

Life or Death

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Parashah Acharei Mot & K'doshim

Torah: Vayikra (Lev.) 16:1-20:27

Haftarah: Amos 9:7-15

The life of a creature is in the blood (Vayikra 17:11)

Life is in the blood, so the shedding of blood causes death. There are times when the shedding of blood is necessary, such as for punishment for sin or atonement for sin, however, God is a God of life, not death.

I get no pleasure from the blood of bulls, lambs, and goats! (Yesha'yahu 1:11)

God's people are also to be a people who sow seeds of life, not death. The shedding of human blood is usually the harvest of seeds of destruction which have already been planted. What are these seeds? I will get to that in a minute, first some background. Isra'el is getting ready to go into the Promised Land and expel the wicked inhabitants who live there. These wicked nations are going to be punished for their sins against God, thus the justification for the shedding of their blood. What about the surrounding nations who are going to witness all this? How are they going to react to the God of Isra'el, and these people from Egypt taking this land by force? How is Isra'el going to live peacefully in the land once God brings them in?

When I was in basic training, I was yelled at from time to time. It was after basic that I learned why. I was in a flight of around 50 other guys. If I was doing something wrong, chances are others were wrong in the same way. By yelling at me, the instructor was able to correct me, and others were able to learn from my mistake so the instructor would not have to correct them as well. God did the same thing with the wicked nations in Kena'an. By destroying them, as Isra'el moved in, the nations surrounding Isra'el would see God's power and not only leave Isra'el alone, but perhaps change their ways as well.

In punishing the pagan nations for their sin, by shedding their blood, this put a responsibility on Isra'el to be different. If they lived by the same sins, and treated their neighbors as badly or worse than the people who lived there previously, then the blood that was shed would be in vain and God would be dishonored. This would lead to more bloodshed. This brings us to the seeds of destruction I was talking about.

...you are not to engage in the activities found in the land of Kena'an, where I am bringing you; nor are you to live by their laws. (Vayikra 18:3)

- Do not steal from, defraud, or lie to each other. (Vayikra 19:11)

- Do not oppress or rob your neighbor; (Vayikra 19:13)

- Do not be unjust in judging (Vayikra 19:15)

- Do not go around spreading slander among your people, but also don't stand idly by when your neighbor's life is at stake; (Vayikra 19:16)

- Don't take vengeance on or bear a grudge against any of your people; rather, love your

neighbor as yourself; (Vayikra 19:18)

- If a foreigner stays with you in your land, do not do him wrong. (Vayikra 19:33)

- Don't be dishonest when measuring length, weight, or capacity. (Vayikra 19:35)

These are just some examples of behaviors and activities in Kena'an which plant seeds of destruction in the land, and can lead to bloodshed. These activities may not always lead to bloodshed, but you don't want to leave oily rags in your garage because they could cause a fire. Neither do you want to plant these seeds of destruction in your life, because even if they don't lead to bloodshed, they certainly won't lead to life and prosperity either. Unless a person is truly derailed and psychopathic, nobody will shed the blood of another for no reason at all. When people are cheated, lied to, stolen from, slandered, judged wrongly, or otherwise treated with disrespect, this is when anger and bitterness build within a person. This can eventually lead to bloodshed if not met with forgiveness. It was God's desire, as His people entered the Promised Land that they would have peace in the land, both inside and outside their borders. To accomplish this, He gave them laws which were designed, not only to make them holy before God, but to sow seeds of life and prosperity in the land. What were these seeds?

- None of you is to approach anyone who is a close relative in order to have sexual relations; (Vayikra 18:6) – This promoted unity within the tribes without producing large family clans which could have conflict with other family clans.

- You are not to let any of your children be sacrificed to Molekh, (Vayikra 18:21)

- ...show respect for the old, (Vayikra 19:32) – Life is valuable to God, whether young or old.

- Every one of you is to revere his father and mother, (Vayikra 19:3) – God's people are to respect authority.

- ...don't harvest all the way to the corners of your field...leave them for the poor and the foreigner; (Vayikra 19:9-10) – God's people are to help the poor, as well as the widow, orphaned, and handicapped.

- These along with the positive expressions of the seeds of destruction which would include honesty, truth, love, and justice all plant seeds of life and prosperity which help to gain respect before God and man, even from the ungodly.

In the same way as the seeds of destruction will not always lead to bloodshed, the seeds of life will not always lead to peace and prosperity. Such things come from the hand of God, but regardless of the results, sowing seeds of destruction is not in God's plan for His people.

We are advertisements for God in this world. As ungodly people are speeding down the road that leads to destruction, they see us as billboards on that highway. They may see us for only a brief moment. What do they see? Do they see people who, despite conflict and difficult circumstances, are able to maintain peace, love, and joy amongst ourselves and

with them, or do they see the same hopelessness, discontent, bitterness, and disrespect they are used to?

*The Word, which gives life!
He existed from the beginning.
We have heard him, we have seen him with our eyes,
we have contemplated him, we have touched him with our hands!
The Life appeared, and we have seen it.
We are testifying to it and announcing it to you -
eternal life!
He was with the Father, and he appeared to us.
What we have seen and heard, we are proclaiming to you;
so that you too may have fellowship with us.
Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Yeshua the Messiah.
(1 Yochanan 1:1-3)*

There has been much bloodshed throughout human history. Some has been from the righteous for their righteousness at the hands of wicked people. Some has been from the wicked as punishment from God for their wickedness. Some has been from those animals whose substitutionary atonement brought sinners closer to God. Then there was the blood of God's own Son, whose blood freed all men from their bondage to sin. Life is in the blood, and if we do not sow the seeds of life that brings us closer to the Life, then all that blood was shed in vain. Their blood is on our hands.

*When you spread out your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you; no matter how much you pray,
I won't be listening;
because your hands are covered with blood.
Wash yourselves clean!
Get your evil deeds out of my sight!
Stop doing evil, learn to do good!
Seek justice, relieve the oppressed, defend orphans, plead for the widow.
"Come now," says YHVH, "let's talk this over together.
Even if your sins are like scarlet, they will be white as snow;
even if they are red as crimson, they will be like wool.
If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good of the land;
but if you refuse and rebel, you will be eaten by the sword";
for the mouth of YHVH has spoken.
(Yesha'yahu 1:15-20)*