

## SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

**The Crowd Cheered When I Answered the Missionary**

Before the Covid pandemic, Jewish communities held annual Celebrate Israel Festivals. Each year, Jews for Judaism participated with an information table manned by me and several volunteers.

One year, while standing in front of the Jews for Judaism booth answering people's questions, I was interrupted by several missionaries. They challenged my beliefs and

said I was going to hell unless I accepted Jesus as my savior.

I told them I pray directly to God and don't need an intermediary.

Their response did not surprise me. Many Christians assume that without a Temple and animal sacrifices, "the Jewish people cannot make things right with God and they cannot find forgiveness."

To support their belief, they claim the Jewish Bible, in Leviticus 17:11, says, "*Without the shedding of blood, there is no atonement for sin.*" Christians then argue that animal sacrifices have been replaced by Jesus who died "*as a ransom to set them free from the sins that were committed*" (Hebrews 9:15).

By now a crowd of thirty people had surrounded me and was pushing forward to hear my response.

First, I pointed out that the verse "*Without the shedding of blood, there is no atonement for sin.*" is not in the Jewish Bible. It is in the New Testament and actually says, "*according to the law ALMOST ALL things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission*" (Hebrew 9:22). The words "almost all" imply that not all sins required blood. Furthermore, although Leviticus 17:11 says, "*blood makes atonement,*" it does not say blood is the ONLY way to receive forgiveness.

Missionaries conveniently ignore these points because if there are other ways to replace sacrifices, we don't need Jesus.

The Bible says there are numerous ways to achieve atonement without blood. For example, atonement could also be attained by giving money (Exodus 30:16), offering incense (Numbers 16:47), and by a wave offering (Number 8:21).

Additionally, most sins when done intentionally did not require sacrifices. Remorse and repentance were sufficient to achieve forgiveness. For sins that required a sacrifice, the sacrifice served to motivate feelings of remorse. This was especially relevant for an unintentional sin because a person might mistakenly think repentance wasn't necessary since it "was only an accident."

I also explained that after the Temple was destroyed, we can offer our sincere prayers in place of sacrifices as it says, "*Take words and return to the Lord... offer your lips in place of sacrifices*" (Hosea 14:2).

One missionary was unsatisfied with my response and demanded that I give a better proof that words and prayer can achieve forgiveness.

I immediately recalled a verse in this week's Torah portion Shelach (Numbers 13:1–15:41), which describes God's anger when the Jews accepted a negative report about their ability to enter the Land of Israel.

When Moses prayed to God and asked for forgiveness, God relented and said, "*I have forgiven them according to your words*" (Numbers 14:20). Upon hearing this passage the missionary's jaw dropped. He was left speechless, but the crowd let out a big cheer.

Finally, I pointed out that in recognition of the power of prayer to obtaining forgiveness, Jews recite the verse "*I have forgiven them according to your words*" numerous times on Yom Kippur.

May this Shabbos provide opportunities to turn to God with our prayers, and may they be answered with blessings of good health and success in all our endeavors.

Shabbat Shalom,

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