



Teshuva – *Sins Blotted Out*

by Tim Kelley

With the coming of the New Moon, we have now entered into the Biblical month called Elul. For the past 12 or so years, this month has held a special place in my life in that it marks, at least for me, the beginning of the fall festival period – especially in regards to preparations for Sukkot. For most of the year, I generally coast in regards to the fall festival, but when there's only 45 days left till the festival, my wife and I kick into high gear and devote much of our time to festival preparations. But festival preparations are not all that changes with the coming of Elul. The weather usually turns a little cooler, work in our business normally begins to pick up, and my hay fever flairs, but most importantly – I've come to see that this month really does put me in the frame of mind that we are in the last days, and as such – we need to really get serious about our walk . . . that is, our walk with God.

At the beginning of His ministry, after fasting for 40 days and subsequently being tempted by haSatan, Yeshua began to travel throughout Galilee saying:

NKJ Matthew 4:17 . . . "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Note what He said. The kingdom of God is right around the corner, therefore REPENT.

John the Baptist made a similar statement to the throngs of Jews who had come to the Jordan river to be baptized by him. He said –

ESV Matthew 3:2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

In both of the above cases, the Greek word for "at hand" is the word *eggizo* (Strong's 1448) which means to bring near or to join together. For those of us who have studied the Torah for a number of years, and have noted that the purpose of the sacrifices in Leviticus were for the purpose of *drawing near to God*, this term *eggizo* might take on a little different meaning.

We know that Yeshua didn't restore or establish the Kingdom of God while on earth. His disciples asked Him about it after He was resurrected –

ESV Acts 1:6 "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

But we know that His answer was obviously – No, and we are still waiting nearly 2000 years later.

Never-the-less, Yeshua indicated that the Kingdom of God was near. Notice what Yeshua told His disciples when he sent them out two-by-two:

ESV Luke 10:1-11 After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. ² And he said to them, ". . . behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves . . .", ⁸"Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. ⁹ Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' ¹⁰ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ¹¹'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.'

So wait – Yeshua did not restore the Kingdom to Israel, yet the Kingdom of God is near - - and what's more, we should repent because it is near. What does all this mean. Maybe there's something we're missing.

It takes three things to have a kingdom. They are – a king, a people, and a land. Yeshua is obviously the King. It was one of the reasons He was born¹. Israel is the land. The Jewish people had occupied it for 400 years and they were living there in relative peace. All that's needed was the people. There again, the Jews are there . . . would that not satisfy the *people* requirement for a people? Maybe not, for even though the Jews were to some degree, walking in the ways of YHVH, there were apparent problems within the camp, you might say. And the biggest problem was that the people, to a large degree, did not have a heart for God . . . and what's more, not all the tribes were represented in Israel. You might say that the makings for the Kingdom of Israel were there, but not the Kingdom of God.

What was lacking was a heart of Teshuva. So for the remainder of my time, I want to talk about this concept of Teshuva and our part in *drawing near to God*.

WHAT IS TESHUVA?

Teshuva (תשובה Strong's 8666) is a Hebrew word for *return*. It comes from the root word *shuwb* (שׁוּב Strong's 7725) which again means to *return* or *turn back*. This is the word that's most commonly used in the Tanakh (the Old Testament) when it comes to a person repenting of sins. It's also commonly used in reference to restoration, as in restoring the relationship between God and man. A good example of the use of the word *shuwb* is found in the prophecy of Ezekiel –

ESV Ezekiel 18:21 "But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

Because Hebrew is an action-oriented language (every word is rooted in a verb), the Hebrew concept of repentance is more than just feeling sorry for what you've done. To the Hebrews, repentance meant restoring what you had taken or destroyed then setting your heart to follow the correct path the next time. Everything a person does is considered part of his *walk*, and the Hebrew walk was to follow a narrow and strait path that was defined by YHVH's torah (law or instructions). Thus, when a person got off the path, it was sin.

ESV Proverbs 4:14 Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil.

In order to *repent of the sin* the person would simply get back on the path. This understanding is illustrated in many of David's psalms; here's an example –

ESV Psalm 119:35 Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.

So, to *shuwb* – repent – simply means to *reverse course and get back on the path*. But this doesn't usually happen overnight. Teshuva is a process. It takes effort. We sometimes find ourselves well down the path to destruction before we realize how far we've strayed.

According to the rabbis, Teshuva consists of four steps –

1. Regret. Realize that you have indeed sinned, then coming to the understanding that your actions have brought harm to another's life, and being ashamed and embarrassed that you had done so.
2. Cessation of the sin. One cannot be sincere about turning his life if he remains in the sin.
3. Confession before God – an oral confession of the sin and it's impact on one's own life and the life of others. Confession must first be before God. If your sin is against your fellow man, confession is followed by restitution, which opens the path for forgiveness.
4. Acceptance for the Future – Accepting the just consequences for the sin and making a heartfelt commitment to not sin again.

As we are taking these steps, we find ourselves getting closer to the correct path – the way of God.

WHY THE PERIOD OF TESHUVA?

¹ John 18:37

The scriptures show that Moses again ascended Mount Sinai after the *sin of the golden calf*. His purpose for doing so was to seek God's forgiveness for Israel's sin. According to tradition, he ascended the mountain on the first day of the sixth month – the month of Elul – and stayed there 40 days and 40 nights. That would have brought him to the Day of Atonement, the day Israel's *corporate sins* are forgiven according to Leviticus 16.

In Jewish eschatology, the Day of Atonement is also the day a person's eternal fate is determined. On that date, a person's name would be found written in one of two heavenly books – the Book of Life or the Book of Death. Which book your name is found it would be determined in some degree by your acts of Teshuva in the previous 40 days. Thus, the month of Elul, and the days from Yom Teruah to Yom Kippor are quite important in regards to repentance.

The Bible mentions that John the Baptist preached the baptism of repentance. Though it cannot be clearly established, it's quite possible that it was the custom during the period of Teshuva to be immersed.

ESV Mark 1:4-5 John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Luke's account of the same event mentions John's remarks to the crowds that came to him –

ESV Luke 3:7 "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

The *wrath to come* may have been a reference to the Jeremiah 30 prophecy of the *birthpains of The Messiah* or what is referred to as the *tribulation* in the Christian world. If this is the case, then the Jewish people would have been immersing in the Jordan as a sign of being born again – a commitment to a new life, after which they spent the next 40 days re-orienting their lives to please YHVH in preparation of Yom Kippor and their names being written in the Book of Life. The Birthpains were understood to start on Yom Teruah and end on Yom Kippor, and those whose name was found written in the Book of Life on Yom Teruah would escape the most severe portion of the Birthpains of the Messiah.

PREPARING FOR THE RETURN OF THE MESSIAH

As believers, it is important that we take into account the importance of the upcoming *moedim* – the fall festival days which are a blueprint of God's plan of salvation for all mankind. Yom Teruah, the first of the fall festivals, pictures, among other things, the *catching away of the bride*. It is our hope to be a part of that bride, but can we be if we are defiled by sin? No, unless we have cleansed ourselves by Teshuva. Repentance is what opens the way for forgiveness.

ESV Isaiah 55:6-7 "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Teshuva provides a way for forgiveness. And after our sins are forgiven, the most wonderful thing happens – our sins are blotted out. They are gone, there is no more record of them, they've vanished away! It's sort of like a morning cloud that fades away as the morning progresses. It's here for a while and then it vanishes before our eyes. Notice -

ESV Isaiah 44:22 I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you.

God is able to make our sins vanish away, and He does it for His own sake.

ESV Isaiah 43:25 "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins."

But why? Why is it important to God that our sins are gone – vanished – out of sight and out of mind? It's real simple, and something we can only understand within the confines of marriage. YHWH is going

to marry a virgin, but Israel has played the harlot. How does this get reconciled? Because when our sins vanish, Israel in essence becomes a virgin again.

NKJ Jeremiah 31:4 . . . O virgin of Israel! You shall again be adorned with your tambourines, And shall go forth in the dances of those who rejoice.

ESV Jeremiah 31:20-21 ²⁰ Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, declares the LORD. ²¹ "Set up road markers for yourself; make yourself guideposts; consider well the highway, the road by which you went. Return, O virgin Israel, return to these your cities.

It is only in this state of virginity that we can draw close to YHVH as He had intended for us to be. Drawing close to Him, and helping others to do so, is the purpose for which Israel became a people, and the reason we have been called to this understanding. But YHVH is waiting for Israel to repent – to perform Teshuva. The fate of the world is dependent upon Israel turning back to the god of their fathers – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Peter fully understood that the return of the Messiah and the restoration of all things was waiting on this corporate and individual teshuva to take place. On Shavuot, just days after Yeshua was resurrected, he admonished the myriads of Jewish and non-Jewish believers to -

ESV Acts 3:19-21 Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

Each year we go through these festival cycles. They help us understand the plan of God for the salvation of the world. I hope we will all make Teshuva a part of that cycle so that we can all be a part of the greatest of all wedding suppers, the one that takes place during the fall festival of Sukkot – the Wedding Supper of the Lamb.

NKJ Revelation 19:7-9 "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." ⁸ And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. ⁹ Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!' " And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."

Shalom Aleichem