

As we continue our study of 'righteousness', let's recap what we've seen so far. In part one, we found that in the Tnakh (Old Testament) righteousness could be defined as -

- The belief that YHVH will do as He said He would do.
- The willingness to maintain a given code of conduct, be it in our community or in God's Kingdom, i.e. – the Torah
- The 'strait' path that leads to God's Kingdom
- Doing good deeds – helping those who ask for help
- Justification - searching for a way to restore our righteousness

Let's now focus on the last point in that Study – Justification, because in this study we're going to focus on -

- How to restore righteousness – which implies Justification
- What Yeshua had to say about righteousness
- What the Apostles – specifically Paul – had to say about it righteousness

I think that Paul's writings about Righteousness and Justification are very important because they help us to understand the divide between the Jews and non-Jews of his day, but also help us to understand what will be the roadblocks to reconciliation between modern-day Jews and Christians as the Christians began to turn to the Hebrew walk of Messiah Yeshua and the Fathers.

Let's start with 'restoring righteousness –

Though we have seen that righteous is walking the strait path of YHVH, we all have a problem, and that is – we sometimes get off the path, and when we do, we find that we have 'missed the mark' and are headed over a cliff, which is the definition of sin. Because we have all sinned, David said –

NKJ Psa 143:1-2 ... O LORD, Give ear to my supplications! In Your faithfulness answer me, *And* in Your righteousness. ² Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, For in Your sight no one living is **righteous**.



A few years later, Solomon said the same thing –

ESV Ecc 7:20 Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins..

So what do we do? What can we do to remove our infractions and again appear 'righteous' before YHVH? How can we restore righteousness so that we can appear before YHVH as blameless?

David was a man after God's own heart, and in many ways, he gained that honor by depending on God to get him out of some bad situations. One of those bad situations was when he committed adultery with the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and then murdered Uriah in order to cover his sin. David knew he was in trouble, but it took the prophet Nathan to really make it sink in. After David basically pronounced his own death sentence, he went to YHVH in prayer saying –

NKJ **Psa 51:1-4** ... Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. ³ For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. ⁴ Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done *this* evil in Your sight-- That You may be found just (*tsadaq*) when You speak, And blameless when You judge.

In David's mind, his repentance and YHVH's forgiveness was an act of righteousness on YHVH's part. When YHVH forgives our sins, it is His righteousness that is being displayed – not our own. The prophet Isaiah has much to say in this regard. Speaking of Israel, he said –

NKJ **Isa 43:25-26** "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins. ²⁶ Put Me in remembrance; Let us contend together; State your case, that you may be acquitted (made righteous).

The context of this passage is that Israel and Judah would soon be taken into captivity, but in captivity, they would remember YHVH and turn back to Him, i.e. - repent. YHVH said He would bring them back and would then judge them, but they would be found guiltless – not because they were without sin, but because they had been found to be 'righteous'. How? Let's continue ...

Going on to chapter 44 we see that even while she is in captivity, she will not be forgotten by YHVH and that He will redeem them. Verse 22 says –

NKJ **Isa 44:22** I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, And like a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you."

To redeem implies paying a ransom¹, and chapter 53 shows how.

NKJ **Isa 53:10-12** Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put *Him* to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see *His* seed, He shall prolong *His* days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. ¹¹ He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify (*make righteous*) many, For He shall bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Messiah Yeshua is the ransom that was paid to redeem Israel, and once that ransom was paid, YHVH began to call Israel back, just as he said he would do in chapter 44:22. Because He did so, the exiles can now be considered righteous.

NKJ **Isa 45:23-25** I have sworn by Myself; The word has gone out of My mouth *in* righteousness (*'tsedaqah'*), And shall not return, That to Me every knee shall bow, Every tongue shall take an oath. ²⁴ He shall say, `Surely **in the LORD I have righteousness** and strength. To Him *men* shall come, And all shall be ashamed Who are incensed against Him. ²⁵ In the LORD all the descendants of Israel shall be **justified** (*'tsadaq' – made righteous*) and shall glory."

So righteousness comes from YHVH. Man's righteousness is nothing. In fact - God calls it 'filthy rags' –

NKJ **Isa 64:5-6** ... You are indeed angry, for we have sinned-- In these ways we continue; And we need to be saved. ⁶ But we are all like an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousness's

¹ The Hebrew word translated 'redeem' is ga'al - גָּאֵל - **01350** which in many cases implies 'buying back' from slavery one of your relatives.

(*ESV* *righteous acts*) are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.

So the Tnakh is very clear. Righteousness comes from God via the death and resurrection of His son – Messiah Yeshua. Though we attempt to live a sinless life, we still – from time to time – make mistakes and are subject to death. Only by applying Yeshua's righteousness are we able to stand blameless before YHVH.

Let's now take a look at what Yeshua had to say about righteousness. To begin, let's define a few words. The first place the word 'righteous' is found in the 'Testimony' (New Testament) is in Matthew's account of the words of Yeshua when He was found by the Pharisees to be eating with 'publicans and sinners'. When asked why He would do that, He answered –

NKJ Mat 9:12-13 ... "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³

"But go and learn what *this* means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.

While the sinners were in a state of repentance, the Pharisees offered sacrifices while at the same time violating the Torah; practicing lawlessness (Matt. 23:27-28). The 'mercy and not sacrifice' reference was taken from Hosea 6:6 – it is a statement that YHVH would rather forgive due to repentance than from sacrifices. The full passage reads -

NKJ Hos 6:6 ⁶ For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

This was a **remez**. The passage is about YHVH inviting Ephraim to return to YHVH. The prophet talks about healing the divide between Ephraim and YHVH. It also speaks of both Israel's and Judah's faithfulness being like a fog that fades away. The passage ends with

NKJ Hos 6:11 Also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed for you, When I return the captives of My people.

Going back to Matthew 9:12-13, the Greek word translated 'righteous' is 'dikaious' ({dik'-ah-yos} – Strong's 1342) which basically means 'one who follows the law'. 'Dikaious' comes from the Greek word 'dike' {dee'-kay} – Strong's 1349 which means 'a judicial hearing or verdict'.

Thus a 'righteous' person is one who has been judged to be in tune with the law. Because Yeshua was contrasting a righteous person to a sinner, we can see that a 'righteous' person is one who would be considered in a court of law to be 'blameless'. Does that mean that a 'righteous person' - a person who is not a 'sinner' - has lived a perfect life? No. He's just a person whose sins have been covered. A good example is that of the parents of John the Baptist –

NKJ Luk 1:5-6 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ And they were both righteous (*dikaious*) before God, *walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless*.

So righteousness in the New Testament is the same as in the Tnakh. It is obedience to God's commandments. It's a person who is striving to walk the Torah walk, but who from time to time, misses the mark, but repents. That person is considered 'blameless'. Another word that needs a clear definition is the word 'justified'. We see the first occurrence of that in Luke.

NKJ Luk 18:10-14 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men-- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. ¹² 'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' ¹³ "And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so

much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'
¹⁴ "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

In this example, the Pharisee believed that because of his strict Torah observance, he was a righteous person. On the other hand, the tax collector admitted that he missed the mark from time to time, and therefore repented – believing he was not worthy to even ask for mercy. According to Yeshua, the tax collector was more justified than the Pharisee.

So, what does 'justified' mean? In this passage, the word 'justified' is from the Greek word 'dikaioo' ({dik-ah-yo-o} - Strong's 1344), which comes from the same Greek word as does the word 'righteous', and thus implies a courtroom situation where a person is being accused of a lawless deed, but is found not guilty due to lack of evidence.

Why is there no evidence? Because, as we mentioned before, YHWH has blotted out the sin because of the sacrifice of Yeshua. Paul explains that in Colossians 2:13-15, we'll look at later in another teaching, but for now, Yeshua's reference to the tax collector's justification is the same as what was promised in Isaiah 43 that we referenced earlier.

The apostles – especially Paul – had much to say about righteousness. Righteousness, specifically the pursuit of righteousness, became a big part to the apostles' message. Their message focused around the regathering of the exiles, and 'unrighteousness' is what caused both Israel and Judah to be taken captive in the first place.

Most students of the New Testament do not understand the background of the peoples the apostles had to deal with, and thus misunderstand their intent. So here's a little history.

After the Maccabean revolt, and to counter the assimilation of the Jews into the Greek culture, the Jews developed "fences" around God's law so as to avoid Judah as a people from declining into a state of unrighteousness again. They believed that by maintaining their 'fences' they could attain righteousness by perfectly keeping the law, something that is commonly referred to as 'works righteousness.'

After the death and resurrection of Yeshua, Israel (the Ten 'Lost' Tribes) who had been taken captive and exiled from their land some 700 years earlier, began to be drawn back to the Hebrew walk that was taught by Moses. Not knowing what had suddenly caused their 'awakening', these so called 'gentiles' began to repent of their lawless ways. They began to seek a way by which they could join back in to the 'commonwealth' – 'the people of Israel.'

The first example of this is when peoples from all lands showed up to keep the Festival of Shavuot (Pentecost) in 30-31 AD. At that event, Peter told his audience that the sacrifice of Messiah Yeshua is what caused many of them to make the trip from Asia Minor to Jerusalem to observe this festival. It was just as was foretold by the prophets 100's of years earlier.

Paul also saw what was happening as the tribes returned, and after his Damascus Road experience, began to proclaim the message that the Messiah had come - that the prophesied gathering of the exiles had begun, and that the reunification of Israel and Judah was now possible.

But there was a problem. For the previous 1000 years, the northern tribes had been in opposition to YHWH and were steeped in idolatry. Judah on the other hand, had maintained a distant relationship with YHWH, mostly through their oral traditions.

How could these two opposites join back together? Paul began to show them God's plan.

One of the first recorded examples of Paul attempting to reveal YHWH's plan of restoration is found in Acts 13. To set the stage, Paul and Barnabus had come to Antioch, where they were invited to speak in a

synagogue. Paul then stood up and began to convey his message giving a brief history of the Hebrew people up through the time of King David. Speaking of David, Paul said -

NKJ **Act 13:23-31** "From this man's seed, according to **the promise**, God raised up for Israel a Savior-- Jesus ... ²⁶ "Men *and* brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent. ²⁷ "For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled *them* in condemning *Him*. ... ³⁰ "But God raised Him from the dead. ³¹ "He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people ...

Paul was showing those in the synagogue that the prophesied Messiah had come, had died according to the words of the prophets, and had been resurrected back to life. What's more, there were many eyewitnesses of that happening.

Continuing on, Paul began to explain the ramifications of that event –

NKJ **Act 13:32-41** "And we declare to you glad tidings -- that promise which was made to the fathers, ³³ "God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. ... ³⁸ "Therefore, let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; ³⁹ "and by Him **everyone who believes is justified** from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses ...

The 'promise which was made to the fathers' was that Israel and Judah will again be united and thus the Kingdom of God could be restored. Paul was showing that this unification became possible because of the death and resurrection of the Messiah – which provided justification (being made righteous) to those who believe.

Believe what? Believe the prophecies that showed it would happen (see sidebar). But what things could not be justified by the law of Moses? It would have to be the Torah commandments that could not be forgiven through repentance and restitution. They would basically be things that could not be forgiven by repentance and restitution - things that often incurred the death penalty. Things like murder, kidnapping, adultery, certain sexual sins, Sabbath breaking, idolatry, and a number of other sins. These types of sins are what caused Israel to be taken captive by the Assyrians, and Judah to be taken captive by the Babylonians – both of which caused a scattering of God's people just as it was prophesied ².

Because these were considered to be 'intentional' sins, there was no sacrifice for them. The only way to atone for them would be through the sacrifice of Yeshua.

Paul's letter to the Galatians has a lot to say about righteousness as well.

In his day, Galatia was an 'area' in Asia Minor. It was in close proximity to some of the areas mentioned in Acts 2:9-11 as well as in 1 Peter 1. According to 1 Peter 2:9-10, these people were collectively a part of the 'chosen people' – Israel (vs. 2) – and specifically part of 'Ephraim' – the norther tribes of Israel that were exiled from the land and subsequently scattered to the nations ³.

Paul had apparently spent some time in Galatia on one of his earlier journeys, and had apparently taught them that they were being drawn back to YHVH according to the promise. He taught that they can find reconciliation to the God of Israel and to the commonwealth of Israel through repentance and calling on the sacrifice of Yeshua to cover their sins and the sins of their fathers.

² Lev. 26; Deut 28

³ Compare 1 Peter 1:1 and 2:9 with Exodus 19 and Hosea Chapters 1 & 2. You will find that they are speaking of the same people - the Hebrews. These same people show up in Acts 2.

But some of the believing Pharisees had also visited the Galatian people teaching that believing in Yeshua and following the Torah was not enough. They taught that if a person was to become 'righteous', that person also had to convert to Judaism – which in the Jewish mind meant following the Torah - as well as the oral traditions which included ritual circumcision.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul mentioned a problem that arose in the synagogue in Antioch when Peter paid a visit and would not eat with the non-Jews in the congregation. In his confrontation with Peter about this separation from the non-Jews, Paul said –

NKJ **Gal 2:15-16** ¹⁵ "We *who are* Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, ¹⁶ "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

Paul was reminding Peter that 'we' believe that righteous comes by belief and faithfulness ⁴ to Yeshua – period. Torah observance does not bring justification because you cannot do enough 'works' to make up for the death penalty that comes from breaking the law.

Paul goes on to say –

NKJ **Gal 2:21** ... if righteousness *comes* through the law, then Christ died in vain.

So that's pretty clear. It's not Torah observance that makes one righteous. Instead, it is faith that Yeshua removes the sin and its penalty from off our back and places it on Himself. Of course, since failure to keep the Torah causes one to lose righteousness, then Torah observance is required to maintain righteousness.

Paul adds more about the concept of 'righteousness' in his letter to the Romans. In the 2nd chapter, Paul criticized the Jews in the congregation who were judging the non-Jews (the Ephraimites) in regards to their Torah observance. Apparently, while the Jews were judging the non-Jews (who were relatively new to the Torah), they themselves were guilty of the same sins ⁵ ! So, Paul wrote to the Jews in the congregation –

NKJ **Rom 2:12-13** For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law, ¹³ for not the hearers of the law *are* just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified ...

When you add that to what Paul told Peter in Antioch, we see that faith alone will not justify you if you refuse to observe the Torah. On the other hand, those who have no knowledge of the Torah (as did the returning exiles) – can be justified (*found to be righteous*) by faith that Yeshua can and will remove the penalty of centuries of lawlessness, but - they must begin to follow the law.

We can understand that today by simply looking at the civil laws we face every day. If a person is pulled over by a policeman because one of his tail lights is not working, the officer will oftentimes issue a pardon. But if the next day, the same officer pulls that person over because that same tail light is not working, the officer will probably write him a ticket.

Paul has much more to say about faith, works, and their relationship to righteousness - as does James and Peter, but I think the examples given help us to see that we cannot appear righteous and blameless before YHVH unless we repent and plead with YHVH to remove our sins and place them on the back of Yeshua. It is His perfect walk that allows Him to bear the consequences of our sins, and without Him, we cannot claim righteousness and are thus doomed for destruction.

⁴ 'belief' and 'faith' come from the same Greek word – 'peitho' (3982) - persuade

⁵ Romans 2:1

So, what is righteousness?

It is Yeshua living in us - letting Him control our lives. And if we mess up – repenting and asking Him to cover our sins. That is the only way we can appear blameless before the Judgement Seat of God.

Shalom Aleichem!