

Ponderings in the Psalms

The following is a Messianic Study on

Psalm 50

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The *Pondering* studies were published in the Brit Chadashah Newsletter. Brit Chadashah (*New Covenant*) is a Messianic Fellowship in Sydney. Led by Paul Cohen a Jewish believer in Messiah Yeshua (Jesus). We meet together fortnightly for Bible studies from a Messianic Jewish Perspective. We are a unique fellowship made up of Jewish and Gentile people who are believers in Yeshua as the promised Messiah of Israel.

If you don't know Yeshua as your Messiah, we encourage you to search out the Scriptures for yourself. God promised in the book of Jeremiah, "*You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart*" (Jeremiah 29:13). And we hope you will make contact with us so that we can share more about the Messiah, His life and ministry.

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Pondering Psalm 50

1 A Psalm of Asaph.

The Mighty One, God, the Lord, has spoken,
And summoned the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.

2 Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,
God has shone forth.

3 May our God come and not keep silence;
Fire devours before Him,
And it is very tempestuous around Him.

4 He summons the heavens above,
And the earth, to judge His people:

5 “Gather My godly ones to Me,
Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.”

6 And the heavens declare His righteousness,
For God Himself is judge.

Selah.

7 “Hear, O My people, and I will speak;
O Israel, I will testify against you;
I am God, your God.

8 “I do not reprove you for your sacrifices,
And your burnt offerings are continually before Me.

9 “I shall take no young bull out of your house
Nor male goats out of your folds.

10 “For every beast of the forest is Mine,
The cattle on a thousand hills.

11 “I know every bird of the mountains,
And everything that moves in the field is Mine.

12 “If I were hungry I would not tell you,
For the world is Mine, and all it contains.

13 “Shall I eat the flesh of bulls
Or drink the blood of male goats?

14 “Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving
And pay your vows to the Most High;

15 Call upon Me in the day of trouble;
I shall rescue you, and you will honour Me.”

16 But to the wicked God says,
“What right have you to tell of My statutes
And to take My covenant in your mouth?

17 “For you hate discipline,
And you cast My words behind you.

18 “When you see a thief, you are pleased with him,
And you associate with adulterers.

19 “You let your mouth loose in evil
And your tongue frames deceit.

20 “You sit and speak against your brother;
You slander your own mother’s son.

21 “These things you have done and I kept silence;
You thought that I was just like you;

I will reprove you and state *the case* in order before your eyes.
22 “Now consider this, you who forget God,
Or I will tear *you* in pieces, and there will be none to deliver.
23 “He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honours Me;
And to him who orders *his way aright*
I shall show the salvation of God.”

Introduction

A Psalm of Asaph.

Who was Asaph? There are a few people in the Bible with this name, but most likely this is the seer (prophet) who was mentioned with David in 2 Chronicles 29:30, who was the son of Berechiah (1 Chronicles 15:17). Psalms 73-83 are also connected to Asaph.

Outline

This Psalm is a warning about the court case that God is going to bring to the nation of Israel. Verses 1-6 are an introduction; this is followed by the two indictments of God against the people’s sacrificial practices (verses 7-15), and their stand on moral issues (16-21), and then there is the conclusion (verses 22-23).

Messianic insight

The rabbis on Psalm 50:2 see a messianic connection, in the Midrash (Sifre on Deuteronomy, Piska 343) it is written “... *He shined forth from Mount Paran: There are four occasions when God shines forth ... The fourth will occur in the days of the Messiah, as it is said, Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined forth* (Psalm 50:2).”¹

Names of God

אל אֱלֹהִים יְהוָה (*El Elohim YHWH*): this trifold naming (verse 1) literally means the “*God of gods, the LORD*,” but it is considered a description of God as the Judge of the world. As such many translations have “The Mighty One, God the LORD,” and the only other place we see this name is in Joshua 22:22. Within the context of both passages we see the LORD God as the judge.

Description of Jerusalem

Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty: Zion is Jerusalem, the city where God dwelled. *The perfection of beauty* is not referring to God, even though He is perfect, for this is a description of Jerusalem, the city of God, itself (Psalm 48:2; Lamentations 2:15). This can be seen in the light of the 2nd Temple and an historical description can be found in 1 Maccabees 2:12 “*And, behold, our sanctuary, even our beauty and our glory, is laid waste...*” (Septuagint Brenton translation). Here we note that *the perfection of beauty* is narrowed down to the Temple of the LORD.

Verses 1-6 an introduction

The heavens and the earth are summoned as God’s witnesses against Israel (Deuteronomy 4:26, 30:19, 32:1; Isaiah 1:2; Jeremiah 2:12, 6:19, 22:29; Micah 6:1-2), who is in covenant relationship with the LORD (Exodus 19). When God made the Mosaic Covenant, He made an appearance (Exodus 19:16-19), and that is the language here. The Lord is coming again to judge *the faithful*, those who made the covenant by sacrifice. This is harking back to Exodus

¹ Tom Huckel, *The Rabbinic Messiah*, (Philadelphia, PA: Hananeel House, 1998), Ps 50:2–59:16. (<https://jewishstudies.washington.edu/book/sifre-devarim/chapter/pisqa-343/> page 5)

24:3-8, and yet it also speaks to those who are continuing to sacrifice to the LORD (verse 5). So, both past and present faithful worshippers are addressed here.

Two indictments of God

Sacrificial practices of all people (verses 7-15)

God does not rebuke Israel for bringing sacrifices, as He had commanded it in Leviticus 1-7. However, He does rebuke them for their pagan thinking, that is, their idea that He needs such sacrificial gifts of food and drink, like the gods of the nations do. God can and does eat. This is clear from two passages in the Tanach (Older Testament). God appeared and ate with Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18:8), and with Moses and the elders (Exodus 24:9-11). We know Yeshua ate, and one example given in the Brit Chadashah is the last Seder (Passover) (Luke 22:16,18,30). We also know that He will join us at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9).

But unlike the gods of the nations, the LORD did not feed on the sacrifices, and He gained no strength from the sacrifices.² In the many passages that talk about the various sacrifices and food that was placed before God, He never said, nor indicated, that He was hungry or thirsty. There is no indication that God actually partook of the offerings.

What the LORD desires is obedience, and sacrificing was a way to draw near to Him. This was to be done in faith, and was an expression of thanksgiving (Leviticus 7:12-15). The sacrifices were offered from the heart, and with prayers indicating faith and trust in the day of trouble. The thanksgiving sacrifices were part of the peace offerings, a voluntary sacrifice given to God. As a way to say Thanks LORD, thanks for Your goodness towards us, thanks LORD for Your blessings and thanks LORD for Your salvation (deliverance).

Moral issues (16-21)

Asaph now comes to a second group, the teachers. They should have been proclaiming the Word of the LORD, and the Covenants and promises, but instead they were applauding the behaviour of those who flouted these instructions. God calls these men wicked. During the days of the Tanach (Older Testament), the teachers of the Torah were the Priests and the Levites (Leviticus 10:8,11; Deuteronomy 33:10; 2 Chronicles 17:8-10). From childhood they were instructed and saw their fathers and grandfathers teach the community. There are godly examples of priestly leaders, such as Aaron's grandson Phinehas (Numbers 25), but we need to be aware of three examples of wicked leadership. Firstly, Aaron's two eldest sons (Leviticus 10); secondly, Samuel's sons (1 Samuel 2:12-21); and thirdly, Annas / Ananias and his sons. Annas had five sons, and his son-in-law Caiaphas, who all served as high-priest and were condemned for their behaviour (Josephus Antiquities 18.2.2; 20.9.1). Annas³ was one of the most dishonourable leaders in Jewish history. The Pharisees said:

*“Woe to the house of Annas!
Woe to their serpent's hiss!
They are high priests;
their sons are keepers of the treasury,*

² While there are a number of examples found on tablets this quote shows that the god's of the nations needed the sacrifices: “Since through the extirpation of humankind, with the exception of the occupants of the ark, all sacrifices had ceased, the gods had not been fed for some weeks and now were hungry.” The Gilgamesh epic and Old Testament parallels by Alexander Heidel, University of Chicago Press, 1963, page 256.
https://oi.uchicago.edu/sites/oi.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/shared/docs/misc_gilgamesh.pdf

³ For more information see John W. Lawrence, *The Six Trials of Jesus*, pp. 59-60. Or Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua* vol 4, §166.

*their sons-in-law are guardians of the temple,
and their servants beat people with staves.” (Pesahim 57a)*

All of these men, and others like them, are called wicked by God. They should have been upstanding leaders in the community, who obeyed and taught the Law of the LORD, believed in the covenant and promises, and behaved as honourable men; and yet they did the opposite. They also did not condemn sinners, they actively stole and committed adultery, abused their authority and harassed the faithful. All the while they were thinking that God did not care; their self-delusion made them believe that God was just as lawless and faithless as them (verse 21). There are many warnings here for people who want to serve in the leadership of a fellowship today, and James, the brother of the Lord, cautions us strongly “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment” (James 3:1).

Conclusion (verses 22-23)

The grace of God is evident, and even now He calls to those “*who forget God*”! As prophetic words they should be heard as *you who forget Me*, as prophesied by Moses (Deuteronomy 32:18). This is a personal call from God, a call to repentance, with the most severe warning, for God says He will come and “*tear you in pieces, and there will be none to deliver.*” Nobody can deliver you out of the Hands of God (Deuteronomy 32:39). For more on the word tear תָּרַפּ (*tarap*) see Hosea 6:1. Here it is applied to the teaching elders of the community. What a warning, a warning we all need to heed. God’s patience is running out and He will remove, and even tear up, leaders who are continuing in ungodly behavior, and refuse to teach the whole council of God. You who forget God, He remains the Holy One, the Mighty God, who is judge of all the earth. For this reason, we teach scripture. He is perfect, He is faithful and His ways are just (Deuteronomy 32:4). Again, there is an application for us in the 21st century. If our leaders teach against the moral standards of scripture, and allow Biblically condemned practices, I urge you to leave that fellowship and seek a new Bible believing, Scriptural sound congregation.

In the final verse the faithful are called to do two things: firstly, to *sacrifice thank-offerings*, harping back to verse 7-15. While connecting back to the sacrificial system (Leviticus 7:12-15), it has to be seen as a “thank you LORD” offering, that is offered up as, and in, praise and worship. Secondly, we must order our steps, that is, our conduct must follow God’s ways (Psalm 85:13). This connects back to verses 16-21, we are to forsake evil and hypocrisy, and come in repentance. Those who do this are the ones who will see the salvation of God.

Selah
Blessings in Messiah
Sue and Paul