

APOSTOLIC SCRIPTURE REFLECTION:

for *Mishpatim*

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Hebrews 9:11-23; 10:28-39

“A Blood Covenant”

By the time one arrives at *Mishpatim* (Exodus 21:1-24:18) in the Torah cycle, the dramatic scene of the Ancient Israelites receiving the words of the Almighty, at the foot of the smoking mountain, has concluded. Now with more specificity, we see an expansion upon the Ten Commandments, with a series of rulings or laws that deal with civil and criminal matters (Exodus 21:2-22:16), humanitarian considerations (Exodus 22:17-23:19), Divine promises to avoid assimilation into the pagan nations (Exodus 23:20-33), and the ratification procedures outlined in Exodus 24. While the Apostolic Writings have a number of references to some of the actual laws articulated, the overall description of the blood covenant found in the following passage—symbolizes the critical need for a future and permanently affective blood covenant. This future covenant would be superior in many ways to the original covenant made here between God and Israel, as it would provide permanent atonement for the sins of people:

“Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘**All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!**’ Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put *it* in basins, and the *other* half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read *it* in the hearing of the people; and they said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!’ So Moses took the blood and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words’” (Exodus 24:3-8).

In this passage it is critical to note that *all of the people* declared that they would do *all of the words* which the Lord had spoken. This was followed by the construction of an altar with twelve pillars, signifying that all twelve tribes of Israel were included in this blood covenant. At an appropriate moment, Moses divided the blood of the sacrifices in two, sprinkling half of the blood on the altar, and then the other half on the people who willingly declared that they would do all that the Lord had told them to do. This an awesome scene to imagine—as blood is literally flying through the air—sealing the covenant between the Israelites and their God.

Millennia later, the author of Hebrews uses elements of this passage, with some elaboration, to describe the comparison between the original covenant inaugurated by Moses and the New Covenant established by the shed blood of Messiah Yeshua. The extraordinary upgrade from the blood of animals, to the precious atoning blood of the Son of God, is highlighted:

“But when Messiah appeared *as* a high priest of the good things to come, *He entered* through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Messiah, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:11-14).

Obviously, the blood of Yeshua acquires eternal redemption for those who place their faith in its atoning value. Further clarification comes as Hebrews delineates the need for a bloody death to take place in order to atone for sin. In this case, the author of Hebrews specifies how a covenant is valid only when appropriate sacrifices have been made:

“And for this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that, a death having occurred for redemption from transgressions committed on the basis of the former covenant, those who are called might receive the promised eternal inheritance. (For where there is a covenant, it is necessary for the death of the one who ratifies it to be brought forward, **for a covenant is made legally secure on the basis of the sacrificial victims,**¹ since it is never valid while the ratifier lives. This is why not even the former covenant was confirmed without blood. When each commandment of the law had been proclaimed by Moses to all the people, taking the blood of calves, together with water, crimson wool and sprigs of hyssop, he sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, ‘This is the blood of the covenant which God has enjoined upon you’ [Exodus 24:8]. He also sprinkled the tabernacle and all the cultic vessels likewise with blood. In fact everything, it might almost be said, is purged with blood according to the law, but without the application of blood there is no definitive purgation)” (Hebrews 9:15-22, *WBC*).²

This passage from Hebrews elaborates on what is stated in Exodus 24. We also see other instances in the Torah where the sprinkling of blood or water is used to cleanse people or consecrate items, although there is a temporal nature to such usage:

“This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing. Now he shall be brought to the priest, and the priest shall go out to the outside of the camp. Thus the priest shall look, and if the infection of leprosy has been healed in the leper, then the priest shall give orders to take two live clean birds and cedar wood and a scarlet string and hyssop for the one who is to be cleansed. The priest shall also give orders to slay the one bird in an earthenware vessel over running water. *As for* the live bird, he shall take it together with the cedar wood and the scarlet string and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was slain over the running water. He shall then sprinkle seven times the one who is to be cleansed from the leprosy and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the live bird go free over the open field” (Leviticus 14:2-7).

“Anyone who touches a corpse, the body of a man who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from Israel. Because the water for impurity was not sprinkled on him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is still on him. This is the law when a man dies in a tent: everyone who comes into the tent and everyone who is in the tent shall be unclean for seven days. Every open vessel, which has no covering tied down on it, shall be unclean. Also, anyone who in the open field touches one who has been slain with a sword or who has died *naturally*, or a human bone or a grave, shall be unclean for seven days. Then for the unclean *person* they shall take some of the ashes of the burnt purification from sin and flowing water shall be added to them in a vessel. A clean person shall take hyssop and dip *it* in the water, and sprinkle *it* on the tent and on all the furnishings and on the persons who were there, and on the one who touched the bone or the one slain or the one dying *naturally* or the grave” (Numbers 19:13-18).

Hebrews asserts that it was necessary for the blood of animals to be sprinkled on the different objects used in the Tabernacle, to make them ready for service, something seen in Torah:

“Next Moses slaughtered *it* and took the blood and with his finger put *some of it* around on the horns of the altar, and purified the altar. Then he poured out *the rest of the blood* at the base of the altar and consecrated it, to make atonement for it. He also took all the fat that was on the entrails and the lobe of the liver, and the two kidneys and their fat; and Moses offered it up in smoke on the altar. But the bull and its hide and its flesh and its refuse he burned in the fire outside the camp, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. Then he presented the ram of the burnt offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram. Moses slaughtered *it* and sprinkled the blood around on the altar” (Leviticus 8:15-19).

“Moreover, he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle *it* with his finger on the mercy seat on the east *side*; also in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood

¹ Grk. *nekrois* (νεκροῖς).

² William L. Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary: Hebrews 9-13*, Vol. 47b (Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 1991), 229.

with his finger seven times. Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. He shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel and because of their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and thus he shall do for the tent of meeting which abides with them in the midst of their impurities” (Leviticus 16:14-16).

Certainly with all of these different examples of God requiring a sprinkling of blood or purified water on various objects, He does communicate that blood sacrifices and their proper application are essential to receiving proper cleansing and/or dedication to Him. The Torah states that the *nephesh* (נֶפֶשׁ) or soul of an animal is found in its blood, and that an animal’s life force would be required to be shed in order to offer some atonement for human errors:

“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; **for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement**” (Leviticus 17:11).

The challenge, of course, is that animal blood cannot permanently atonement for human sin. Only the shedding of Yeshua’s blood for sinful human beings has brought the permanent atonement, something which according to Hebrews has offered a kind of cleansing to the elements of the Heavenly Tabernacle:

“Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned *by God* when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, ‘SEE,’ He says, ‘**THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN**’ [Exodus 25:40]. But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises” (Hebrews 8:4-6).

“Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Messiah did not enter a holy place made with hands, a *mere* copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Hebrews 9:23-24).

To those without the spiritual eyes to see and understand the need for a blood covenant—with a blood that is more precious than that of bull and goats—these passages might seem gruesome or superfluous at the least. But the clear fact that has been exemplified since Ancient Israel’s departure from Egypt is that God does require a bloody substitute for sin.

Born again Believers are thankful for the willing sacrifice of the Messiah! His blood cleanses us from all sin. For His return, we eagerly await, and for the consummation of our salvation with the resurrection of the dead and being given restored and redeemed bodies:

“And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23).

“And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment, so Messiah also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without *reference to sin*, to those who eagerly await Him” (Hebrews 9:28).

Until the restoration of all things...

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<p>Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the <i>New American Standard, Updated Edition</i> (NASU), © 1995, published by The Lockman Foundation.</p>
