



*Salvation and
Sacrifice in the
Torah*

Salvation and Sacrifice in the Torah

The Parting of the Gods

Paul and the Redefinition of Judaism

David A. Brondos



Comunidad Teológica de México
Ciudad de México

Theological Community of Mexico
Mexico City

2021

This selection from Chapter 2 of *The Parting of the Gods* explores the idea that God had given his people Israel the Torah as an instrument of blessing out of love for them, since in and of itself obedience to its commandments promoted justice and the well-being of all. The sacrificial worship of Israel's God prescribed in the Torah was to serve the same purpose by helping to bring about and reinforce in the people the way of life that enabled them and others to experience that well-being.

THE BLESSINGS OF THE TORAH

Whether God's blessing of Israel was an end in itself or a means toward eventually blessing other nations in the same way, God's first priority had to be that of doing whatever was necessary to make Israel's blessing a reality. In principle, it might be maintained that God could simply shower freely upon his people Israel all the blessings that he desired for them and in that way accomplish his purposes. In reality, however, such was not the case. The people might take the blessings that God had graciously bestowed on them and use what they had received in ways that undermined and destroyed their happiness, well-being, and prosperity. The result of those blessings would then be suffering and injustice for many of God's people, including especially the less privileged and the disadvantaged, and if any part of the people suffered injustice and oppression at the hands of their fellow Israelites, the people as a whole would be adversely affected. That injustice and oppression would make it impossible for them to experience collectively the blessing God desired for all equally. If God's purpose was also to bless the other nations together with Israel, Israel's misuse of the blessings received from God would ultimately affect those nations negatively as well, since Israel's blessing was a pre-condition to theirs.

In order to enable his people Israel to attain the blessings he sought for them, therefore, it was necessary for God to provide them with guidance and instruction, leading them in the path that was best for them and acting to bring them back into that path whenever they departed from it. In both the Hebrew Scriptures and Second Temple Jewish literature, the means by which God sought to accomplish that objective was the Torah.

Shalom, Justice, and the Torah

In all human societies, legal codes are generally regarded as having the purpose of promoting justice, equity, and the well-being of all. Such was clearly the purpose of the precepts of the written Torah or law of Moses. The justice that it prescribes requires not only that the members of God's people refrain from doing things that are harmful to one another but also that they love and care for one another. Numerous commandments insist on the need to care especially for those in greatest need, such as the widows and the orphans, and to defend the rights of the poor, the foreigners, and the underprivileged.⁸ All Israelites were to show respect for their parents, the

8. See Exod 22:21-27; 23:9; Lev 19:13-14, 32-34; 23:6, 9; Deut 1:16-17; 15:4; 24:6-7, 10, 12-15, 17; 27:19. On this emphasis in the Hebrew Scriptures, see Christofer Frey, "The Impact of the Biblical Idea of Justice on Present Discussions of Social

elderly, and those with disabilities such as the blind and deaf.⁹ The Torah sought to preserve the integrity of marriage and maintain healthy relationships within each family.¹⁰ Young girls and women were not to be abused or exploited sexually.¹¹ Workers and servants were to be treated fairly and humanely, and laborers were to be paid their wages on a daily basis.¹² Fields and orchards were not to be harvested completely in order to make sure that those who might go hungry could find something to eat.¹³ Judgments were to be just and equitable, and measures were to be taken to ensure that those judgments did not favor the rich and powerful.¹⁴ For this reason, judges were prohibited from receiving any type of gifts from those under their jurisdiction.¹⁵ The Torah mandated that scales and balances be accurate and prohibited any type of dishonesty or deception.¹⁶ All were to practice generosity and to be willing to loan to those in need, taking special care to make sure that those burdened down by debt did not go cold at night or become destitute.¹⁷ The people were expressly told that they must not oppress or hate anyone, seek revenge, or bear grudges.¹⁸ Instead, they were to love not only their family members, friends, and neighbors, but even those who hated them.¹⁹

The laws prescribing the cancellation of debts, the liberation of slaves, and the return of property to its previous owners every seven years also had the purpose of promoting equity and avoiding poverty among the people.²⁰ Such measures were designed to prevent the accumulation of wealth and power by some and the gradual impoverishment of others.²¹ By mandating periodic rest for all people, animals, and even the land, the Torah sought not only to promote the physical well-being of all but also to enable them

Justice,” in *Justice and Righteousness: Biblical Themes and Their Influence*, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman, JSOTSup 137 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), 91-104.

9. See Exod 20:12; 21:15, 17; Lev 19:3, 32; 20:9; Deut 5:16; 27:16, 18.

10. See Exod 20:14, 17; Lev 18:6-20; 20:10-21; Deut 5:18, 21; 22:13-30; 23:17; 27:20, 22-23.

11. See Exod 21:22; 22:16-17; Lev 19:29-30.

12. See Deut 24:15.

13. See Exod 23:10-11; Lev 19:9-10; Deut 24:19-22.

14. See Exod 21:23-25; 23:1-3, 6-7; Lev 19:15, 35; Deut 16:18-20; 25:1; 27:19.

15. See Exod 23:8; Deut 16:19; 27:25.

16. See Lev 19:11-12, 35-36; Deut 25:13-16.

17. See Lev 25:35-37; Deut 15:7-11; 24:10-13.

18. See Lev 19:13-18; 23:4-5; Deut 23:7; 24:14.

19. See Exod 23:4-5.

20. See Lev 25:1-55; Deut 15:1-16.

21. See Yairah Amit, “The Jubilee Law—An Attempt at Instituting Social Justice,” in *Justice and Righteousness: Biblical Themes and Their Influence*, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman, JSOTSup 137 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), 47-59 (50-53, 59).

to have the time necessary to enjoy life.²² Commandments regarding food, sanitation, and the treatment of illnesses and diseases also contributed to their overall health and well-being.²³ Numerous passages even command that the people be joyful.²⁴

Throughout the passages from the Mosaic law that prescribe things such as these, the focus is primarily on *distributive* justice, that is, forms of justice aimed at ensuring that the needs of all within the society are met and that resources are distributed as evenly as possible. While *retributive* justice is also necessary, retribution is not regarded as an end in itself but is instead to contribute in some way to *distributive* justice.²⁵ Punishments for violations of the law were to serve the good of all by correcting injustices, restoring equity, preventing some from oppressing others, deterring harmful behavior, and putting a stop to such behavior before it might extend further. The purpose of the talion law, “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” was to ensure that punishments for wrongdoing were just and fair rather than excessive or overly lenient.²⁶ Other forms of justice, such as restorative justice, also had distributive justice as their goal.

In a number of passages from the Hebrew Scriptures, the result of the observance of the commandments of the Torah is said to be shalom. While this word generally is translated as “peace,” in reality shalom is a much broader concept. According to Old Testament scholar George Knight, “The verbal root from which it derives conveys the conception of being whole or being complete or sound; consequently the transitive form of the verb [*shalam*] means to make whole, to restore, to complete.”²⁷ As Knight points out, in Hebrew thought shalom involves a total well-being in body, mind, and spirit, as well as abundance, prosperity, material security, contentment, harmony, fullness of life, and relations with others that are peaceful, constructive, and satisfying.²⁸ In many contexts, its closest Greek equivalent is not *eirēne*, generally translated “peace,” but rather *sotēria*, which is also derived from the word for “whole” (*sōs*). This meaning of *sotēria* and its cognate verb *sōzō* is reflected in the words often ascribed to Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels,

22. See Exod 20:8-11; 23:12; 31:12-17; 35:2-3; Deut 5:12-15; 20:5-7.

23. See Lev 11:1-15:33; Num 5:1-4; 19:11-22; Deut 14:3-21; 24:8.

24. See Deut 12:7, 12, 18; 14:26; 16:11, 14-15; 26:11; 27:7.

25. On the centrality of distributive justice in biblical thought, see Christopher D. Marshall, *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 45-53; Jeremiah Unterman, *Justice for All: How the Jewish Bible Revolutionized Ethics*, JPSEJS (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2017), 15-84.

26. See Hans Jochen Boecker, *Law and the Administration of Justice in the Old Testament and Ancient East*, trans. Jeremy Moiser (London: SPCK, 1980), 173-75.

27. George A. F. Knight, *A Christian Theology of the Old Testament* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1959), 250.

28. Knight, *Christian Theology*, 250, 253.

where he tells those whom he has healed: “Your faith has saved you” or “made you well” (*hē pistis sou sesōken se*).²⁹ Both shalom and *sotēria* can therefore be translated as “wholeness,” “completeness,” or “well-being,” and can be applied to individuals as well as communities and groups of people.³⁰ Justice was said to exist when all without exception enjoyed this shalom to the extent that this was possible, and such justice was the goal of the Torah: “There will be justice among us if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he commanded us” (Deut 6:25).

Precisely because God had given the Torah to promote among his people the well-being of all, it was generally considered the most precious gift and blessing ever bestowed upon human beings. The Psalmists rejoice over the goodness of the Torah and express their delight in its precepts.³¹ When both God and his commandments are said to be “righteous” or “just,” this is not because they are designed to ensure that wrongdoing will be punished but rather because they promote shalom for all. In other words, the justice that they promote is primarily *distributive* rather than *retributive*. For this reason, in the Hebrew Scriptures justice is often regarded as synonymous with grace, mercy, and kindness, and to judge is generally to *save*.³² Such would not be the case if judgment and justice were understood primarily in terms of retribution.

There can be no doubt that most Jews in antiquity viewed the Torah in these terms. Philo of Alexandria and Flavius Josephus, for example, repeatedly express their admiration for the law and speak of its goodness, excellence, and beauty.³³ Both stress that it is far superior to any other law found among human beings and affirm that people of other nations marvel at its greatness.³⁴ They claim that the Mosaic law promotes kindness, gentleness, and compassion for all and brings harmony, happiness, and

29. See Matt 9:22; Mark 5:34; 10:52; Luke 7:50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42.

30. See Claus Westermann, “Peace (Shalom) in the Old Testament,” in *The Meaning of Peace: Biblical Studies*, ed. Perry B. Yoder and William M. Smartley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 16–48 (19–21).

31. See especially Ps 1:2; 19:7–10; 112:1; 119:14–16, 35, 47, 70, 77, 143, 162.

32. See Deut 10:18; 32:36; 1 Chron 16:33; Ps 9:7–9; 10:17–18; 33:5; 36:5–6; 67:4; 71:2, 15; 72:2–4; 76:9; 82:3–4; 89:14–17; 96:10–13; 103:6, 17; 112:9; 116:5; 135:14; 145:17; 146:5–10; Prov 31:9; Isa 1:17; 11:4; 30:18; 45:21; 59:11; Jer 5:28; 9:24; 21:12; 22:3, 15–16; 33:15–16.

33. See especially Philo, *Creation* 1.1–3; *Moses* 2.12, 52; *Spec. Laws* 2.79; *Virtues* 113, 125, 183; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.14; 4.122–23; 16.44; 18.266; *Ag. Ap.* 2.173–88, 277–95. On this point, see Peder Borgen, “Philo of Alexandria,” in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus*, ed. Michael E. Stone, CRINT 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 233–82 (234–35); Trent A. Rogers, *God and the Idols: Representations of God in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10*, WUNT 2/427 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 140.

34. See Philo, *Moses* 1.1–3; 2.25–27; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.93, 223; 4.114; 12.110–11.

countless other benefits into the lives of those who observe it. The fact that Jews who lived in the diaspora generally preferred to live according to their own law rather than the laws of the nations among whom they dwelled indicates that they held the Mosaic law in the same high esteem that Philo and Josephus did.

If the purpose of the Torah was to promote shalom for his people, it follows that the God of Israel had given its commandments out of love for them and insisted that they obey those commandments for their own good. Commandments such as those considered above had intrinsic consequences in that, in and of themselves, they contributed to the well-being of all. Communities in which all respected and cared for one another, and especially for the disadvantaged and those in greatest need, would tend to be healthy and enjoy peace and prosperity. The social fabric would remain strong and things such as injustice, violence, and oppression would be avoided as much as possible. Nevertheless, the law itself could not ensure well-being for all, since that well-being also depended on factors that were beyond the control of human beings. In order to enjoy shalom, the people needed to have good harvests, live free of plague and disease, and not be oppressed by enemy nations. Because God alone could ensure things such as these, the people depended on his loving intervention and providence.

Undoubtedly, there was a sense in which the law could be understood as a burden that made great demands on God's people. Yet this should be understood in the sense that it requires a great deal of effort and commitment to persist in doing what is good, healthy, and wholesome for oneself and others. To offer a present-day analogy, it is burdensome and demanding to get up early in the morning to do some type of exercise, to limit oneself to eating foods that are healthy and nutritious, and to refrain from drinking alcohol in excess or smoking. Yet in the long run the benefit of doing these things far outweighs the cost, dedication, and effort that they require. In Jewish thought, the law was seen in the same way: it made difficult demands on those who were committed to observing it faithfully, yet the wellness and blessings that resulted from that observance made it well worth the sacrifices involved in doing so.³⁵

Once it is understood that in Jewish thought God had given the Torah to Israel for the sake of the people themselves rather than for his own sake, other ideas that appear throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and in the Jewish writings of antiquity take on new meaning. For example, the idea

35. On this understanding of the law, see Ed Condra, *Salvation for the Righteous Revealed: Jesus amid Covenantal and Messianic Expectations in Second Temple Judaism*, AGJU 51 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 67; Philip S. Alexander, "Torah and Salvation in Tannaitic Literature," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 1: *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Donald A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, WUNT 2/140 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 261-303 (282-83).

that God was a “jealous God” who prohibited Israel from serving other gods and practicing idolatry stresses the notion that only God and his law were able to grant fully the shalom, justice, and prosperity that he desired for his people.³⁶ The worship of other gods and idols led to injustice, oppression, violence, lawlessness, and all sorts of evils, undermining and destroying human well-being rather than contributing to it.³⁷ Because no other set of commandments, precepts, and guidelines found in the laws of other nations could promote the same wholeness that the Torah did, in and of itself it was harmful and detrimental to God’s people to forsake Israel’s law for the laws of other nations or to disregard the Torah partially or entirely. If God was “jealous,” therefore, prohibiting his people from serving other gods and demanding that they observe carefully and faithfully the Torah he had given them, it was not for *his own* sake but for *theirs*.

The idea that God punishes or chastises Israel should likewise be understood on the basis of these same ideas. In passages such as Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, God promises to pour out blessings of different types upon his people on the condition that they obey the commandments he was giving them for their own good. At the same time, however, God tells them that he will chastise them by means of various types of afflictions and hardships if they fail to obey those commandments. This meant that there was not only an *intrinsic* relation between the people’s behavior and the consequences of that behavior, but an *extrinsic* one as well. Because the law prescribed a way of life that was conducive to the people’s well-being, in and of itself obedience to that law would enable them to enjoy a certain level of well-being and shalom. Nevertheless, for reasons already mentioned above, that well-being also depended on God’s responding to their obedience by intervening from heaven to bless them in various ways and to protect them from suffering and misfortune. If they failed to live in the way that God had commanded them out of a loving concern for their well-being, it would be counter-productive for God to continue to shower them with blessings, since to do so would only promote further injustice and inequity, in essence adding fuel to the fire. Instead, God would need to inflict some type of hardship or suffering upon them until they might become conscious of their wrongdoing and return to him in obedience for their own good.

36. See Exod 20:5; 34:14; Deut 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; Josh 24:19; Ezek 39:25.

37. On this idea, see Lev 18:21; Deut 20:18; 32:15-17; 1 Kgs 18:18; 2 Kgs 17:9-17, 29-41; 21:6-9; 2 Chron 33:4-6; Ps 106:36-38; Isa 57:1-10; Jer 7:9-10; 9:13-14; 16:11-12; 19:4-5; 22:9; 32:35; 44:8-10, 22-23; Ezek 18:6-17; 20:24-26, 31; 22:3-12; 23:37-39; 33:25-26; Wis 14:1-31; Jub. 11:3; T. Reu. 1:4; Josephus, *Ant.* 5.107-8; Philo, *Spec. Laws* 1.312. On Philo’s thought on this subject, see Karl-Gustav Sandelin, *Attraction and Danger of Alien Religion: Studies in Early Judaism and Christianity*, WUNT 290 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 27-59.

Both the Hebrew Scriptures and Second Temple Jewish literature repeatedly use the language of correction and discipline to speak of the afflictions God imposed on his people in an attempt to bring them back into conformity with his good law when they had abandoned it.³⁸ Such correction and discipline is consistently presented as an expression of love.³⁹ Perhaps no passage articulates this idea as clearly as 2 Macc 6:12-16. There, after describing the terrible cruelties inflicted on many Jews by the Syrian king Antiochus when they refused to forsake their laws and adopt Greek customs as he had commanded, the author of the book writes:

Therefore I exhort those who read this book not to be disheartened by these afflictions, but to consider that these punishments were aimed not at the destruction of our people but at their correction (*paideia*). For it is a sign of great kindness to punish the impious immediately rather than leaving them alone for long. For the Lord has determined not to treat us like the other nations. In their case he waits patiently for them to reach the full measure of their sins before punishing them, but in our case he does not wait until our sins have reached their height before inflicting punishment on us. Therefore he never withdraws his mercy from us. He does not abandon his people, but disciplines (*paideuōn*) us with afflictions (2 Macc 6:12-16; cf. 7:32-33; 10:4).

Whether God poured out his blessings on his people or subjected them to hardships, therefore, he was believed to be acting out of love for them. Although at times the sufferings inflicted by God might be so intense as to seem excessively cruel, only when Israel persistently and stubbornly refused to heed God's call to return to him in obedience did God find it necessary to treat his people so harshly and take such drastic measures. The alternative was for God simply to abandon his people and let them go their own way to their own perdition and destruction. While God might do so for a time in order to let them experience the painful consequences of their disobedience to his good law, however, his love for his people would never allow him to forsake them definitively.

Purity, Sacrifice, and the Worship of Israel's God

At first glance, many of the commandments found in the Torah do not appear to promote any type of well-being in and of themselves. This is especially true with regard to the commandments that prescribe the worship

38. The Hebrew word often used is *mûsar* (verb *ysr*). See, for example, Lev 26:18, 23, 28; Job 36:10; Jer 2:30; 5:3; 7:28; 17:23; 32:33. The Septuagint generally uses the term *paideia* and its cognates to express the same idea of correction, discipline, and instruction; see Wis 3:5; 11:9-16; 12:20; Pss. Sol. 3:4; 7:3, 9; 8:26, 29; 13:7-12; 14:1; 16:11; 17:5; 18:7-8; cf. 2 Bar. 1:4; 4:1.

39. See, for example, Deut 8:5; Job 5:17-18; Ps 94:12; Prov 3:11-12; Pss. Sol. 13:9-10; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.311.

of Israel's God through sacrifice, as well as many of the regulations having to do with purity. It might seem that there is no intrinsic relationship between the observance of these portions of the law and the people's well-being. If such were the case, then it would be necessary to affirm that God had given such commandments for some purpose other than that of seeking the well-being of those who obeyed them. For example, God might have prescribed sacrificial offerings simply because he wished to be served, worshiped, and glorified for his own sake or sought to keep any type of impurity or pollution at a distance from himself, perhaps because his holy nature could not allow him to tolerate being in the presence of anything impure or polluted.⁴⁰ Surprisingly, some scholars have even claimed that impurity or pollution actually *endangered* Israel's God, as if he might be harmed or affected adversely by it.⁴¹

There is little evidence, however, that ideas such as these were common among Jews.⁴² In the Second Temple period, by far the most comprehensive consideration of the meaning of the sacrificial worship offered to Israel's God in accordance with the prescriptions of the Mosaic law is found in the writings of Philo. In the first two books of his work *Special Laws*, Philo examines in detail the various procedures, elements, objects, places, and figures associated with the sacrificial rites carried out at the Jerusalem temple in order to discern the meaning they were to have for those who participated in them.⁴³ According to Philo, the sacrificial rites had a didactic purpose: God had ordered the people to practice sacrifice in order to instruct them and reinforce basic truths regarding God and their relation to him.

40. Thus, for example, Roy Gane claims that for Israel's God to maintain his presence in the temple, "he requires the purification of his sanctuary because the people's moral and physical imperfection, which affect his dwelling place, are incompatible with his nature" (*Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005], 327). On the basis of this idea, it is often claimed that some of the sacrificial rites had the purpose of cleansing the sanctuary from its pollution to make it possible for God to dwell there; see, for example, Jacob Milgrom, *Studies in Cultic Theology and Terminology*, SJLA 36 (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 81-82; Michael Newton, *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul*, SNTSMS 53 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 6-7, 36; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 230.

41. Baruch A. Levine, for example, writes: "Implicit in all expiatory rites is the assumption that ritual offenses endanger the deity in some way, since they threaten to diminish the purity of his earthly dwelling. . . . There is a reason for Yahweh's wrath. It was not mere displeasure at being disobeyed. His wrath was a reaction based on a vital concern, as it were, for his own protection" (*In the Presence of the Lord: A Study of Cult and Some Cultic Terms in Ancient Israel*, SJLA 5 [Leiden: Brill, 1974], 76, 78).

42. On what follows, see David A. Brondos, *Jesus' Death in New Testament Thought*, vol. 1: *Background* (Mexico City: Theological Community of Mexico, 2018), 125-201.

43. See especially Philo, *Spec. Laws* 1.168-302; 2.145-222.

The offering of first fruits, for example, “teaches us a high truth,” namely, that “the beginnings of things both material and immaterial are found to be by God only” (*Heir* 113-14). The commandment to offer God victims without blemish was given to instruct the people regarding the need to live innocent from evil and free of moral defilement (*Spec. Laws* 1.167). The Feast of Tabernacles teaches those who celebrate it to honor equality and hate inequality and to be thankful to God as the source of all good things (*Spec. Laws* 2.204). Both Philo and Josephus also see the decorations on the temple curtain, the various ornaments in the sanctuary, the high-priestly vestments, and the sacrificial worship in general as fulfilling the same kind of didactic purpose.⁴⁴

The purpose of sacrifice, however, was not only to offer the people instruction as to how they were to think and live but also to bring about in them that same way of thinking and living. The people's participation in the sacrificial worship offered to Israel's God served to produce and strengthen in them the spirit of love, obedience, and dedication to God that God desired to see in them for their own good. By performing the rites prescribed and participating in them, they not only learned that they should be grateful to God and obey him but were given concrete means of expressing that gratitude and manifesting that obedience. According to Philo, because the difficulties and costs involved in traveling to Jerusalem from afar to present sacrificial offerings to God there were considerable, they both required and generated greater devotion and commitment to God among those who made the journey to worship at the temple (*Spec. Laws* 1.67-70). The commandments mandating offerings for sins reiterated to the people the importance of avoiding sin and led them to reflect constantly on their behavior to see if they were living as God desired. The sacrificial rites therefore cultivated and reinforced in them the way of thinking and living that God desired to see in them for their own good.

Thus Philo, for example, repeatedly stresses that the offering of sacrifice leads the worshipers to reflect on their actions and produces a spirit of gratitude in them.⁴⁵ The sacrifices for sin, including those prescribed for the Day of Atonement, are to bring people to repentance and renew them in their obedience: “For those who have acknowledged their sin are changing their way for the better, and while they reproach themselves for their errors are seeking a blameless life as their new goal” (*Spec. Laws* 1.227). The rites involved in the sacrifices for sin also reminded the people to refrain from sinning and allowed them to “make themselves pure by curbing the

44. See Josephus, *J.W.* 5.212-14; Philo, *Moses* 2.93-108, 117-35, 150-51; *Heir* 221-29. On these points, see especially Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 113-23.

45. See, for example, Philo, *Spec. Laws* 1.171, 283-95; 2.174-75, 180, 209.

appetites for pleasure” so that they might become “enamoured of continence and piety” (*Spec. Laws* 1.193). Sacrificial worship was therefore intended to induce in those who participated in it a life dedicated to practicing justice and righteousness in accordance with God’s will. According to Philo, this is the ultimate purpose of all of the sacrificial worship prescribed by Israel’s God.

Numerous passages from other Second Temple Jewish writings and from the Hebrew Scriptures themselves speak of sacrifice as having the purpose of reminding the worshipers of certain truths.⁴⁶ By reminding the people that both they and all they possessed belonged to God as the sovereign creator of all, the sacrificial worship of God led them to dedicate themselves wholly in body and soul to serving God and using all that they had received from him in the way he desired, in accordance with his will for justice and the well-being of all. In particular, the three great feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles served to bring to mind the ways in which God had been active in the events of Israel’s past so that the people might remain conscious of their unique identity. By reinforcing that identity, the celebration of the feasts and the observance of special days helped bring the people to live in the way God had commanded for their own good out of love for them.⁴⁷

When God’s people offered him their sacrifices and gifts, they were understood to be offering *themselves* to God as well. Any sacrificial offering that did not represent a heartfelt and sincere offering of oneself to God was not acceptable to God. Numerous passages from the Hebrew Scriptures and Second Temple Jewish literature stress that, without a sincere commitment to doing God’s will, no sacrifice is pleasing to God.⁴⁸ If those offerings were not expressions of the spirit of self-offering that God desired to see among his people for their own good, they were not fulfilling their purpose. And if that spirit was genuine, it would naturally and inevitably manifest itself in the desire to share one’s life and one’s possessions with God through gifts and offerings that were visible expressions of that spirit. For this reason, it was generally expected that all who approached God bring something

46. See, for example, Exod 20:24; Lev 2:2, 9, 16; 5:12; 6:15; Deut 16:3, 12, 16; Josephus, *J.W.* 5.212-13, 218; *Let. Aris.* 157-59; Philo, *Heir* 113-16; *Spec. Laws* 1.261-66; 2.145-46, 150-52, 156-60, 197-203.

47. See Exod 12:14, 26-27; 13:3-16; 31:13, 17; Lev 16:29-34; Num 10:10; Deut 5:15; 15:15; 16:3, 12; 26:1-9.

48. See, for example, 1 Sam 15:22-23; 1 Kgs 8:39; Ps 40:6-8; 50:7-18, 23; 51:16-17; Prov 15:8; 21:27; Jer 11:14-15; 14:10-12; Hos 6:6; 8:12-14; Mal 1:7-14; 2:13-15; Jdt 16:19; Sir 7:9-10; 35:1-9, 14-15; 38:9-11; 2 En. 45:3; 46:1; Philo, *Moses* 2.106-8; *Spec. Laws* 1.67-70, 171, 196, 203, 257-60, 269-85, 293; 2.35, 42; *QG* 1.61; 2.52; *Names* 240; *Unchangeable* 8-9; Josephus, *Ant.* 6.147-48. On this point, see also Everett Ferguson, “Spiritual Sacrifice in Early Christianity and its Environment,” *ANRW* 2.23.2, 1151-89 (1156-60); Unterman, *Justice for All*, 93-108.

to share with him rather than drawing near to him with empty hands.⁴⁹ To express one's gratitude to God without manifesting that gratitude in a concrete way when one had the means to do so was seen as a lack of sincerity. Nevertheless, it was stressed that if for some reason one was not able to present any offering, it was equally acceptable for one to enter into his presence merely to praise and thank him with a sincere heart and acknowledge his loving sovereignty over one's life.⁵⁰ It was often repeated that those who approached God in that spirit yet for some reason were unable to present God a sacrificial offering were pleasing to God, whereas those who offered God sacrifices of great opulence and material worth without the proper inner disposition and devotion were not.

Of course, it was expected that the desire to share one's being and possessions with God through sacrificial offerings be accompanied by a desire and commitment to share one's being and possessions with others as well, especially those in greatest need. The offerings of any who were not committed to justice and equity among God's people were not acceptable to God, no matter how lavish those offerings might be.⁵¹ By strengthening his people's love and dedication to him through his command that the people manifest their praise, honor, and adoration for him by means of sacrificial offerings, therefore, the God of Israel was understood to be reinforcing in his people their commitment to seeking the well-being of all.

One other reason why God was thought to have mandated sacrifice was that it afforded his people an opportunity to live and experience palpably their communion with God and one another. The sacrificial offerings served as means for the people to express concretely the sincerity of their petitions to God as well as sentiments such as gratitude for God's blessings or remorse for their sins. Numerous passages from the Hebrew Scriptures and Second Temple Jewish writings make it clear that to offer sacrifice was in essence to offer up prayers to God.⁵² Words and actions complemented each other and gave meaning to each other. Neither was thought to be sufficient without the other. While it was a pagan philosopher who wrote, "Prayers divorced from sacrifices are only words, prayers with sacrifices are

49. See Exod 23:15; 34:20; Deut 16:16; Sir 35:6.

50. See Philo, *Moses* 2.106-8; *Spec. Laws* 1.271-72; Josephus, *Ant.* 6.148.

51. See, for example, Prov 21:3; Isa 1:11-17; 58:6; Jer 7:3-10; Amos 5:21-25; Mic 6:6-8; Sir 34:23-24.

52. See 2 Sam 24:25; 1 Kgs 18:24-26, 36-37; 2 Kgs 16:15; 2 Chron 20:9; Ps 4:1, 5; 20:3-6; 27:6; 69:30; 116:17; 141:2; Isa 1:15; 19:21-22; 56:7; Dan 9:20; Amos 5:22-23; Zech 8:22; Mal 1:8-9; 1 Macc 7:37; 2 Macc 1:8, 23; 10:3-4; 14:34-35; Jdt 9:1; Sir 50:5, 18-19, 22-24; Jub. 6:14; 13:9; 16:20-31; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.100; 4.243; 5.256; 6.19, 25, 102; 7.331-34; 8.108; 11.17; 14.260-61; 18.15; *J.W.* 2.197, 409; *Ag. Ap.* 2.77, 196; Philo, *Dreams* 2.299; *Drunkness* 66; *Moses* 1.219; 2.5, 133, 147, 153-55, 159; *Spec. Laws* 1.97, 113, 167-71, 224; *Unchangeable* 8.

animated words, the word giving power to the life and the life animation to the word,” his saying reflects very well Second Temple Jewish thought on the subject as well.⁵³ Sacrificial worship therefore fulfilled the purpose of enabling the members of God’s people to manifest their innermost sentiments, beliefs, and desires in tangible and visible ways that went far beyond anything that words alone could ever articulate.

The Letter of Aristeas stresses many of these same points with regard to the purity laws given through Moses, which were intimately related to sacrificial practices:

In his wisdom the legislator, in a comprehensive survey of each particular part, and being endowed by God for the knowledge of universal truths, surrounded us with unbroken palisades and iron walls to prevent our mixing with any of the other people in any matter, being thus kept pure in body and soul, preserved from false beliefs, and worshiping the only God omnipotent over all creation.... So, to prevent our being perverted by contact with others or by mixing with bad influences, he hedged us in on all sides with strict observances connected with meat and drink and touch and hearing and sight, after the manner of the Law. In general everything is similarly constituted in regard to natural reasoning, being governed by one supreme power, and in each particular everything has a profound reason for it, both the things from which we abstain in use and those of which we partake.... The fact is that everything has been solemnly set in order for unblemished investigation and amendment of life for the sake of righteousness.... [God] has thereby indicated that it is the solemn binding duty of those for whom the legislation has been established to practice righteousness and not to lord it over anyone in reliance upon their own strength, nor to deprive him of anything, but to govern their lives righteously.... The symbolism conveyed by these things compels us to make a distinction in the performance of all our acts, with righteousness as our aim.... I have therefore given a brief résumé of these matters, indicating further to you that all the regulations have been made with righteousness in mind, and that no ordinances have been made in Scripture without purpose or fancifully, but to the intent that through the whole of our lives we may also practice justice to all mankind in all our acts, remembering the all-sovereign God (Let. Aris. 139, 143-44, 147, 151, 168).

Like the commandments regarding sacrificial offerings, the prescriptions regarding purity in the Torah were thought to have been given to reinforce the people’s unique identity as those chosen by God, as the text just cited makes very clear.⁵⁴ By doing so, those prescriptions helped to hold

53. Sallustius, *Concerning the Gods and the Universe* 15.16 (quoted in Ferguson, “Spiritual Sacrifice,” 1156).

54. On the purpose of the purity laws in the Hebrew Scriptures and Second Temple Jewish thought, see Cana Werman, “The Concept of Holiness and the Requirements of Purity in Second Temple and Tannaic Literature,” in *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus*, ed. Marcel J. H. M. Poorthuis and Joshua Schwartz, JGPS 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 163-79. On Josephus’ understanding of the relationship between

sin in check and discouraged the people from adopting the beliefs and practices of other nations, which did not contribute to shalom and well-being in the way that the Torah did. Observance of the Torah's prescriptions regarding the distinction between the pure and the impure thus promoted certain attitudes and sentiments among God's people, reminding them of who they were and what God desired to see in them. By constantly leading them to reflect on their conduct, those prescriptions strengthened their obedience to God's will for their own well-being. In addition to promoting physical health among God's people, the purity regulations helped bring about in them indirectly a life that was pure in a moral or ethical sense.

Although many of the sacrificial practices carried out among God's people Israel were similar to the practices of people from other nations who worshiped their own gods, the belief that Israel's God was fundamentally distinct from other gods led to an understanding of sacrifice that was also fundamentally distinct from that of other nations. Among the majority of those peoples, sacrifice was connected with the worship of gods and idols that made few if any moral or ethical demands on their worshipers. Those gods and idols desired sacrificial offerings *for their own sake*, either because they depended on those sacrifices to satisfy their own needs or because those offerings satisfied the passions and selfish desires of those divinities and brought them pleasure.⁵⁵ Contrary to the God of Israel, who had commanded that the people present him sacrificial offerings out of love for them with the goal of bringing about in them the type of life that was in their own best interest, most of the gods of other nations were thought not to care whether the people who worshiped them showed concern for the oppressed and needy or dedicated themselves to promoting justice, equity, and well-being for all. What was believed to anger the God of Israel, however, was not the people's failure to offer him the sacrifices he had mandated but the failure to practice the justice and righteousness he had commanded in his law for the good of all. And the reason that this angered him was precisely his love for the people, since by disobeying or ignoring him they were doing harm to themselves and others whom he also loved.

By repeatedly stressing that Israel's God had no need of the sacrificial offerings presented to him, therefore, the Hebrew Scriptures and Second Temple Jewish writings made it clear that God had instituted the sacrificial

purity and justice, see Steve Mason, "Pollution and Purification in Josephus's *Judean War*," in *Purity, Holiness, and Identity in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Memory of Susan Haber*, ed. Carl S. Ehrlich, Anders Runesson, and Eileen Schuller, WUNT 305 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 183-207.

55. On the Second Temple Jewish critique of the nature and character of the gentile gods to whom sacrifice was offered, see especially Robert Goldenberg, *The Nations that Know Thee Not: Ancient Jewish Attitudes towards Other Religions*, BibSem 52 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 51-62.

system of Israel, *not for his own sake or the sake of his own holiness and justice, but for the sake of the people themselves*. There were no self-interests behind the God of Israel's demand for sacrifices—not even the desire to be honored, glorified, or worshiped. What was thought to have motivated the God of Israel to command his people to worship, glorify, and honor him through sacrifice was not a concern for himself, his own ego, or his own holiness and justice, but rather his desire to reinforce the people's obedience to the commandments that he had given them for their own well-being and happiness. If that obedience was not being reinforced, the offering of sacrifice was not fulfilling its purpose and thus was not pleasing to the God of Israel.

Had God Given the Torah for His Own Sake?

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and Second Temple Jewish literature, the God of Israel is presented as all-powerful. It is claimed that there is nothing impossible for God and that in his sovereignty he can do all things. As creator of all things in heaven and on earth, he is subject to nothing and no one.⁵⁶ Even among those Jews who came to believe in spiritual forces of evil such as Satan during the Second Temple period, it was not thought that those forces had any power over God. He could destroy any or all of them in an instant simply by willing their destruction. Just as he had created all things with his word, so also could he destroy anything he wished simply with a word.

In Second Temple Jewish thought, this belief in the God of Israel as sovereign creator of all set him apart from all the gods of the nations as a God who was fundamentally distinct from them.⁵⁷ While there might be other gods and supernatural beings above, in, and below the earth, they were in no way comparable to the God of Israel. On the contrary, because God had created all that there is, any other spiritual beings that existed must have had their origin in him and were therefore subject to his power and authority.

One of the primary differences between the God of Israel and the other gods of antiquity is that the God of Israel needed nothing from the human beings he had created. Because he did not eat or drink, he had no

56. On this conception of God in Second Temple Jewish writings, see the collection of passages presented in Henry J. Wicks, *The Doctrine of God in the Jewish Apocryphal and Apocalyptic Literature* (London: Hunter & Longhurst, 1915), 27-129.

57. On what follows, see especially Unterman, *Justice for All*, 1-14; Peter Frick, "Monotheism and Philosophy: Notes on the Concept of God in Philo and Paul (Romans 1:18-21)," in *Christian Origins and Hellenistic Judaism: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew Pitts, TENTS 10 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 237-58 (240-44); John M. G. Barclay, "Snarling Sweetly: Josephus on Images and Idolatry," in *Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 73-87; Rogers, *God and the Idols*, 58-155, 216-19.

need for any of the food or libations that might be offered to him. Because he did not sleep or grow tired, he did not need to rest and could not be disturbed by human behavior. At the same time, because he had no passions, he did not depend on any of the beings he had created to satisfy any type of personal desire on his part. Undoubtedly, he wished for certain things such as the obedience and well-being of those whom he had created. Yet he wished for those things, *not for his own sake*, but only *for the sake of the human beings he loved*. To have affirmed the contrary would have been to maintain that it was possible to manipulate, coax, or pressure God into doing certain things or acting in a certain way by offering him something that he desired in and of itself for his own sake. In that case, God would have been like the gods of the nations, bestowing favors on those who gave him what he wanted, needed, and demanded out of self-interest and lashing out at those who refused to do so in order to inflict suffering on them until they did.

In ancient Jewish thought, all of these things set Israel's God apart from the gods of other nations. Because those gods cared primarily for themselves, what angered them was merely that human beings not give them what they desired, and what placated that anger and gained their favor was simply that they receive from human beings what they demanded of them for their own sake. In order to experience any blessings those gods might bestow or be spared any punishment they might inflict, it was necessary to purchase their favor and avoid arousing their wrath by doing whatever they commanded and refraining from any action or activity that displeased them. In many cases, those gods were not only unconcerned about justice among human beings but actually wanted their worshipers to subjugate and dominate others so that they might obtain from them the gifts and offerings they wanted in even greater measure. If those gods did want there to be justice, peace, or happiness among human beings, this was not an end in itself but rather was desirable in that it made it possible for those human beings to be engaged in doing whatever pleased those gods and kept them content rather than acting in ways that they found bothersome and upsetting.

In many Christian circles in the West, it has been common to teach that the purpose for which God created all things, including especially human beings, was his own glory. For this reason, what God ultimately demands of all is that they worship and glorify him. Such a teaching, however, seems to run contrary to what we find in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Jewish thought. If the God of Israel had created the world for the purpose of being worshiped and glorified by those he created, then any who rendered him such worship would have been pleasing to him, independently of whether they practiced justice, righteousness, mercy, and kindness to others as God had commanded in his law. In this regard, he would be essentially

the same as the gods of the nations, who wished to be revered and adored by human beings for their own sake. According to ancient Hebrew and Jewish thought, however, the God of Israel was fundamentally different from those gods in that nothing could please or satisfy him if it was not accompanied by the practice of justice and goodness in conformity with his law. What ultimately concerned and interested Israel's God was not the praise and adoration of human beings or anything else they might offer him, but a life in accordance with his good and loving will as he had made that will known. If he desired that his people worship him and offer him sacrifices, then, it was not *for his own sake but for theirs*, since had it been for his own sake, their worship and sacrifices in themselves would have been sufficient to please him.⁵⁸ If instead he wished to be worshiped for the sake of his people, it was because only by acknowledging him as the good and sovereign God over all would they be able to enjoy the well-being he desired for them by living in the way he had commanded for their own well-being and happiness.

58. As Rogers has noted, this idea was particularly stressed by Philo: "Because God is sufficient in himself, it is improper to say that worship of God is for God's benefit. Rather, proper worship has as its goal the benefit of humanity. . . ." (*God and the Idols*, 132 [commenting on Philo, *Decalogue* 81]).