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I Blot Out Your Transgressions for My Own Sake

43: 22-28

I blot out your transgressions for My own sake DIG: With what attitude do you imagine the exiles carried out their religious practices? What does that show about their view of God? Although the LORD has not wearied them with His demands, how have they wearied of Him? In spite of their attitudes, what has God done for them? What does the LORD say about Himself in these verses? What does ADONAI mean by blotting out sins for His own sake?

REFLECT: In your worship life, are you lavishly giving yourself to God? Or callously wearying Him with meaningless rituals? When has it been different? What accounts for the change? In your service to the LORD, are you wearying yourself for Him? Or are you wearying Him?

ADONAI will show favor on Isra'el and bring the Jews back from Babylon, but it is not on the basis of Israel's merit. Isra'el is unworthy of God's goodness. She did nothing to please Him while in Babylon and did not call upon His Name. On the contrary, she grew tired of calling upon His Name and always burdened Him with her sins. Isra'el also stopped the sacrifices. Being captive in Babylon, Isra'el could not bring sacrifices to the Temple in Jerusalem. The purport of the accusation, therefore, cannot be blame for not doing the impossible, but rather to contrast the LORD's treatment of His people with their behavior towards Him. In the absence of sacrifices, Isra'el should have attuned her mind and heart to the true service of ADONAI and acted in the Spirit, if not the letter of the prescribed sacrificial ritual. But, some of Isaiah's hearers believed that any deliverance from Babylon would be deserved in the light of their acceptable worship of Him.

Instead, God declares that Isra'el had burdened Him with their sins and bothered Him with their offenses. Yet, you have not called upon Me, O Jacob, you have not bothered yourselves for Me, O Isra'el (43:22). The double use of the pronouns Me . . . Me, emphasizes the need to convey the correct interpretation. Although the Israelites had been formed for the purpose of praising the LORD, they had not done it. Why not? Were they bothered by the LORD's excessive demands? How could they be, since they did not

conform to what **God** really wanted? **ADONAI is saying that although they may have thought they were giving Him acceptable worship, they were not, and that is the reason that He was so tired of their unacceptable worship (1:11-14, 66:3; Jeremiah 7:5-10; Hosea 6:6; Amos 4:4-6; Micah 6:3-8).**



As far as **God** was concerned, **they** had shut **Him** out. As a result, what **they** thought of as worship, **the LORD** viewed as mechanical, aloof repetition. Earlier, **Amos** had prophesied: **I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring Me burnt offering and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps (Amos 5:21-23).** Then **Isaiah** had said to the rebellious nation: **When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen (1:15a).** Finally, **Yeshua** would say it this way: **They worship Me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men (Matthew 15:9).** **Sin** always takes you further than you want to go and costs you more than you wanted to pay!

Regardless if one lives before the cross or after the cross, **faith** always saves. In fact, **without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6a).** Bringing a sacrifice to the bronze altar (see the commentary on **Exodus, to see link click Fc - The Sin Offering**) for a **sin** offering did not forgive the **sin** of the Israelite; the **faith** of bringing a sacrifice to the bronze altar forgave the **sin**. **ADONAI** is always looking for internal change, not external ritual. **Micah** said it this way: **He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).**

You have not brought Me sheep for burnt offerings (see the commentary on Exodus Fe - The Burnt Offering), nor honored Me with Your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with grain offerings (see the commentary on Exodus Ff - The Grain Offering) nor

wearied you with demands for increase (43:23). Rituals themselves were not what **ADONAI** wanted, so **He** could say here and elsewhere that **He** had not commanded **them** (**Amos 5:25-26; Jeremiah 7:22**). What **He** really wanted was **a people** with whom **He** could have fellowship because **their** collective hearts reflected **His** own. The rituals were useful representations of lives surrendered to **Him**, but the symbols themselves could not save.

You have not brought any fragrant calamus for Me (43:24a). Calamus is possibly sweet, fragrant cane (**Exodus 30:23** and **Jeremiah 6:20**). **You have not lavished, literally saturated, on Me the fat of your sacrifices (43:24b).** The people had certainly drenched the bronze altar with **fat**, the most desirable part of the sacrifice and hence the part reserved for **God (Leviticus 4:26)**. But it was all for show. **But you have burdened Me with your sins and bothered Me with your offenses (43:24c).** **God** had not **burdened** and bothered **His people** with tiring, worn out ritual; **they** had **burdened** and bothered **ADONAI** with **their sins** and **transgressions**. It was as if **the Ruach Ha’Kodesh** was saying to the **Israelites**, “**Your** carefully planned rituals are useless because **they** do not reflect a broken heart. **You** are not crushed by your **sin**. **You** have no change of heart and are merely going through the motions.” **Their** efforts to manipulate **God** had failed. **They** had refused to release the steering wheel of **their** lives to **the King**. **They** were sitting on the throne of **their** own hearts and **they** stubbornly refused to get off. But even though **they** were **sinful** and stubborn, **they** were still **the apple of His eye (Deuteronomy 32:10)**. **God’s** remedy was, and always is, **grace**.

So, yes, **ADONAI** would return **Isra’el** to the Land from which **they** had come, but it certainly was not because **they** had earned it. Well, then why? **Their** return would be on the basis of **His grace**. **God** would forgive **them** on the same basis that **He** forgives us. **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).**

No sooner was the need diagnosed, than the remedy was given: **I, even I, am He would blot out your transgressions** (deliberate rebelliousness), **for My own sake, and remember your sins no more (43:25)**. To **blot out their sins** meant to wipe **them** clean. After King David was confronted with his twin **sins** of murder and adultery (**Second Samuel 11**) by the prophet Nathan (**Second Samuel 12:1-13a**), he cried out: **Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin (Psalm 51:1-2)**. **Sin** leaves a mark that only **ADONAI** can **wash away**. And not only does **He wash** our **sins away**, but **He** remembers them **no more (Jeremiah**

31:34), as if throwing them into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19b).

Therefore, the only reason **God** will show favor to **Isra'el** is on the basis of **His grace**. **He** announces that **He** will **blot out**, or forgive **Isra'el's sins**. Notice that **the LORD** says **He** will do this **for His own sake**. Not for **Isra'el's** sake, as if **she** earned this forgiveness, because nothing **Isra'el** had done, or could do, would qualify **them** for forgiveness like this.

But there is a fundamental problem in both **Isra'el** and ourselves. We humans do not like **grace**; we like to feel that we deserve everything we get. We want to be able to say that our good behavior has earned favorable treatment for us before the bar of **God**. Interestingly, the same verb, **my praise**, that occurred at the end of **43:21** occurs here, **your innocence**, at the end of **43:26**. But here instead of recounting the praise of **ADONAI**, **the people** were recounting all **their** good deeds, and by association, the mistreatment **they** have suffered at the hands of **God**. This is always the way it is. Until we recognize our need for **grace**, all of our energies, energies designed for the praise of **the LORD**, will be spent in fruitless self-justification.¹⁶⁴

Therefore, to make sure it is not on the basis of **Isra'el's** merit, **God** again issues a challenge to **her**. The easiest way to understand these next few verses is as a brief court scene in which the accused is given the opportunity to establish his or her innocence. **ADONAI** said to the **Israelites**: Convince **Me** that **you** have earned forgiveness on **your** own. **Review the past for Me, let us argue the legal matter together, state the case for your innocence** and show **Me** that you have not **sinned** against **Me (43:26)**. But there is only silence because **Isra'el's** history was one of **sin**. But **the LORD** answered as if in rebuttal.

The prosecution's **case** was then stated. Before **Isra'el** can be judged, **she** must be confronted with the hopelessness of **her** case. **God** said: **Your first father sinned (43:27a)**. Adam was the **first father** of mankind, but **Abraham** was the **first father** of the nation of **Isra'el**. **He** was the **first** one to be called a **Hebrew (Genesis 14:13)**. Tracing **their sin** back to **Abraham** did not get **them** off the hook however. In biblical thought, **their** guilt increased with each succeeding generation (**Matthew 23:31-32, 35-36**).

Then **God** added that **Isra'el's** **spokesmen**, **their** prophets and priests, had also **rebelled against Him (43:27b)**. Those who interpreted **the LORD's** word, spoken or written, to **His people** also had **their** faults and **sins**. We only need to read about the lives of Moses, Samson, David, Solomon, Hezekiah or Josiah to be reminded of this ugly fact. Nor could anything glorify **their transgressions** as is typical of heroic literature. Their stories are distasteful and embarrassing, and their **sins** had deadly consequences. These could not be

sugarcoated.

For example, as we read about **Abraham's** life we will find that **God** appeared to **him** seven times, each time to develop faith in **his** life. But this does not mean **he** was faultless. The fact of the matter is that **he** failed many times. **ADONAI** gave **him** seven tests and **he** fell flat on **his** face on four of them. First, **he** stayed in **Hebron** when **he** should have gone to the Promised Land (**11:31b**). Secondly, **he** left Palestine, went to Egypt, lied to Pharaoh, and picked up **an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar (12:10-20)**. But then **Abram** turned down riches from the King of Sodom and passed that test; if **he** were going to be rich, it would be from **God** and not from man. Thirdly, **he** listened to **his** wife instead of waiting on **the LORD**, which resulted in the birth of **Ishmael** and untold problems (**16:1-16**). And fourthly, **his** lapse of faith continued as **he** refused to trust **ADONAI** for **his** and Sarah's safekeeping when **he** lied to **Abimelech (20:1-18)**. **Abraham's** last two successful tests occur at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the offering of **his** son Isaac. But **he** still failed four of seven times. However, like Simon **Peter**, **he** got up, brushed **himself** off, learned from **his** mistakes, and started to follow **the LORD** again in faith.

Rather than being of any merit, from the very beginnings of **Israel's** history, there was the characteristic of **sin** right from her very **first** father **Abram**, later renamed **Abraham (Genesis 17:5)**. So here is the fork in the road. If **Israel** chose the route of self-justification, they were lost. If we chose the same route, we are lost also.

Because of the persistent **sinfulness** of **Isra'el**, **God** had no other choice but to judge **her**. By **His** very nature, **He** cannot tolerate **sin**. Utterly disgusted with **them**, **He** said: **I will disgrace the dignitaries of your Temple (43:28a)**. The priests had led the nation astray and the **disgrace the LORD** described here is the judgment of defilement. It would have been particularly horrible for **them** because they had spent **their** entire lives concerned with supposedly being holy (**Isaiah 65:2-5** and **Leviticus 10:3**). Now **ADONAI Himself** would **disgrace them** with defilement of **the Temple** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Gb - The Destruction of Solomon's Temple on Tisha B'Av in 586 BC**).

Furthermore, **God** said that **I would consign Jacob to destruction and Isra'el to scorn (43:28b)** when **they** went into exile (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Dd - Isra'el Will Serve the King of Babylon Seventy Years**). This term **destruction** refers to the *cherem* judgment of **the LORD**, which literally means **devoted to destruction**. Before the battle of Jericho, **ADONAI** said to Joshua: **Keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. So, they devoted the city to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it - men,**

women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys. Then they burned the city and everything in it (Joshua 6:18, 21, 24). When God used this word, He was signaling that the nation had sunk so far into sin, that there was no further justification for its existence. The irony here is that the **destruction** was particularly applied to the Canaanites and Amalekites, the enemies of Jacob's family who sought to prevent the fulfillment of ADONAI's promises to them (Joshua 6:17; First Samuel 15:21). The Most Holy Place had become unholy in the LORD's eyes and Jacob had become Canaan. Isra'el, created to witness to the glory of God by sharing in that glory (Exodus 19:5-6), had been turned over to the greatest mockery possible. The nation had not merely sinned; it had become the very opposite of what it was meant to be. Far from its behavior providing some justification for deliverance, that behavior gave ample reason for its complete abandonment. Nevertheless, the LORD will not allow that to happen. Why not? Solely because of His own grace.¹⁶⁵

In Chapter 43 we have seen a brilliant and devastating satire against idolatry. Unfortunately, this will become a reoccurring theme until the seventy years of the Babylonian rule had been completed. The human heart has a way of turning from God to some idol. Today, we do not go after graven images like the Israelites did, but we need to understand that anything that a person gives himself or herself to instead of ADONAI is an idol. It can be wanting to accumulate money for its own sake, seeking fame or self adoration. Or it could even be good things in life that we abuse, like pleasure, sex, alcohol, or a career. Even our families or our ministries can become idols. In fact, anything that we replace God with in our lives is an idol. The LORD said: I Am a jealous God (see the commentary on Exodus [DI](#) - You Shall Not Make For Yourselves an Idol). That means if there is anything between you and Him, He wants it out of the way no matter what or who it is. As we leave this chapter, we leave the darkness of judgment and move into the light of the coming Messianic Kingdom and the promise of the Ruach ha-Kodesh.