

Many years ago I was talking with a friend who was commenting about his friend (let's call the friend 'Jack') who was struggling with forgiveness? Apparently Jack's mate (let's call her 'Jill') had had an affair and Jack could not find it in his heart to forgive Jill. I ask my friend "Is Jill still involved in the adulterous relationship?" to which he responded "Yes" and I replied "that's the problem"!

Why is it some people have such a hard time with forgiveness while others do not? Could it be a cultural thing? Forgiveness is a very interesting subject which - based on your culture or religious background – may mean something to you while meaning something quite different to someone else. For instance, if your religious background is Christian, forgiveness is something you believe has been given freely to you via the sacrifice of Jesus (Yeshua) on the cross. Therefore, based on your interpretation of Yeshua's words, you believe you should extend forgiveness freely to those who have harmed you. On the other hand, if you were raised in an orthodox Jewish family, you probably look at forgiveness through the lens of the Torah – the five books of Moses – which show that there are laws pertaining to forgiveness. An atheist (atheism is a religion as well) would probably look at forgiveness as a token statement that he/she is willing to make so he can continue supporting the views of a person caught in some type of aberrant behavior simply because of who that person is.

How we look at forgiveness can play a large part in how we perceive God — is He simply full of forgiveness — willing to overlook the sins of His people? Or is He a god of Law — a god who expects His people to overcome their sins? Our view of forgiveness might also play a role in how God looks at us and our role in the Kingdom of God? After all, the Torah tells us to -

^{NKJ} **Leviticus 19:15** "... do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor"

Will we be willing to apply judgment righteously, or will we simply sweep sin under the rug so that we might preserve a relationship with one who continually commits the same sin?

Since many who embrace the Hebrew Roots¹ understanding of the Bible come from varying religious backgrounds, it is not surprising that we hold varying views on the topic of forgiveness — after all, we have all been influenced by the religious culture from which we came as well as what has become the all too common parade of politicians, athletes, and entertainers who publicly ask forgiveness for anything from deviant behavior to simply wearing the wrong costume at a Halloween party while in their teens.

Therefore, it is my purpose to determine why we sometimes have problems with forgiveness. In order to do this, we will rein in these widely varying views of forgiveness and simply see what the Bible says about it—and believe me, it says a lot! We will look at the many passages that deal with "forgiveness" in their context, which in some cases will require us to rebuild the foundation of those passages by referencing other articles I have written. This will be a long study, and will probably take three sessions to complete.

So in this message, I want to:

¹ What is Hebrew Roots? <https://www.amiyisrael.org/hebrewRoots.html>



- define Biblical forgives
- show to whom Biblical forgiveness applies
- address many of the passages in the Tnakh (the Old Testament) that deal with forgiveness

From this we will be able to build a foundation from which we can in future messages:

- see if Yeshua and His disciples diverge from the foundations set in the Tnakh
- see what the Bible says about those who will not repent, and ultimately -
- determine if we are even able to forgive another person

So let's get going!

Biblical Forgiveness

Let's start by defining "forgiveness", which by the way, is not an easy task. The following definition of forgiveness comes from "Greater Good Science Center" an online magazine published by Berkeley University. In their article titled "Forgiveness" it says -

"Psychologists generally define forgiveness as a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness."²

Sounds easy! Right? You just make the decision to forgive someone and "whallah!" the hurt is gone! — But is it? Did the pain of being violated when someone harms you just go away? Obviously not. Nevertheless, this is probably the majority view of what it means to forgive.

But is it Biblical? Does it follow God's view of forgiveness? Before we attempt to answer that, let us look at another definition. This one comes from the Jehovah's Witnesses website.

"Forgiveness is the act of pardoning an offender ... We forgive others when we let go of resentment and give up any claim to be compensated for the hurt or loss we have suffered."³

To me, this is a more Biblical definition than the former, but not by much. Note that just "letting go" is the center point of this definition, but if just "letting go" was that easy, we would not be having this discussion. Without getting deeply into this study, I think we can do better by considering a point that is common to both of the above definitions, and that is they both mention "hurt" or "loss". In a legal sense, when one suffers a loss by another's hand, the scales of justice are out of balance. In order for there to be justice, the scales have to be returned to a balanced state, and that oftentimes requires restitution. God gives an example of restitution very soon after giving the Hebrew people the Ten Commandments.



^{ESV} **Exodus 22:1** "If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep."

² <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/forgiveness/definition>

³ <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/what-is-forgiveness/>



By having the offender (the thief) pay back the value of what was taken — plus some, the scales of justice are brought back in balance – maybe even benefiting the one whose ox was stolen. Therefore, since the scales are now balanced, there should be no problems between the thief and the owner.



Unfortunately, God does not use the word “forgive” in this example, so let’s go to one where He does.

^{ESV} **Leviticus 6:2-7** “... If anyone sins and commits a breach of faith against the LORD by deceiving his neighbor in a matter of deposit or security, or through robbery, or if he has oppressed his neighbor ³ or has found something lost and lied about it, swearing falsely- in any of all the things that people do and

sin thereby- ⁴ if he has sinned and has realized his guilt and will restore what he took by robbery or what he got by oppression or the deposit that was committed to him or the lost thing that he found ⁵ or anything about which he has sworn falsely, he shall restore it in full and shall add a fifth to it, and give it to him to whom it belongs on the day he realizes his guilt. ⁶ And he shall bring to the priest as his compensation to the LORD a ram without blemish out of the flock, or its equivalent for a guilt offering. ⁷ And the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD, and he shall be forgiven for any of the things that one may do and thereby become guilty.”

In this example, the offender is charged with a “breach of faith” — he was entrusted with something and it came up missing. Though not as much as it would be for outright theft, he still had to pay restitution. You will notice in this example that forgiveness comes after not only making it right for the one who has suffered loss, but by also making it right with God (through the offering given to the priest).

Note that the steps to forgiveness include 1) realizing your guilt, 2) restoring what was taken, 3) paying restitution (on the day he realizes his guilt), and 4) giving an offering.

In this passage, the Hebrew word for “forgiven” is “salakh” (סָלַח – 5545) and it means to “forgive, to pardon”. Forgiveness is a pardon — a decree made by an authority that for all practical purposes “vaporizes” a sin. For a convicted felon who receives a pardon, it’s as if he had never committed the crime in the first place. The crime is removed from his record and he is to be treated as if it never happened. This is consistent with the word picture formed by the Hebrew letters “samech-lamed-chet” which paint a picture of “twisting out of the hook that divides” – sort of like a lamb who twists his head out of a shepherd’s staff so he can rejoin his brothers.⁴

In the Leviticus 6 example, as with the person who steals an ox, once the steps are taken, the person is to be forgiven. Once the offended person forgives, he should act as if it never happened — never bringing it up again — not to the offender or to anyone else. It’s the old adage “forgive and forget”.

⁴ See Strong’s 5541 - Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon; Francis Brown; Hendrickson Publishers; Peabody, MA; 14th printing in July 2012; pg.699a



Though a pardon removes the record of the crime, a pardon cannot remove the personal guilt associated with the crime. Therefore “pardon” is not the entire definition for “forgive”. Another aspect of forgiveness is what is found in God’s character. We find it in the account of Israel refusing to enter the Promised Land and Moses’ intercession for them. In that intercession Moses reminds God that –

^{ESV} **Numbers 14:18** 'The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression ...

Here, the word for “forgiving” is “nasa” (נָסָא – 5375) that means “to lift, bear up, carry, take”. That same word in the LXX is translated “removing”. King David used that word in his psalm of deliverance when he wrote –

^{ESV} **Psalm 25:18** Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins.

In that passage, “nasa” is used because David is asking God to remove his sins from off him. This is the context of Micah 7 where the prophet says –

Micah 7:18-19 Who is a God like you, **pardoning** (nasa) iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.¹⁹ He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

This passage speaks of the gathering of the exiles and how the nations will gasp at what they see – YHVH lifting Israel’s sins off their back, crushing them into powder under His feet and then casting them into the sea never to be found again. This is YHVH not only removing the penalty and the record of the sin; it is Him removing the memory of the sin as well.⁵

So another aspect of forgiveness is to remove the burden that is on the offender. When you look at forgiveness as the removal of monetary debt, then it is easy to understand how being forgiven does indeed remove a burden. A debt that is forgiven is debt that no longer exists.

So my definition of “forgive” is

“to make things right so as restore a relationship and remove the burden of guilt.”

You will notice that in my definition, it is the responsibility of the offender to initiate the process of forgiveness. We will see more examples of that as we continue.

To Whom Does Biblical Forgiveness Apply?

When Christians talk about forgiveness, they oftentimes talk about it in “New Testament” terms, as if forgiveness is a New Testament concept. But forgiveness predates the New Testament by thousands of years — it is a very Hebraic concept. It’s as Hebraic as is the term “marriage”. Just as God created marriage, He created forgiveness. And just as God legislates marriage, He also legislates forgiveness. But man has stepped in and made his own laws pertaining to marriage — totally destroying God’s intent. Such is the same for forgiveness, and that is why we have widely divergent views about forgiveness, just as we do about marriage – especially in regards to who a person can marry. Being that mankind has totally corrupted God’s desire for

⁵ See my article “Sin’s Blotted Out” - https://www.amiyisrael.org/articles/YomKippur_SinsBlottedOut/yom-kippur-sins-blotted-out.html



marriage, is it not possible – or even likely – that he has done the same for forgiveness? I believe the answer is an emphatic “yes”!

Therefore, it is important that we realize that “Biblical forgiveness” is established in the Torah, and illustrated in the prophets and the writings — which in my opinion includes the words of Yeshua and His disciples.

Since forgiveness is established and governed by God in the Torah⁶, then the full application of forgiveness can only happen if a person is willing to submit to God and His law. When one or both parties reject the laws pertaining to forgiveness, then you cannot have Biblically-based forgiveness.

“But” you might ask “Doesn’t the Bible speak of forgiveness of sin for the entire world?” Yes it does, but in their order.⁷ As we continue to study God’s word, we soon find out that God is only working with one people at this time, and those people are the Hebrews and those who attach themselves to the “Hebrew” tree⁸. God says it Himself –

^{ESV} **Amos 3:1-2** Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

In effect, YHVH is saying that He is only dealing with Israel in this age, but the scriptures show that through Israel, all the nations will eventually turn to Him. Paul confirms this in his letter to the Corinthians -

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 5:9 - 6:1** I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people- ¹⁰ not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler- not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? ¹³ God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

What Paul is saying is that God holds believers to a higher standard — a standard based on God’s law – the Torah. Considering that various passages in the New Testament define “the church” to be ancient Israel⁹, we should therefore assume that many of the statements made by Yeshua and His apostles in regards to forgiveness can only work if those involved are willing to submit to the Torah. As we get deeper into this study, it will be clear why that is the case, but for now it is important to see that hoping to be able to extend Biblical forgiveness to a non-believer will oftentimes end in frustration and hurt feelings.

While we are talking about hurt feelings, it is also important to realize that expecting a person - even a believer - to follow the biblically defined process for forgiveness for an offense other than

⁶ The five books of Moses – Genesis through Deuteronomy

⁷ See 1 Corinthians 15:22-23

⁸ Romans 11; see my article series “Who is Israel”

⁹ See my article “What is the Church?”



biblically defined sin, is outside the parameters of Biblical forgiveness. For instance, expecting the offender to follow the Biblical pattern because he or she hurt your feelings is probably never going to happen, though the Torah does provide a remedy for those situations.

Forgiveness Without Repentance?

This brings us to the third and final point for this portion of this study – can a person truly forgive if the offender has not repented? This is widely debated in Jewish circles, and for the most part, the conclusion is “no”. On what basis do they draw that conclusion? They base it on the understanding that the parameters for forgiveness are defined in the Torah, and the Torah clearly shows that forgiveness is dependent on repentance.

But we don’t need the rabbis to see this — the scriptures make it pretty clear all by themselves. Let’s take a look.

Attached to this article¹⁰ is a listing of all the scriptures where forgiveness type terms are found in the King James Bible. Next to each scripture, I’ve listed the Hebrew or Greek word from which the “forgive” word is derived. I’ve also included as a comment the context of each passage. In this first message of the series, we’re going to go through a number of those scriptures found in the Tnakh to see how the Hebrews in the time before the advent of The Messiah applied forgiveness. We’ll start in the beginning of the book and build from there. The first passage that uses the English term “forgive” or a derivative thereof is in the case of Joseph and his brothers after their father Jacob died.

^{ESV} **Genesis 50:17** 'Say to Joseph, Please **forgive** the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants."

What we see is that the brothers are concerned that Joseph might take vengeance on them for what they had done many years earlier, so they came to him asking for forgiveness. As restitution for their sin they offered to become his slaves. Joseph made it clear — just as he did years earlier — that what they had done had been turned by God into a good thing. Therefore, Joseph held no grudge against them. Nevertheless, the brother’s needed forgiveness because their conscience convicted them. Thus it is likely that Joseph formally forgave them.

Going through Leviticus 4, 5, and 6 we find God clearly stating what an offender must do to be forgiven, and what the offended must do once the offender has done it. In each case, repentance and restitution precede forgiveness—even in cases where the sin is against God alone.

Numbers 15 verses 24-28 show that even unintentional sins follow the same pathway to forgiveness. In the case of an individual who sins without knowing it, the scripture says –

^{ESV} **Numbers 15:27-28** "If one person sins unintentionally, he shall offer a female goat a year old for a sin offering. ²⁸ And the priest shall make atonement before the LORD for

¹⁰ Forgiveness Scriptures - https://www.amiyisrael.org/articles/Forgiveness-Can_You_Really/Forgiveness_Passages.pdf;



the person who makes a mistake, when he sins unintentionally, to make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven.

Note that the following passage shows that a person who sins openly with a “high hand” should be “cut off” — separated from the people. We will discuss that more later in this series.

Numbers 30 verses 2–15 appear to be cases where restitution is not possible because the sin is against one’s self. God takes vows seriously, but realizes that sometimes people make foolish or rash vows. Though he does not do so for a man, he allows the one who provides a covering for a woman (her father or her husband) to nullify those vows if done so in a certain time frame. Once that is done, the woman’s foolish vow is forgiven.

Joshua 24 is important because it shows that if Israel turns to idolatry, God will not forgive them (that is, unless they repent).

^{ESV} **Joshua 24:19-20** But Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. ²⁰ If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good."

To understand what Joshua is saying, one must remember that it is God’s desire that his people turn back to Him. This is clearly illustrated in Ezekiel’s prophecy –

Ezekiel 33:10-16 ¹⁰ "And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus have you said: 'Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?' ¹¹ Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? ¹² "And you, son of man, say to your people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him when he transgresses, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall by it when he turns from his wickedness, and the righteous shall not be able to live by his righteousness when he sins. ¹³ Though I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, yet if he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered, but in his injustice that he has done he shall die. ¹⁴ Again, though I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' yet if he turns from his sin and does what is just and right, ¹⁵ if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has taken by robbery, and walks in the statutes of life, not doing injustice, he shall surely live; he shall not die. ¹⁶ None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he shall surely live.

Joshua was simply stating the fact that even though you may have followed Him earlier in life, if you turn to idolatry, He will turn from you. Notice in Ezekiel’s prophecy that the path to return (repentance) includes turning away from sin, following the right path, and restoring what was taken. Once a person has done that, the “nasa” portion of repentance steps in and lifts your sins off you to be remembered no more. This concept goes along with King Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem.



1 Kings 8, along with 2 Chronicles 6, when taken in context, clearly show that repentance must precede forgiveness. The following passage pertains specifically to the Israelites when they are taken into captivity, but finally come to their senses –

1 Kings 8:46-50 ⁶ "If they sin against you- for there is no one who does not sin- and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near, ⁴⁷ yet if they turn their heart in the land to which they have been carried captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captors, saying, 'We have sinned and have acted perversely and wickedly,' ⁴⁸ if they repent with all their mind and with all their heart in the land of their enemies, who carried them captive, and pray to you toward their land, which you gave to their fathers, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name, ⁴⁹ then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause ⁵⁰ and forgive your people who have sinned against you, and all their transgressions that they have committed against you, and grant them compassion in the sight of those who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them

Scripture shows that this “return” to God will precede their return to the land, and that the return to the land began in small part during the 1st century AD. When we get to it, this will help us to understand Yeshua’s words in regards to forgiveness.

The Hebrew concept of repentance before forgiveness is nailed down in Solomon’s statement in 2 Chronicles 7:14.

^{KJV} **2 Chronicles 7:14** If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will **forgive** their sin, and will heal their land.

A person has to humble himself in prayer, seek God’s presence, and turn from his evil ways before God will hear and forgive. This is stated again in another psalm -

^{ESV} **Psalm 86:5** For you, O Lord, are good and **forgiving** abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.

We have seen scripture after scripture that show forgiveness to be predicated on repentance. Let’s now look at some that show that forgiveness is clearly denied if a person is unwilling to repent. We will start with Isaiah where the context shows that God’s people are worshipping idols.

^{ESV} **Isaiah 2:9** So man is humbled, and each one is brought low- do not **forgive** them!

Here’s one from Jeremiah –

^{ESV} **Jeremiah 18:23** Yet you, O LORD, know all their plotting to kill me. **Forgive not** their iniquity, nor blot out their sin from your sight. Let them be overthrown before you; deal with them in the time of your anger.

Jeremiah is asking God to **not forgive** those who are plotting against him. Not forgiving the unrepentant just might be what God requires of Himself. Notice this passage in Jeremiah where he prophesies the disaster God is going to bring on Judah if they don’t repent -



^{ESV} **Jeremiah 36:3** It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the disaster that I intend to do to them, so that everyone may turn from his evil way, and that I **may forgive** their iniquity and their sin."

Like others before it, this passage shows that repentance is a prerequisite for forgiveness. The word “may” in the “may forgive” phrase is derived from the Hebrew letter “vav” that precedes the word “salachti” (forgive your). That vav has a “sheva” (two dots one on top of the other) vowel

point. It looks like this – ׀. According to BDB¹¹, this sometimes signifies an action that is predicated by a previous action. This is confirmed in many translations¹² as well as Yeshua’s own words –

^{ESV} **Mark 11:25** and whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven **may** forgive you your trespasses."

Thus it appears that YHVH Himself is subject to His own law when it comes to forgiveness.

One final passage from Jeremiah is found in the “new covenant” passages of chapter 31. This passage shows the “nasa” aspect of forgiveness in that once a person is forgiven, even God will not be able to recall his or her sins.

^{ESV} **Jeremiah 31:34** And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will **forgive** their iniquity, and I will **remember their sin no more.**"

Finally, Daniel 9 shows that Judah (at least those in Babylon) had turned their hearts to God (as evidenced by their pleas) and are now asking for forgiveness.

^{ESV} **Daniel 9:18-19** O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. ¹⁹ O Lord, hear; O Lord, **forgive**. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name."

So we’ve seen numerous passages that illustrate the Torah principle of forgiveness only after repentance. I submit that there is not a single place in the Tnakh were God forgives His people before they repent. Instead of God forgiving the unrepentant sinner, He says this –

^{ESV} **Proverbs 28:13** Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

And for those who believe that the New Testament prescribes a policy of loving and forgiving everyone – even your enemies, King David – the only person in the Bible who is called “a man after God’s own heart”¹³ wrote this –

¹¹ Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon; Francis Brown; Hendrickson Publishers; Peabody, MA; 14th printing in July 2012; pg. 254b item #4

¹² King James Version, English Standard Version, New King James Version, Geneva Version, American Standard Version, Webster Version

¹³ 1 Sam. 13:14



^{ESV} **Psalm 139:21** Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? ²² I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies.

From what we've seen, the Old Testament lays down a very convincing case that forgiveness is predicated on repentance, and in many cases – restitution. With that foundation in place, we will move on to the New Testament “forgiveness” passages. But before we do, it is important to understand one more thing, and that is:

For I the LORD do not change;
therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

ESV Malachi 3:6

Therefore, what we see in the Tnakh should continue in the New Testament. We'll see!

Shalom Alecheim