

What is "Sin"

What will YHWH forgive???

by John Steed

I began to pose this question after reading Sha'ul's sermon in Acts 13: 38&39 -

"Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."

Just what is Sha'ul talking about? Where in the Torah is he getting this from? What is it that we weren't able to be justified - declared righteous/forgiven - from under the Torah?

OK, I had always understood that the systems of animal offerings as set up in the Torah are simply a symbol of the real thing - that which was accomplished through Messiah. But as symbols one would expect them to have the same effect, i.e. to make an animal offering for one's sin would be the same as having faith in Messiah.

And does it not say in reference to the sin offerings that "the priest shall make an atonement for him for his sin which he hath sinned, and it shall be forgiven him." Isn't "forgiven" enough?? 3Mosh/Levi. 4&5 has a whole list of sin offerings - but I noticed one limitation on them all - in all cases it used the term: "sin through ignorance." Now Strongs defines the word shegagah here translated "ignorance" as meaning "a mistake or inadvertent transgression." What about deliberate or wilful sin? What is YHWH's attitude to that? How is it forgiven - or even can it be forgiven, assuming a person later repents??

4Mosh/Num. 15:30-31 spells it out very clearly "But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the YHWH; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he hath despised the word of the YHWH, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him."

What does "presumptuously" mean? The word in Hebrew is "yad" - a hand, but it is speaking of a figurative "open hand." These following verses also express the same thought -3Mosh/Lev 20:20 "And if a man shall lie with his

uncle's wife, he hath uncovered his uncle's nakedness: they shall bear their sin; they shall die childless.”

3Mosh/Lev. 24:15 “And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his Elohim shall bear his sin. 16 And he that blasphemeth the name of the YHWH, he shall surely be put to death,... 17 And he that killeth any man shall surely be put to death.”

This is in line with what it says in Hebrews 10:28 “He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses”

Now at this point I was somewhat stumped and still unsure of what Sha'ul could mean. It was suggested that I look at Yesh/Isaiah 53, which I did, but at this point I could see no help there. I had the feeling that Sha'ul was talking about a forgiveness existing in Yahushua for this willful sin, a forgiveness for which no atonement or offering existed in the Torah, but I had no evidence.

But our Rabbi said “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:” so having taken the issue to YHWH in prayer the answer was not long in coming! I found the first clue in the Siddur, the Jewish prayer book. In it I saw a translation 2Mosh/Ex. 34:6-7 that was a little different to most, it read:

“HaShem, HaShem, God, Compassionate and Gracious, Slow to anger, and Abundant in Kindness and Truth. Preserver of kindness for thousands of generations, Forgiver of iniquity, wilful sin, and error, and Who cleanses.”

Judaism knows these verses as the “13 Attributes of Mercy” but the thing that grabbed my attention was the reference to “wilful sin.” I realized I had to go back and study the actual Hebrew words used here. This is what I found. There are three words used in this text that describe different types of sin, types of sin which YHWH says here that He does forgive. In this translation they have been translated “iniquity, wilful sin” and “error,” but the KJV renders them “iniquity, transgression” and “sin.” The three Hebrew words involved are: ‘avon, pasha’ and chatta’ah.

‘Avon: as defined by Strongs - “perversity, i.e. (moral) evil:--fault, iniquity, mischief, punishment (of iniquity), sin.”

Pasha’: Strongs - “a revolt (national, moral or religious):--rebellion, sin, transgression, trespass.”

Chatta'ah: Strongs - “an offence, and the penalty or sacrifice for it:--sin (offering).” This word comes from the root word chata', of which Strongs says “a prim. root; prop. to miss; hence (fig. and gen.) to sin; by infer. to forfeit, lack,

expiate, repent, (causat.) lead astray, condemn:--bear the blame, cleanse, commit [sin], by fault, harm he hath done, loss, miss, (make) offend (-er), offer for sin, purge, purify (self), make reconciliation, (cause, make) sin (-ful, -ness), trespass.”

Now I saw a picture of three grades of sin, the least being, chatta’ah - accidental sins, simple things that one could commit without being aware of it, and what we could call “non-capital crimes.” The next being ‘avon - sins which result from our human perversity, wilful violation of Torah, things which we cannot claim to have done in ignorance - murder, adultery, idolatry (sometimes), etc. And the worst being pasha’ - sins which involve direct rebellion against YHWH - breaking the first command, blasphemy, and such.

Now I quickly discovered that in all cases except one, animal offerings related to chatta’ah only! In the case of the other sins they are “capital offences” and the offender was supposed to be executed in one way or another. Actually there is a suggestion that their death atones for their crime in 4Mosh/Numbers 35:33 were it is talking about murderers, “for blood, it polluteth the land; and no expiation can be made for the land for the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it.”

And now I understood why following his sins in the case of Bathsheba, David wrote: “For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it (Ps.51:16).” There were no sacrifices prescribed for David’s sin in the Torah in this case it was as he says - “The sacrifices of Elohim are a broken spirit:” David makes regular use of all three words to describe his sins in this Psalm, read it.

But the really interesting part is that there is one animal offering which does cover all three types of sin, this is the goats of Yom Kippur! In relation to the first goat it says:

“Then shall he kill the goat of the sin-offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the veil, and do with his blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy-seat, and before the mercy-seat: and he shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleannesses of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions (pasha’), even all their sins: and so shall he do for the tent of meeting, that dwelleth with them in the midst of their uncleannesses.” 3Mosh/Lev. 16:15-16.

And in regard to the second goat it says:

“Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities (‘avon) of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions (pasha’), even all their sins (chatta’ah); and he shall put them

upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a man that is in readiness into the wilderness:" 3Mosh/Lev. 16:21

Of course it is Yom Kippur, the day of Atonement that is connected to the death of Yahushua in Hebrews 9&10. But before we look at Messiah, there is something else of particular interest I found. Yom Kippur has a particular national function, that is, those goats offered on that day atoned for the sins of the nation, rather than the individual alone. Now what I found is that it was because of Israel's national sins in the category of 'avon and pesha', perversity and rebellion, that they were exiled from the land! Let's take a look at a few verses.

Eze. 39:23&24 is probably the most direct - "And the nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity ('avon); because they trespassed against me, and I hid my face from them: so I gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they fell all of them by the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions (pesha') did I unto them; and I hid my face from them."

Isaiah 50:1 "Behold, for your iniquities were ye sold, and for your transgressions was your mother put away.

Amos 2:4-6 "Thus saith YHWH: For three transgressions of Judah, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have rejected the law of YHWH, and have not kept his statutes, and their lies have caused them to err, after which their fathers did walk: but I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem. Thus saith YHWH: For three transgressions of Israel, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have sold the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes--"

Getting depressed? Well here's the hope, back in 3Mosh/Levi. 26:40-42 we read:

"And they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, in their trespass which they trespassed against me, and also that, because they walked contrary unto me, I also walked contrary unto them, and brought them into the land of their enemies: if then their uncircumcised heart be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity; then will I remember my covenant with Jacob; and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land. "

This of course leads me, in a roundabout way, back to Isaiah 53, that great prophecy of YHWH's anointed servant! In Isaiah 53:5 we read "But he was

wounded for our transgressions (pesha'), he was bruised for our iniquities ('avon); the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." So yes, Sha'ul is right when he says regarding Yahushua: "And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." Rabbi Yahushua is the remedy for the sins of our wilfulness and rebellion.