

Behold, I Was Brought Forth (Shapen) in Iniquity

הָרַבְעוֹן חוֹלְלָתִי וּבְחַטָּא יִחַמְתַּנִּי אִמִּי

“Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” (Ps 51:5, KJV)

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity; and in sin my mother conceived me.” (Ps 51:5, NASB)

“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” (Ps 51:5, NIV)

“True, I was born guilty, was a sinner from the moment my mother conceived me.” (Ps 51:5, CJB)

What does it mean to be “brought forth (*shapen*) in iniquity?” The Hebrew word translated *iniquity* in the NASB and KJV is the word *avón* (אָוֹן) and the Hebrew word translated *sin* is the word *chet* (חַטָּא). These are two different Hebrew words (See Ps 51:2 and Ps 51:9). Yet Bible translations, such as the NIV, translate them both as sin. Is it likely that both words mean the same exact thing (to be sinful)? Curiously, Modern Hebrew dictionaries translate both words as 'sin' or 'transgression.' (See *Shilo Pocket Dictionary Hebrew-English*) In *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, *avón* is translated as an activity that is crooked or wrong, a **conscious and intentional** offense.

On the other hand *chet* means to miss the goal, to sin against G-d. The Artscroll Tanakh uses the word '*fashioned*' rather than *shapen*. How were you and I “*fashioned in an activity that is crooked or wrong or a conscious and intentional offense?*” Whenever we have some difficulty in obtaining a precise meaning for Scripture, we are comforted in the first principle of Hermeneutics, that is, 'Scripture interprets Scripture.' And such will be the case here. G-d is far more precise in distinguishing the word *sin* from the word *iniquity*. How were you and I fashioned in iniquity? I believe we definitely were...

THE DEFINITION OF INIQUITY

The clearest and most accurate way to define the word *iniquity* is to identify its meaning and context in Scripture. A clue to the definition of iniquity is found in Matthew 7:21-23:

"Not everyone who says to me, 'L-rd, L-rd!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, only those who do what my Father in heaven wants. On that Day, many will say to me, 'L-rd, L-rd! Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we expel demons in your name? Didn't we perform many miracles in your name?' Then I will tell them to their faces, 'I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of iniquity (lawlessness)!'"

We must ask, ‘When is preaching (prophesying) iniquity? When is casting out demons iniquity? And when is doing wonderful works iniquity?’ The answer is given in the above verse: **when we do these activities in our own will rather than according to the Father's will.**

Iniquity means doing my own will even though it is something good.

As Believers, we are called to follow in the steps of our L-rd and Savior, Messiah *Yeshua*. It is significant that *Yeshua* did nothing of His own will, but only the will of His Heavenly Father. (See John 6:38.) *Yeshua's* refusal to follow His own will is lauded in Hebrews 1:9: “*You have loved righteousness and hated iniquity (lawlessness/wickedness.) Therefore, O G-d, your G-d has anointed you with the oil of joy in preference to your companions.*”

Iniquity is Going Our Own Way

A further relationship between iniquity and doing our own will is found in Isaiah 53:6: “*We all, like sheep, went astray; we turned, each one, to his own way; yet ADONAI laid on him the iniquity (guilt) of all of us.*” The Greek word for *iniquity* is *anomia*. *A* means “without,” and *nomia* means “law.” *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* defines *anomia* as “*the condition of one without law; contempt and violation of law; not subject to the law.*” The JNT and the NASB translate iniquity in Mathew 7:22 as *lawlessness*.

King Saul's "Good" was Iniquity

King *Sha'ul* provides a powerful study in the concept of iniquity. When *Sha'ul* faced the *P'lishtim* (Philistines) in battle, he offered a sacrifice to the L-rd. After he finished sacrificing, *Sh'mu'el* arrived and reproved him for the sacrifice, for it was not done according to the L-rd's commandment. *Sha'ul* tried to justify his "good deed" by saying, "... *I saw that the army was drifting away from me, that you hadn't come during the time appointed and that the P'lishtim had assembled at Mikhmas. I said, 'Now the P'lishtim will fall on me at Gilgal, and I haven't asked the favor of ADONAI,' so I forced myself and offered the burnt offering.*" (1 Samuel 13:11-12). Because the priest was to offer sacrifices—not the king—*Sh'mu'el* said to *Sha'ul*: "...*You did a foolish thing. You didn't observe the mitzvah of ADONAI, which he gave you. If you had, ADONAI would have set up your kingship over Isra'el forever. But as it is, your kingship will not be established...*" (1 Samuel 13:13-14).

At a later time, *Sha'ul* was sent out by the L-rd to totally destroy the corrupted 'Amaleki (Amalekites) and all their possessions. However, *Sha'ul* decided to save the best sheep and the best oxen so he could sacrifice them to the L-rd. When G-d saw that *Sha'ul* had followed **his own will**, He said to *Sh'mu'el*, "*I regret setting up Sha'ul as king, because he has turned back from following me and hasn't obeyed my orders'...*" (1 Samuel 15:11).

The next day *Sh'mu'el* reproved *Sha'ul*, but *Sha'ul* once again justified what he had done: "...*I did too pay attention to what ADONAI said, and I carried out the mission on which ADONAI sent me'...*" (1 Samuel 15:20). Then *Sha'ul* explained that the sheep and the oxen which he did not destroy were to be used for sacrifices unto G-d. Then *Sh'mu'el* said, "*Does ADONAI take as much pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying what ADONAI says? Surely obeying is better than sacrifice, and heeding orders than the fat of rams... For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft (divination), and stubbornness (insubordination) is as iniquity and idolatry...*" (1 Samuel 15:22) Over the years I have always memorized the KJV which states it this way: "*For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.*" When G-d makes a comparison between terms, we must pay attention!

How the definition of iniquity clarifies other passages of Scripture

By using the definition of personal willfulness for *iniquity*, Scripture passages stand out with new clarity of meaning and application.

"Order Establish my footsteps in Your word, And do not let my own willfulness (iniquity) have dominion over me." (Psalm 119:133).

If every one of our decisions is not based on Scripture, we will fall into destructive habits that come by exercising our own willfulness.

"...For just as you presented your members as slaves to uncleanness (impurity) and to iniquity (lawlessness), resulting in further iniquity (lawlessness), so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness." (Romans 6:19-20).

In this passage G-d distinguishes *uncleanness* from *iniquity*. Uncleanness involves a violation of G-d's physical or moral laws. Once again, however, *iniquity* can involve doing good deeds, but by our own willfulness—not by G-d's direction. Self-willed actions tend to produce more self-willed actions; thus, we go from what the KJV states "*iniquity unto iniquity.*"

"For the mystery of iniquity (lawlessness) is already at work.... His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason G-d will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false (the lie)" (2 Thess. 2:7-11).

The mystery of *iniquity* is that we will follow our own faulty reasoning when we have available to us the infinite wisdom of G-d. When we persist in doing our own will, G-d turns us over to a reprobate mind, and we

believe the lie that we are equal with G-d. In reality, we have placed ourselves above G-d by deciding what our will is in each matter rather than determining the will of G-d.

"Nevertheless, G-d's firm foundation stands, stamped with these words: 'The L-rd knows his own,' and, 'Let everyone who claims he belongs to the L-rd stand apart from wrongdoing.' In a large house there are dishes and pots not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay. That is, some are meant for honorable use and some for dishonorable. If a person keeps himself free of defilement by the latter, he will be a vessel set aside for honorable use by the master of the house and ready for every kind of good work." (2 Timothy 2:19-21).

'Departing from iniquity' ("Get away from me, you workers of iniquity" Matthew 7:23) means to stop doing what we want to do and to begin to do the will of G-d—which will be good works. Works directed by G-d are acts of faith and righteousness.

"He gave himself up on our behalf in order to free us from all violation of Torah and purify for himself a people who would be his own, eager to do good." (Titus 2:14)

Only as we depart from the iniquity of works that are initiated by our own will, will we be able to recognize and achieve the good works that are initiated by the will of G-d. Works that are directed by G-d fit into His bigger picture and His greater plan for the world.

"But [Bil'am] was rebuked for his sin – a dumb beast of burden spoke out with a human voice and restrained the prophet's insanity!" (2 Peter 2:16).

The account of *Bil'am* provides a clear illustration of doing what appears to be good but which is motivated by self-will and condemned by G-d as iniquity. The king of Moab became alarmed when the nation of Israel came out of Egypt toward his land. *Bil'am* was known for his ability to effectively bless or curse people. Therefore, the king of Moab offered him money to curse the nation of Israel. When *Bil'am* asked G-d if he could cooperate with the king of Moab in this venture, G-d specifically stated: "*G-d answered Bil'am, 'You are not to go with them; you are not to curse the people, because they are blessed.'*" (See Numbers 22:12). Rather than obeying the will of G-d, *Bil'am* persisted in his self-will to cooperate with the king of Moab in order to get his reward. So *Bil'am* appealed to G-d, and G-d gave him the desire of his willfulness. But He also instructed *Bil'am* to bless the people of G-d and then labeled his action *iniquity*.

Every good deed must be motivated by G-d's love—not by our self-will. Rav Sha'ul (Paul) was motivated by the love of Messiah in his ministry among Believers—not by his own self-will. (See 2 Corinthians 5:14.)

How the definition of iniquity is verified in Isaiah 53:5-6

"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the L-rd hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." (KJV)

"But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but Adonai has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." (NASB)

"But he was wounded because of our crimes, crushed because of our iniquities; the disciplining that makes us whole fell on him, and by his bruises we are healed. We all, like sheep, went astray; we turned, each one, to his own way; yet ADONAI laid on him the guilt of all of us" (CJB)