

## Parashah One Hundred and Eleven

Numbers 15:1–41; Isaiah 56:1–8; Galatians 3:24–29

notes by Tim Hegg

### *Community Solidarity within the Covenant of HaShem*

Our *parashah* is laid out in a very systematic way: the first section (vv 1-10) deals with a reiteration of the sacrifices, anticipating the entrance into the Land and the freedom Israel would have to live a life of worship to HaShem. The second section (vv. 11-16) deals with the relationship of the foreigner (non-Jew) within the community in terms of this life of worship. The third section (vv. 17-21) contains the command of separation of *challah* as a *terumah* (elevation offering) to HaShem, an on-going act of worship in the life of each family. The fourth section (vv. 22-31) delineates unintentional from intentional transgressions, both corporately and individually, and the manner in which restitution may be made, or the penalty of *karat* (being “cut off”) is applied. The fifth section (vv. 32-36) gives a specific illustration by way of narrative of an intentional sin by an individual which resulted in his being “cut off” through capital punishment. The sixth and final section (vv. 37-41) gives the *mitzvah* of *tzitzit*, a gracious and loving gift of the Father to Israel so that they would guard against transgressing God’s commands, whether unintentional or intentional.

#### *Section One: The Sacrifices (1-10)*

The opening section deals with the various sacrifices that would define the life of praise and worship of the covenant nation. These sacrifices were the *עֹלָה*, *olah* (whole burnt offering), the *זֶבַח*, *zevach* (communal sacrifice; festival offerings, also called *שְׁלָמִים*, *sh’lamim*, “peace offerings”), the *מִנְחָה*, *minchah* (grain offering, which often accompanied the other offerings), and the *נֹסֵחַ*, *nesech* (the libation or drink offering). All of these are connected with the primary altar of sacrifice, being defined as *אִשֶּׁה*, *isheh*, “fire” offerings. They can be communal or individual, and thus the use of *נִדְרָה*, *neder*, “vow” and sometimes designated “votive offering,” meaning that one vows to set apart a given animal or grain for the offering, and thus the offering consists both of the vow itself and the completion of the vow by actually offering the sacrifice.

These offerings are listed together here because they describe in broad strokes the life of the covenant people. They describe the basic perspective that (1) all things come from the hand of the Almighty, and therefore our sacrifices acknowledge that He is the giver and sustainer of our lives; (2) our lives are lived unto Him, and thus those events in our lives which bring us joy and gladness are reminders to give Him thanksgiving; (3) He is good and gracious, and thus He deserves our on-going praise, regardless of current circumstances; and (4) since we are His people, and He is our King, we strive to follow His commandments and live in a way that honors Him. Thus, “when you enter the Land” is an over-arching phrase which characterizes the life of His covenant people as He intends—nurtured and protected by Him in the Land where His Presence resides. Thus the sacrifices are a “soothing aroma” (*רֵיחַ נְחֹאֵחַ*, *reiach nichoach*) to Adonai. Not only are the covenant people satisfied and content when living in close fellowship with HaShem, but in some mysterious way, this arrangement also gladdens the heart of the Almighty!

These basic principles are derived from the combined elements of the sacrifice. The innocent, clean animal whose life is taken, must always remind us of the fact that our adoption into the cov-

enant people of God is based upon payment of a price, the requirement of our redemption. God is the One who desires to dwell in the midst of His people, yet He cannot diminish His holiness to do this. As such, He provides the atonement through means of a substitute. In all of the sacrifices, this stands out as a primary reality. Secondly, the fact that in some of the sacrifices there is participation by consuming the meat or grain (whether by all or by the priests as the representatives of the people) indicates the on-going viability of the covenant. God and man “sit at table” together and enjoy the fellowship for which man was created. Thirdly, the addition of the libation or “drink” offering (always of wine) is symbolic of the joy that this arrangement affords. While man, affected by his rebellion against God carried in his own fallen nature, may think that joy and happiness comes from his own endeavors and abilities, in reality, true and lasting joy comes from his fellowship with the Almighty. This truth is borne out continually in the metaphor of the sacrifice, and stood as a lesson for Israel, if they would receive it. Genuine happiness, whether communally or individually, is found in the covenant relationship with the Creator.

*Section Two: The Foreigner (11-16)*

Such a relationship of covenant fellowship opens the question of how one enters the covenant. The second section of our *parashah* deals with this question by way of clear instructions that require full unity of all covenant members. There is no distinction among covenant members, for the same commandments of the sacrifice apply equally to all “native born” (אֶזְרָח, *ezrach*). To emphasize the unity of the covenant people, a *kal v'chomer* scenario is established by specifically mentioning “the foreigner” (גֵּר, *ger*, further defined as “one who sojourns,” גּוֹר, *gur* with the people of Israel). If the same rules apply to the *ger*, then surely they apply to all native born without distinction.

The text is very clear regarding the non-native born who has attached himself to Israel: “just as you do so he shall do” (בְּאֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשׂוּ יַעֲשֶׂה) (בְּאֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשׂוּ יַעֲשֶׂה). Some might conclude that this only has to do with the giving of sacrifices, that is, that in the realm of the sacrifices the non-Jew must follow the same rules as the Jew, but that in other areas of Torah obedience, the non-Jew is not required to follow the Torah in the same manner as the native born. However, our text clearly teaches that all of the commandments are the privilege and responsibility of all covenant members. Verses 15-16 make this explicit, and the following context even more so:

15 ‘As for the assembly (הַקְהָל), there shall be one statute for you and for the *ger* who sojourns with you, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the *ger* be before Adonai. 16 ‘There is to be one law and one ordinance for you and for the *ger* who sojourns with you.’”

The addition of “as you are, so shall the *ger* be before Adonai” (כְּכֶם כִּגְר, *kachem kager*) is very clear. What does it mean to be “before Adonai?” This is sacrificial language, for the sacrifice is offered “before Adonai,” and “before Adonai” is the characteristic phrase to define the locus of the priests’ activity: they minister (or serve, עָבַד, *avad*) “before Adonai.” Now this takes into consideration far more than the restricted laws of sacrifice (i.e., the animal or grain brought, the manner in which the sacrifice is offered, the various quantities of grain and wine that are added, etc.). It also must include the whole range of laws relating to ceremonial purity which render the worshipper fit to bring the sacrifice in the first place. “As you are, so is the *ger*” is a comprehensive description of life lived out “before Adonai.” The *ger* who attaches himself to the covenant people must abide

by all of the covenant stipulations if he is to participate in the high-point of the covenant, that is, the offering of sacrifices. Moreover, the offering of sacrifices also deals with one's own heart and soul before Adonai. We discover in Isaiah's words that bringing a sacrifice while engaged in a life of idolatry is an abomination to HaShem. Thus all covenant members were required to love Adonai with all one's heart, the expression of which was the bringing of the sacrifices. The individual expression of allegiance to God, and praise for His covenant friendship, is thus directly expressed in the next section of our *parashah*.

### *Section Three: Separation of Challah (17-21)*

The separation of *challah* (a small, round loaf of bread, cp. the Mishnah Order *Chalah*) is next mentioned as the fitting expression of the covenant members to their Master who has sustained their lives through His kindness. "You shall lift up a *termuah* (elevation offering) to Adonai when you eat of the *lechem* of the Land." Like the previous sacrifices, this *termuah* is an offering to Adonai, and must therefore include the native born as well as the *ger*. This is a "first fruits" offering—an acknowledgement that all that comes forth from the Land is a gift from God. It is fitting, then, that He should receive the praise before the food is eaten in order that He should be given His rightful place as Giver and Sustainer.

The modern tradition of separating a "pinch" of *challah* reflects our willingness to remember this vital truth. It is a "memorial" portion, a physical act that reminds us of this eternal truth. That this is to be done "throughout your generations" would indicate that it is proper whether in the Land or not. And we should note that there is no indication that this "offering" was done at the altar. While the context may imply this, it is not explicitly stated in the text. We may consider the very real possibility that the stipulations for this "offering" were given in such a way as to make this an "offering" available wherever one baked the bread and ate it.

Once again, the "rituals" of life (for eating is the most common reality of our lives), given to the covenant people by their King, afford them the constant reminder of their covenant relationship with the Almighty.

### *Section Four: Unintentional and Intentional Sin (22-31)*

The designation "unintentional" with regard to sin has been variously understood. The Sages give two suggestions: either the people or person is unaware of the laws governing a particular situation, or they are unaware that they were breaking a law, even though they know the law existed. It is easy to offer an example of the first suggestion: e.g., perhaps a person simply did not know the amount of oil to add to a given offering, and thus added none or insufficient amount. The second suggestion, that a person was aware of the law but not aware that he was breaking it, could be illustrated by someone who ate the prohibited fat (חֵלֶב, *cheilev*, which was the fat surrounding certain organs of the animal) thinking that it was ordinary fat (שׁוֹמֵן, *shuman*) which is permitted (cf. m.*Hodayot* 2:1-2; m.*Kritot* 4:1f).

However, as we noted earlier in our reading of Leviticus, the "unintentional sins" listed there clearly include those that involve some form of premeditation (such as stealing). How should we understand the designation "unintentional?" The word itself is formed on the verb שָׁגַג, *shagag*, the related form being שְׁגָגָה, *shegagah*. Its basic meaning is "to error" or "to go astray," and can

designate simple “unacceptable behavior.” It can even be used of hasty words (Qoh 5:5). It appears to be a word that is very general, describing any sinful behavior. But we may understand its use here by noting the contrasting term used to designate “defiance.” The Hebrew for this is **בְּיַד רָמָה**, *b’yad ramah*, “with a high hand.” In the first case, the sin is designated as an “error,” “a wrong doing.” But in the second, the element of full, open rebellion is the issue. “With a high hand” means without any remorse or repentance, or with a continuation in the transgression without any evidence of a willingness to turn from the sin and cease from doing it. Thus, the contrast is between a person or a group (for the text indicates both a corporate and individual application) who comes to realize their sin and turns from it, seeking restitution with God and those sinned against, and those who knowingly sin *and persist in that sin*. While there is a way of reconciliation for the former, there is no forgiveness for the latter. Hardened rebellion against God draws the punishment of *karat*, being cut off from the covenant people.

Once again, these laws of restitution through sacrifice on the one hand, and the laws of *karat* on the other, equally apply to native born and *ger*. The text is explicit:

29 ‘You shall have one law for him who does anything unintentionally, for him who is native among the sons of Israel and for the *ger* who sojourns among them. 30 ‘But the person who does anything defiantly, whether he is native or a *ger*, that one is blaspheming Adonai; and that person shall be cut off from among his people.

It will be helpful for us to note the words that are used to describe the one “with a high hand,” that is, with defiance against Adonai. First, the defiance is seen by the fact that this one persists in disobeying the commandments of HaShem. Note v. 31:

31 ‘Because he has despised the word of Adonai and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt will be on him.’”

In despising the “word of Adonai,” he has directly raised his fist in the face of God. The Hebrew word “despise” is **בָּזָה**, *bazah*, which can also mean “to plunder.” The idea here might well be that the person has “plundered” the word of God in the sense of not willingly submitting to it, but rather viewing it as “conquered” by his own desires and actions. He has divested the word of God of its true meaning, and twisted it to support his own willful sin. This is called “blasphemy” against the Almighty.

Note the context of the sin of the “high hand.” The text is clear: he has “broken His commandment.” The willing persistence to disobey God is the essence of rebellion, and there is no forgiveness for rebellion apart from repentance of it. The only way to receive the forgiveness that God so graciously affords is to surrender to Him. All who continue in their “high hand” against the Almighty will ultimately feel the sting of His justice.

It seems clear that our text (and others which parallel it) formed the basis for the severe discipline of excommunication in the Apostolic *halachah*. Rebellion against the commands and ways of God proved a person to be outside of the covenant, and therefore without right to remain within the community of the covenant people. Of course, unless there is a recognition of the value and necessity of a covenant community, the threat of being “cut off” from it presents very little (if any) motivation for turning from one’s sin.

### *Fifth Section: Example of a High Handed Person (32-36)*

The fifth section of our *parashah* narrates the well-known story of a man who went out to collect sticks on the Sabbath. Often used by opponents of the Sabbath to demonstrate the lack of compassion exhibited in “the Law,” this story is no doubt given to illustrate the stipulations just described. Here we have, apparently, an example of the “sin of a high hand.” Since it follows immediately upon the instructions of what should be done to someone who acts defiantly against HaShem, it seems fully warranted to interpret it in this light.

We should therefore presume that the activity of this man as described here in our text, was not a one-time incident, but was only illustrative of this man’s defiance against the Almighty. Given clear instructions regarding the Sabbath, the man decided to act in rebellion against God for whatever reason. Either he considered the word of God to be less than true, or he had decided that the word of God was not something to which he needed to submit. One could well imagine that his picking up of sticks was for building a fire, perhaps for cooking. But these are additional thoughts. Clearly, by whatever means, he transgressed the Sabbath laws, and in so doing, demonstrated his rebellion against the Almighty. Furthermore, the narrative is completely silent as to his response when caught committing the transgression. There is no hint of remorse or repentance. As a root of bitterness (the breeding ground of rebellion) within the community, he posed the danger of attracting others to his rebellion. As such, the penalty of *karat* was administered, not merely by the leaders of the people, but by the whole congregation in general. The root of bitterness, if allowed to remain, “defiles many” (Hebrews 12:15, cf. Deut 29:18).

### *Sixth Section: Tzitzit (37-41)*

The final section of our *parashah* gives the mitzvah of *tzitzit* (צִיצִית). Once again, if studied within the context of the *parashah*, the giving of the *tzitzit* at this point must be linked with the general flow of the narrative. If the life of the covenant people is one of willing, constant submission to HaShem and His ways, then the giving of a reminder of His commandments is a kind and benevolent gesture on the part of our Father. He knows that when we walk in His ways, it will be well with us, and the joy and happiness which He designed for us to share will, in fact, be ours (cf Gen 18:19).

The exact manner in which the *tzitzit* are to be worn, and how they are to be tied, or even what they look like, is not described in the text. Apparently the people were familiar with them, so that the simple commandment was sufficient for carrying out the will of HaShem. Deuteronomy 22:12 describes them as גְּדִלִים, *g’dilim*, usually translated “tassels,” though the word appears to be related to גָּדוֹל, *gadol*, “great” or “big.” In the Deuteronomy text, it clearly says that the tassels are to be worn “on the four corners of your garment,” a statement that informed the rabbinic *halachah* of *tzitzit*.

Our *parashah* describes a “thread of blue” (תְּכֵלֶת, *t’cheilet*) which is to be part of the tassel on each corner, and the text indicates that “it” would constitute *tzitzit*: וְהָיָה לְכֶם לְצִיצִית, *v’hayah l’chem l’tzitzit*. The fact that the verb is masculine singular might well indicate that the thread of blue is what ultimately constitutes the *tzitzit*. This thread of blue is therefore vital if the *mitzvah* is to function as God intends. For the thread of blue may very likely symbolize Yeshua, the Royal

Priest (*t'cheilet* was used in the garments of the priest and in the Tabernacle/Temple), who not only explains the manner in which HaShem intends the commandments to be lived out, but also empowers His people to keep the commandments through the Ruach who dwells within. The *tzitzit*, then, are the original symbol of “what would Yeshua do!”

Here, as often, the *parashah* we have studied points us to Yeshua, the “goal of the Torah” (Romans 10:4). Our study has reminded us that the goal of all of the commands of God is that He might dwell among His people—that He might have close friendship with the people He has created as His chosen treasure. May we strive all the more to know and appreciate His presence among us.