



Parades's Parsha Discussion with Rabbi Alex Israel

TORAH TO DISCUSS WITH TEENS AND ADULTS AROUND YOUR SHABBAT TABLE

Vayikra. The Salt Covenant

Salt is traditionally placed alongside the bread at our Shabbat table (Orach Chayim 167:5). The source for the Jewish practice of dipping the bread into salt comes from our parsha this week:

¹³You shall season every flour offering with salt; Do not omit the salt of your covenant with God from your flour offerings; with all your offerings you must offer salt.



Why is salt such an important part of the sacrifices?

Ibn Ezra says: "Don't serve the sacrifices plain without seasoning such that they will not be eaten; that is degrading."

Is this just a culinary concern? If so, why does the verse refer to "the covenant of God" when it gives the instruction to salt the sacrifices?

The phrase, "a covenant of salt" (Num 18:19; 2 Chron 13:5) is biblical terminology for an unwavering, everlasting commitment, where salt is used as a metaphor, in the same manner as it preserves meat and other foodstuffs.

But this hardly explains why sacrifices need to be salted! Ramban explains beautifully:

Salt is (sea)water which, through the power of the sun upon it, becomes salt. Water, in its original form, gives life to the land and causes things to grow, but after it becomes salt, it destroys every place and burns it, such that nothing can be sown or grown

... The salt is like a covenant, so the Torah says, "the kingdom to David over Israel eternally, for his descendants, a covenant of salt."

Rabbeinu Bachya elaborates on this Ramban:

Salt possesses two contrary, contradictory powers - water and fire - which correspond to the two qualities by virtue of which the world exists – the attribute of mercy and the attribute of strict justice. For this reason, God says "the salt of the covenant of your God." **the covenant of God is compared to salt, because through it, the world is either preserved or destroyed...**

Similarly, salt can preserve or destroy. It preserves meat, and gives flavor to all foods. But it also has the potential to cause death and destruction; after all, land that has been salted will fail to produce any vegetation..."

Accordingly, we will say that every sacrifice needs salt because it expresses the essential idea of the Jewish "korban". Korban from the root KR"V expresses nearness to God, approaching God. In this encounter, the "korban" itself is not intrinsically pleasing to God, it offers no assurance of blessing. It is the loyalty to God's covenant that grants life or death, not the offering of a sacrifice. Maybe this explains why salt accompanies all the sacrifices. Preservation or destruction are a function of the covenant. Only a person who obeys God's law will find their offering to God's pleasure.

Please Discuss:

- What is the purpose of the salt on the Temple altar?
- How does salt in particular express the God-Israel covenant?
- Why is that important to remember when engaging in the sacrificial ritual?

And here is a fascinating Midrash brought by Rabbeinu Bachya:

"The world is a third desert, a third inhabited, and a third water. The sea stood before God and complained: Master of the universe, The Torah was given in the wilderness; the Temple was built in the inhabited region of the land, - what will be with me? God responded: Israel will always bring salt on the altar"

- What do you make of this Midrash? What values is it expressing?

Shabbat Shalom!