

Luke 17 is set in the context of Yeshua's response to the Jewish leadership's criticism of Him for eating with "publicans and sinners"¹. His response included five parables – one after another², and then these words to His disciples –

^{NKJ} **Luke 17:1–5** Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe *to him* through whom they do come! ² "It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. ³ "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. ⁴ "And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him." ⁵ And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."

In the context of the event that had inspired the parables, the "little ones" being referenced in the above passage were the publicans and sinners who were apparently beginning to hear His words and were making life changes accordingly. Though the direct reference was to "publicans and sinners", it could include anyone who heard the words of the Messiah and began to walk the Hebrew walk.

Yeshua's concern was that the Jewish leaders were apparently comparing the "little one's" sinful lifestyle with their "righteousness" and offending them by belittling them. The term that Yeshua used for "offend" is "skandalon" (4625) which means to "set a trap". In other words, it is a way to snare you or cause you to stumble.

Yeshua made it clear to His disciples that they were to not treat the "little ones" that way. He said –

^{NKJ} **Luke 17:3** "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins *against you*, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

Though this seems to be saying that if a person sins against you personally and he later repents, you are to forgive him. A better understanding³ – as many recent translations show is –

^{ESV} **Luke 17:3** Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him,

In other words, if a person sins and – after his sin has been brought to his attention – he repents; you are to forgive him, and as we learned earlier, the Greek word translated "forgive" in this passage is "aphiemi" (363) which has as one of its meanings "to send away". In other words, the sin is gone, so you are to forget about it. Most people have no problem with this, especially if the "sinner" follows the biblically mandated process for repentance, which in many cases includes restitution. But that's not the end of the story!

¹ Luke 15:1-2

² Lost Sheep (Luke 15:3-7), Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10), Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-13, and Lazarus & Rich Man (Luke 16:19-31)

³ Many translations have a marginal reference indicating that the phrase "against you" was added later. The word "eis" (1519) is oftentimes translated "against", but the word can also mean "among". In fact it is translated "among" 39 times in 39 verses, whereas it is translate "against" only 26 times. In the context of the previous five parables which all deal with avoiding the skandalization of the "lost sheep", the word "among" seems to be more appropriate. If Yeshua really did mean "against", He would have used the word "kata" (2596) as He did in Matt. 5:11 & 23, Mark 11:25, Luke 9:40, John 18:29 and many other passages where harm is inflicted on another person.



You will notice that one of the key words in the above passage is the tiny word “if” — “if” he repents, you forgive. By using the term “if”, it is implied that if he does not repent, you may not be able to forgive. Why, because it is almost impossible to “aphiemi” – send away – a sin that continues to exist.

So what do you do when a person does not willingly repent? Is there a biblically based process for dealing with the unrepentant offender? What if the offender is “not in the walk? What can you do to rebuild a relationship that is broken because of someone’s offense.

In this final installment of our study on biblical forgiveness, we will attempt to answer those questions by:

- Taking another look at to whom biblical forgiveness applies
- Examining three types of offenders
 - The Repentant Offender
 - The Questionable Offender
 - The Unrepentant Offender
- See what scripture says about Forgiveness and the Goyim

Biblical Forgiveness – To Whom Does It Apply?

Let’s start by again looking at to whom biblical forgiveness applies. Because we are discussing what I call “biblical” forgiveness, we must assume that both the offended and the offender subscribe to the jurisdiction of the Bible. That would include both the Old and New Testament — the Old Testament because forgiveness is defined in the Torah, and the New Testament because it shows us Yeshua’s application of the Torah instructions pertaining to forgiveness. But there is more.

God uses very specific terms when it comes to forgiveness, and to whom it can be extended. We find this in a passage we’ve used before.

^{ESV} **Leviticus 6:2-3** "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 ...

This passage goes on to show what the oppressor must do to obtain forgiveness, but what we want to take from it is that the laws of forgiveness apply to the offended person and his “amiyth” – his “neighbor”. According to Strong’s, an “amiyth” (אִמִּיִּתְּךָ - 5997) is an associate – someone you are in contact with quite often. It could be a co-worker, someone you do business with, or even your next door neighbor. The point is that it is more than a casual acquaintance, it is someone you trust, and like was shown above, it is someone who is on the same Torah-based path. This stands to reason because most of us would not entrust our valuable assets to someone we do not know.

When you consider that a very small percentage of mankind fits this description, then it becomes obvious that the likelihood of being able to practice “biblical” forgiveness is somewhat slim when dealing with someone outside the Torah community.

So let’s assume someone within the Torah community has inflicted harm on us and wants to make it right, i.e. – he wishes to be forgiven. What does the Torah prescribe for the “repentant offender”?

The Repentant Offender

Though we have discussed a number of places in the Torah that defines biblical forgiveness, one example that is very clear is found in the book of Numbers –

^{ESV} **Numbers 5:6-8** ⁶ "... When a man or woman commits any of the sins that people commit by breaking faith with the LORD, and that person realizes his guilt, ⁷ he shall confess his sin that he has committed. And he shall make full restitution for his wrong, adding a fifth to it and giving it to



him to whom he did the wrong. ⁸ But if the man has no next of kin to whom restitution may be made for the wrong, the restitution for wrong shall go to the LORD for the priest, in addition to the ram of atonement with which atonement is made for him.

Though this passage does not mention forgiveness, it is quite obvious that forgiveness is the expected outcome, thus this passage can be used as a model for a person who has inflicted harm on another and is seeking forgiveness. Let's look at it verse by verse.

⁶ When a man or woman commits any of the sins that people commit by breaking faith with the LORD, and that person realizes his guilt ...

The first thing we see is that to fit the process of forgiveness, the offense must fit the description of a "sin"; and what is sin? According to the apostle John -

^{KJV} **1 John 3:4** ... sin is the transgression of the law.

Since the "law" is the Torah, a sin must be something that is defined by the Torah to be such. Therefore, we cannot expect a person to repent of something that is not a sin according to the Torah. On the other hand, if a person has sinned, he must –

^{7a} ... confess his sin that he has committed ...

A verbal admission that you did indeed harm your brother goes a long way toward mending a relationship, and in fact will oftentimes bring a problem to a close – especially if the harm inflicted was the result of a minor accident or oversight. But let's say it was an accident due to negligence, such as an automobile accident caused by a drunk⁴ driver. In that case, restitution must be part of the forgiveness –

^{7b} And he shall make full restitution for his wrong, adding a fifth to it and giving it to him to whom he did the wrong ...

When restitution is required – which is most often the case – the offender must pay back 120% of the value of the harm inflicted. The extra 20% would help offset any costs incurred by the offended to remedy the harm inflicted on him. In addition, the 20% additional restitution would serve as a deterrent to keep the offender from committing the same sin again. In Hebrew parlance, this is "eye for eye; tooth for tooth".

What if the offended person dies before the offender realizes what he had done had harmed another person? Does he still have to go through the process of repentance and restitution? According to the Torah, he does –

⁸ But if the man has no next of kin to whom restitution may be made for the wrong, the restitution for wrong shall go to the LORD for the priest, in addition to the ram of atonement with which atonement is made for him.

Why pay restitution after the offended person dies? There are a number of reasons including the possibility that the person died as a result of his injuries and has left behind a wife and children, but the primary reason is that ultimate forgiveness comes from God. Whenever you bring harm on another, there are actually two relationships that need to be restored – the relationship between the offender and the offended and the relationship between the offender and God.

When it comes to forgiveness, the above example is the best-case scenario. The person realizes he has caused harm to another person and then wants to make it right. But what if you are harmed by another person and he never initiates the repentance process? Does the Torah speak of that? Yes it does, but before we get to that, let's think about what typically happens when we've been hurt by another and an apology never comes. What is our typical reaction?

⁴ The Torah does not clearly define drunkenness as a sin, but it is implied in Deut. 21:18-21



The Questionable Offender

When an apology is slow – or maybe never comes, the typical person will begin to talk to his or her friends about what happened, and before long a rumor has spread about the person and his name has been tarnished. With that in mind, let's take a look at what the Torah has to say when an offender fails to make things right –

^{NIV} **Leviticus 19:16-18** "Do not go about spreading slander among your people. "Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the LORD. ¹⁷ "Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt. ¹⁸ "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

What we see is that we are to avoid slandering our brother with rumors, but are to go to him and talk about the problem. According to the Torah, this is the definition of “loving your neighbor as yourself”. Instead of spreading rumors about him and his misdeeds, we are to go to him privately and point out what he has done. In this passage, the Hebrew word for “rebuke” is “yakach” (יָכַח - 3198) which means to “prove, judge, correct, etc”. This word is used quite often in the book of proverbs –

^{ESV} **Proverbs 3:12** for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

^{ESV} **Proverbs 9:8** Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you.

^{ESV} **Proverbs 24:24-25** ²⁴ Whoever says to the wicked, "You are in the right," will be cursed by peoples, abhorred by nations, ²⁵ but those who rebuke the wicked will have delight, and a good blessing will come upon them.

Instead of slander, you are to gently and carefully go to your brother and let him know what you are thinking. By doing so, you may actually win him over to seeing what you see, or you may find that your own perception of what had happened was wrong. Maybe what he did to you was done because he thought you wanted him too — a big misunderstanding. Maybe he took something by mistake. Maybe he did nothing at all – you just imagined it. The point is, do not speak ill of him – instead, go to him.

Yeshua speaks of this in His “Sermon on the Mount” -

^{ESV} **Matthew 5:21-22** "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother⁵ will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

In other words, Yeshua is saying that you can murder someone's reputation with your words, therefore, if you have a problem with your brother, go to him and get it worked out before a rumor is spread that might come back on you in the form of a libel suit.

Putting the shoe on the other foot, Yeshua went on to say that if you feel that you may have harmed someone, go to that person and get it worked out as well.

Matthew 5:23-25 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison.

⁵ The phrase “without cause” is not found in the earliest manuscripts and may have been added. In either case, it does not significantly change the intent of Yeshua's words.



By confessing his infraction and voluntarily making it right by offering restitution, an offender can avoid going to court where a judge may impose a stiffer penalty than what the offended may expect. Today we call that “settling our of court”.

With the above instructions, Yeshua reinforced to His disciples the Torah-prescribed responsibility each party has in the repentance – forgiveness process — the responsibility of the offended to go to his brother (Lev. 19:16-18), and the responsibility of the offender to confess his infraction (Lev. 6:2-7).

So far, we’ve seen that the Torah prescribes what is to be done when a person realizes he has caused you harm and he wishes to make it right. We’ve also seen what you are to do if you believe your brother has harmed you, but he has failed to confess his sin. But what instructions does the Torah provide for the person who simply will not repent?

The Unrepentant Offender

Whereas the Torah provides a number of examples of what a person must do to make it right with his brother, it gives no instructions for those who refuse to repent. Before delving too deep into why that is the case, let us consider why a person may be unrepentant. Maybe the alleged offender has refused to repent because he truly believes he did nothing to cause offense. If this is the case, he may have to go to court in order to clear his name — a possible outcome in Yeshua’s Matthew 5:25 example above.

So refusing to repent does not necessarily mean you are guilty, but let’s say the offender is guilty and he knows it, yet he refuses to confess his infraction to his neighbor and make it right. Though the Torah does not directly address that situation, Yeshua discussed a similar question but in a different context.

In Matthew chapter 18, the writer gives an account of Yeshua illustrating the attitude toward others that a person would have if he were to be considered “greatest” in the Kingdom of God⁶. A careful study of the text shows that the “little ones” referenced by Him were more than likely new converts to the Hebrew way and quite possibly part of the “lost sheep” of the house of Israel, i.e. – the northern tribes. When one comes to understand the animus the 1st century Jewish leadership had for the returning northern tribes, it is easy to see why Yeshua oftentimes addressed it with His disciples.

In a nutshell, Yeshua was showing His disciples that when a newly converted “little one” – comes into the fellowship and makes a mistake in regards to the Torah walk, the seasoned believers – instead of offending them by talking about them – should take that person under their wing and gently show him the error in hisway. This is how He said to do it –

^{ESV} **Matthew 18:15-18** "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

As footnoted in the previous study, the word “against” in verse 15 should have been translated “among” thus showing that the problem being dealt with is against the community – not an individual. Yeshua said that it should first be addressed one-to-one by a person who had witnessed the infraction, and if a successful conclusion is not found, one or two other “witnesses” to the infraction should be brought in to the conversation. If – and only if – a resolution is still not found, it should go before the leadership of the community, i.e. – the “church”. If again there is no resolution, the individual should be considered to be “gentile” – a person who is not interested in following the ways of God. On the other hand, if a resolution is found, i.e.– the person repents – he is to be forgiven. As Yeshua went on to say, whatever the

⁶ This was partially discussed in the previous installment in this series



outcome, YHVH approves and “binds” it. This is what led Peter to ask “how often are we to forgive a person?.”

Matthew 18 could possibly be considered a pathway to forgiveness for a personal offense, but only if Yeshua’s conditions are met – specifically that there are at least two, and preferably three witnesses to the infraction. If that is not the case, the offended person has no recourse but to take the offender to court, but again – without multiple witnesses, it is unlikely the offended party would receive a favorable verdict.

At that point, the offended may have to take a deep breath, let God deal with it, and let it go. “Letting it be”, “leaving it behind”, and “letting it go” are in fact, the more common understanding of the Greek word “aphiemi” (Strong’s 863) than is the concept of “forgiveness”. Of the 174 times “aphiemi” is used in the King James Version of the Bible, only 45 times is it translated “forgive” or a derivative thereof. The more common meaning is in the sense of “leaving”, “leaving it alone”, “to permit or allow”, and “leaving behind”.

“Letting it go” does not mean the guilty offender is “off the hook”. When you consider that biblical forgiveness implies that the offender has committed a sin, then that unrepentant person will eventually stand before God who said –

^{ESV} **Exodus 32:33** ... "Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot (*his name*) out of my book.

Forgiveness and the Goy

Though our discussion so far has dealt with those who subscribe to the authority of the God of Israel and His written instructions, we must also consider what to do when an offense is inflicted on us by a person who does not subscribe to that authority. In the Old Testament, that person is called a “goy” (גוֹי – 1471) which means “nation”. The Greek term is “gentile” (1672).

Because the goy is unwilling to submit to God’s written instructions, we cannot assume he would submit to God’s instructions pertaining to repentance and forgiveness. Never-the-less, God’s principles are universal and a believer can attempt to apply them with the hope that by virtue of the kindness you extend, the goy may actually repent so that you can actually forgive him — but don’t hold your breath.

This, I believe – is what Yeshua meant as he continued to teach His disciples in His Sermon on the Mount –

^{ESV} **Matthew 5:38-45** "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'
³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. ⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

As mentioned earlier, “eye for an eye” simply means to pay restitution for harm you have inflicted on others, which in the Torah community is what should be expected. Many believe that in saying this, Yeshua did-away with the restitution portion of the repentance process, thus enabling His followers to extend forgiveness to those who have not repented. The problem with that idea is that if Yeshua did away with that Torah instruction, He would have Himself broken the Torah and disqualified Himself from being our Messiah. God was very emphatic about keeping the Torah intact as is shown by Moses’ two references to leaving it alone -



^{TNK} **Deuteronomy 4:2** You shall not add anything to what I command you or take anything away from it, but keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I enjoin upon you.

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 12:32** "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.

Instead of modifying the Torah by re-defining forgiveness, Yeshua was teaching His disciples how they can successfully perform their mission in the non-Torah-observant nations they would soon be sent to. In the nations, they would not have the Torah protections they enjoyed among their Hebrew brothers. Instead, they would be facing Greek and Roman soldiers who – at best – simply tolerated them, or the mostly unrepentant barbarian “Ephraimites” – the “lost sheep” from the “detestable” northern tribes who were 700 years removed from the just ways of their former God. In effect, the disciples would be entering a “war zone”, so they would have to have “broad shoulders”.

Those of us who are walking the Hebrew walk and teaching it to others are in a war zone ourselves. Though we would hope that all people would observe the Sabbath so we would not face Sabbath and festival issues, that is simply not the case. Though we wish that our families and neighbors would understand and extend grace in regards to our “clean foods only” diet, they many times don’t. And though we want that those who do us harm to make it right so that we can forgive them, in many cases they won’t. So, like the disciples, we have to pick our hurt feelings up off the floor – and move on.

To recap what we’ve seen in this four-part study –

- just as God created and defined marriage and many other relational institutions, He also defined forgiveness and how to accomplish it
- repentance and restitution must always precede forgiveness
- the pattern for forgiveness is the same before, during, and after Yeshua’s lifetime which indicates He did not change it.

At the start of this series, I gave the example of “Jack” who was struggling with himself because he could not find it in his heart to forgive his mate “Jill” who had committed adultery and was continuing to do so. Unfortunately, many today find themselves in a similar situation because they’ve been conditioned to think they has to forgive the unrepentant offender. No we know why they struggle — they are trying to do something that even God cannot do – forgive the un-repentant sinner.

But can we forgive someone who does repent? Absolutely! In fact, we are commanded to forgive one who truly repents – not just with words, but also with his actions. That, in fact, is how we are forgiven for our sins – our offenses against God. We repent by acknowledging our sins; confessing them to the one we’ve offended (the God of Israel), and we correct our deviations from His path We pay restitution by asking God to accept our Messiah’s blood as payment for our sins, and He forgives us — seventy times seven, if that’s what it takes.

That’s the process He established at the beginning, and it is still the same today.

Shalom Alecheim.