29 is a repeat of the instructions of Sh'mot chapter 25. However, this time, we learn that the **t'rumah** was so great that Moshe had to instruct the people to stop giving (see 36:3-7)! The major difference between the two accounts is that the former (**Parash'ot T'rumah, Tetzaveh, and Ki Tissa**) signifies the instructions (as can be observed by the fact that the verb tenses are in the future), whereas the latter (i.e. our current portion as well as the final portion) is in the past tense, signifying the work that was completed according to instructions. It is unfortunate that the awful golden calf incident had to even mar the historical narrative at all! Moreover, we learned last week that the temptation to sin is never so great that we cannot escape. But despite the fact that 25, 000 died as a result of the punishment, isn't it fantastic to know that the remaining people gave so abundantly!

With the sin and its punishment behind them, the people were now ready to get busy with the task at hand—building ADONAI a Mishkan (Tabernacle). Moshe had graciously interceded for them, and the LORD restrained himself from wiping them out completely. However, from this point on, the people would learn to operate under the divine grace and provision of HaShem, as performed through the sacrificial system with its Levitical Priesthood. From this point on, HaShem would require the people to rely on his priestly mediators to serve them.

Types and Shadows

As I stated in a previous parashah, God's system of animal sacrifices was never intended to be a permanent one. In fact the etymological background of the word Torah (the root word being an archery term meaning to “direct towards the goal”) also suggests that the fullest measure of HaShem’s forgiveness was not found in the earthly copies, but rather, in the heavenly originals. Yet, during the time period of the TaNaKH, the animal sacrifices were authentically God's system. In other words, if you were a citizen of this community of former slaves, and you wanted to operate within a covenant relationship with its Savior, then you had no choice but to participate in the sacrificial system. There was no room for circumvention. Why would HaShem require exclusivity? Because, in his established order of things, only the blood could make atonement for their lives (read Leviticus 17:11). Moreover, he was teaching each and every participant an important aspect of his established spiritual laws.

The entire Levitical Priesthood and its order of things served to point the way to the ultimate sacrifice that would take place in Messiah Yeshua. We know this using our hindsight, which is 20/20. In fact, as the budding young nation learned to walk in their new calendar—HaShem’s calendar, they would have the opportunity to learn about a great many aspects of the unfathomable grace and mercy of their Husband. In singling out just the Feast Days as an example, we have noted that the word for “appointed time” is “mo-eyd.” Interestingly, this meaning conveys the sense of the “dress rehearsals” that occur before an actual play. In this way, HaShem masterfully designed the Mikra’ey Kodesh (Holy Convocations) to act as dress rehearsals for his children. “Of what?” you might ask.

The Feasts of ADONAI are dress rehearsals of Messianic Redemption.

Our LORD Yeshua has literally and prophetically fulfilled the first four of the seven feasts mentioned in Leviticus 23; it is my belief that the Torah teaches that he will, likewise, literally and prophetically fulfill the final three at his soon to be second arrival. What is more, if we consider the Feasts on the micro level, then by comparison, the entire history of mankind would be the macro. Simply put, the death of Messiah, foreshadowed by the Yom Kippur ritual speaks of Yeshua dying ONCE for the sins of the world. In God’s calendar, Yom Kippur only occurs ONCE! Yeshua’s ministry was perfectly anticipated if the seeker were looking through eyes of faith.

As the children of Avraham willingly and faithfully lived out HaShem’s yearly cycle of “mo-eydeem”, the Spirit of the Holy One graciously opened their hearts to understand that, as his treasured possession, they were responsible to actively pursue a genuine, loving relationship with their “husband”. It is this type of personal relationship that HaShem desired from his children, and to this end, the surrounding nations might also see the goodness and mercy of ADONAI, and seek to become one of his treasured possessions. Today, our responsibilities to our Holy God have not changed any more than he himself has changed.

Returning to the everyday functions of the Tabernacle, as will be outlined in these next few parash'ot, we see that HaShem would also "meet" with his people, via his priestly "go-betweens", for very important reasons. Even the name for the Mishkan ("Ohel Mo-eyd") literally means "Tent of the Appointment". What sort of appointment are we talking about here? Why, an appointment with the Maker of the Universe—the one who could redeem both body and soul! Yes, even though salvation was not "automatically granted" to the covenant participant (the Torah could never "save" the individual), forgiveness was indeed genuine. Sins were not merely cast into some sort of "holding pattern." Sin was in fact dealt with. Allow Melekh Dah-vid (King David) to illustrate this point for us.

A Covering

Before we become so quick to look down on God's temporary solution, let's look at what the sacrificial system of those days could accomplish. In Psalms chapters 32 and 51 we see the heart of man who genuinely experienced the forgiveness of HaShem. In Psalm 32:1 he stated that the man whose sin is covered is blessed! In verse 5 he clearly states that his acknowledgement of his sin brought about true forgiveness from HaShem. Because of unmerited favor, this man could rejoice in the mercies of HaShem (verses 10, 11)!

Psalm 51 was written after Dah-vid had committed the gross sin with Bat-Sheva, the mother of Melekh Shlomo (King Solomon). In this passage we again see a man who, knowing the true goal of the Torah—salvation of his eternal soul through the Promised One to come—sought the genuine forgiveness of his Maker.

Verses 16-19 of this Psalm explain to us readers that a heart given to genuine trusting faithfulness—the very same heart required of us today!—is what rendered the sacrifices of the TaNaKH effective. Simply performing the rituals perfunctorily did not please our Heavenly Abba (verse 16, 17). Rather, it was a heart broken in genuine submission to the Ruach Elohim (Spirit of God) that moved HaShem to forgiveness! This same heart gave the sacrifices validity (verse 19).

Did Dah-vid, as of yet, know the name of his future descendant Yeshua? We have no evidence to support that he explicitly knew the name "Yeshua." What he **did** know is that through Moshe, the Torah promised that one day a "Prophet" would arise and that the people were to obey him (read Deuteronomy 18:15-19)! What he **did** have was a glimpse of the intended function and nature of the Torah (the "**goal**"), in that, these temporary sacrifices **pointed** towards that day when his sins would be forgiven, never again to be brought to HaShem's mind. This is the day spoken about in Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) 31:34,

“...for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (KJV)

And just in case you've forgotten, this is a “New Testament” feature (read Hebrews 8:12)! According to the book of Hebrews, the sacrifices of Dah-vid's day could cleanse the flesh, but not the conscience, that is to say, I understand Hebrews to be teaching that only the eternal blood of a Sinless Sacrifice can regenerate the mind of an individual. By comparison, the blood of bulls and goats was temporal:

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:13, 14, KJV)

Moreover, the writer of Hebrews makes his point explicit in this additional passage:

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (Hebrews 10:1-4, NIV)

The "Old Testament" saints were not "saved" by a different system than the one in which we rely on. If they were, then this would suggest that there were really two separate ways unto righteousness—a theory, which we know, cannot be true. To be sure, Yeshua himself stated emphatically that he was THE way, and that NO man can come unto the Father except through HIM.

The sacrifices, performed with a genuine heart of repentance, afforded real-life forgiveness, but only to the purification of the flesh! However, the temporal blood of the animals in and of themselves—and by themselves—could not even take away sin; only the eternal blood of the Perfect Sacrifice—to which the animals pointed—could purify both flesh and soul.

Thus you could say that the blood of the animals “moved” as it were, the sin from the body of the person to the Mercy Seat (the earthly altar) where God would in fact grant genuine atonement (washing of sins in the flesh) because of the reality of the Heavenly Altar. The objective faith of the individual still remained

dependant upon God's Promised Word to Come, namely Yeshua himself, yet his obedience was demonstrated by adherence to explicit Torah commands where sacrifices were concerned. What is more, the salvation of the eternal soul of an individual was always dependant upon a circumcised heart, exactly as it is today.

In summary then, the sacrificial system was not designed to bring the participant to the goal, namely a purged conscience and salvation of the individual. Sacrifices were for dealing with sin in the flesh. Only genuine faith in the Promised One could move God's heart to reckon to one's account "righteousness" as was done for Avraham. The Torah was weak in that it could not bring to the goal of salvation the heart of an individual. Only the Spirit's supernatural work could—and always will be able to—do that.

There is only ONE path to positional righteousness. There is only ONE way to attain lasting salvation. In his **Jewish New Testament Commentary**, David H. Stern, writing of the mistaken notion that there exists two paths to righteousness, comments on Romans 10:1-13, a passage often quoted (especially verses 4-13) by opponents of the Torah who wish to prove their mistaken premise:

“The righteousness based on the *Torah* says one thing (v.5), *but, in contrast*, the righteousness based on faith says something else (vv.6-8).” This interpretation, like the one that makes v.4 speak of terminating the Law, is antisemitic, even if today it is unintentionally so. It flows out of the Christian theology that mistakenly minimizes the importance of the Mosaic Law. This, in turn, is the fruit of the Church's effort during the second through sixth centuries of the Common Era to eliminate, hide or finesse the Jewishness of Christianity (see my *Messianic Jewish Manifesto*, Chapter III, especially pp. 52-55). It is crucial, therefore, to insist that vv.6-8 do not present the righteousness based on faith in the Messiah Yeshua as *different* from the righteousness based on the *Torah*, but as *the same*—the same righteousness based on the same trust and leading to the same eternal life.¹

He goes on to explain further,

Sha'ul quotes from the *Torah* in order to show that **the righteousness grounded in trusting** (v.6) is exactly the *same* as “the righteousness grounded in the *Torah*” (v.5). He proves this by showing that the very trust implicit in the *Torah* quotation of v.5 (as explained in v.5N) is taught explicitly as well—the *Torah* itself commands the very trust Sha'ul is talking about, trust in God and in his Messiah when he comes. Thus vv.6-8 sharpen the meaning of v.5, which is then seen to imply that the person

¹ David Stern, *Commentary to Romans 10:6-8* (Jewish New Testament Publications), pp. 397-398.

who practices “the righteousness grounded in the *Torah*” (v.5) will necessarily have **the trust** in Yeshua the Messiah **that we proclaim** (v.8). That is, he will see that the *Torah* itself guides him toward the goal of trusting in the Messiah Yeshua (v.4). Therefore...I have rendered it “**Moreover**” in the JNT, so that vv.6-8 *add* to the point already made in v.5 instead of *contrasting* with it. (Emphasis his)²

So, if the question still remains: “How did those folks find salvation?”, I think it can be safely understood now that self-effort and lack of trust was not the way to their salvation; rather, properly understood,

The sacrifices in the TaNaKH were meant to be performed out of the righteousness that is grounded in trusting—the very same righteousness that is produced as a result of genuine, trusting faithfulness in HaShem and his Messiah—the very righteousness we are to display today!

We will study the upcoming Torah portions, which elaborate on the animal sacrifices (especially the upcoming book of Vayikra [Leviticus]) with the above understanding in mind. I want to close this portion with a summarizing quote from the book of Hebrews again. Speaking of the arrangement mentioned in our current parashah, the writer explains,

“By this arrangement, the *Ruach HaKodesh* showed that so long as the first Tent had standing, the way into the Holiest Place was still closed. This symbolizes the present age and indicates that the conscience of the person performing the service cannot be brought to the goal by the gifts and sacrifices he offers. For they involve only food and drink and various ceremonial washings—regulations concerning the outward life, imposed until the time for God to reshape the whole structure.

“But when the Messiah appeared as *cohen gadol* of the good things that are happening already, then, through the greater and more perfect Tent which is not man-made (that is, it is not of this created world), he entered the Holiest Place once and for all.

**“And he entered not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus setting people free forever.”
(Messianic Jews [Hebrews] 9:8-12)**

The closing blessing is as follows:

² Ibid.

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-‘Olam,
asher natan lanu Toraht-emet,
v’chay-yeh o’lam nata-b’tochenu.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you O’ LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have given us your Torah of truth,
and have planted everlasting life within our midst.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

“Shabbat Shalom!”

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