

## Who called?—Elohim Called

“And he (יהוה) called to Moshe and he (יהוה) spoke to him from the tent of meeting. He said” (Lev 1:1).

[ספר ויקרא] [א] וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים-מִשָּׁמַיִם וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלָיו מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר:

### Who Called?

One of the most important distinguishing features between a true prophet like Moshe and a prophet from nations of the world is represented by a single letter at the beginning of this week's *Parashah*: aleph. The sages explain that when the Torah states “and he called (ויקרא) to Moshe” ‘His calling’ preceded all sayings and commands. This is an expression of love, an expression that the ministering angels use, as it states in Isaiah 6:3: “One called (ויקרא) to the other.” However, to the gentile prophets He revealed Himself with an expression of happenstance and uncleanness, as it states in Numbers 23:16: “G-d happened (ויקר, *vayikar*, no ending aleph) upon Bilaam.”

More precisely, if one reads a *Torah* Scroll, the very first word of this week's *Parashah* in the Book of Leviticus, one sees the vav-conversive form *vayikra*. It is translated “And He called” and it is spelled: vav-yud-kuf-raish-aleph, as it ought to be, except that the aleph is written smaller. Thus, the first four letters - vav-yud-kuf-raish - stand out on their own almost as an independent word, *vayikar* (ויקר), which literally means: “He happened upon.” This insight ought to tell us that יהוה makes a distinction between the way G-d relates to His people (symbolized by *Moshe*), and the rest of the world. When calling to His own, He includes Himself, the true Aleph (a letter that is ineffable in and of itself in Modern Hebrew).

The word *kará* (קרא) comes from the infinitive to read (לקרא), which also means to call, to call out to, or to name. There is a famous Hebrew expression we all learned while in Israel: *Ma kará?* What happened? (מה קרה). Notice the absence of the weak guttural Aleph which is replaced by none other than a Hey (another letter associated with *Elohim!*). Who called (הוא קרה)? יהוה called to Moshe (*vayikra*). He is also calling to us!

### The Consolation Prize of Salt (a Jewish Midrash)

In the *Parasha*, the *Torah* states: “You shall salt your every meal-offering with salt; you may not discontinue the salt of your G-d's covenant from upon your meal offering - on your every offering shall you offer salt.” (Vayikra 2:13) Why salt? A famous teaching by Jewish Sages states: “A covenant has been made with salt from the six days of creation that the 'Lower Waters' were promised that they would be offered on the Altar via the salt and via the water libations on the Festival (of Sukkot).”

Another *Midrash* states that when Jews sit around the table waiting for the blessing of *HaMotzi* to be recited over bread the Covenant of the Salt, which is sitting on the table, salt protects them from the words of Satan. Why specifically the salt protects them. The *Midrash* states: ‘G-d's answer to Satan is “Yes, they are sitting around the table now, without saying anything, apparently wasting their time. But just wait a few minutes. In a few minutes they will be reciting blessings, they will speak words of *Torah* and they will be fulfilling *Mitzvot* - just give them some time, just wait!” It was salt which accepted the admonishment to “just wait”. It was the salt who was able to consider something that would happen in the distant future as though it were happening right now. Therefore, specifically the salt - out of all the items in the creation -- protects us from Satan when we are waiting out a period of non-participation in *Mitzvot*.’

One would think that a sacrifice should be saturated with salt, just as a person is saturated with wisdom and understanding (salt is a symbol of wisdom). But the *Torah* says, ‘No! ‘You shall merely *sprinkle* salt on it.’

## **The Salt of the Earth**

*“You are salt for the earth. But if salt becomes tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except being thrown out for people to trample on.” (Matthew 5:13)*

The verse is paralleled in Mark 9:50 and Luke 14:34-35 also has a version of this similar to the one in Mark. There are a wide number of references to salt in the Hebrew Scriptures. Besides our verse in today's *Parashah* (Lev 2:13), we also have Nu. 18:19 and 2 Chro. 13:5 which represent salt as a symbol (sign) of *Elohim's* covenant. Ex. 30:35, Eze. 16:4, 43:24 and 2 Ki 2:21 all present salt as a purifying agent.

Throughout history, salt has always been a precious to man. It was once traded for gold. *Yeshua* called his disciples *“the salt of the earth.”* The early Chinese used coins of salt and in Europe some Mediterranean people used cakes of salt as currency. Roman soldiers were sometimes paid in salt. The word "salary" comes from "sal," the Latin word for salt. The main sources of salt in ancient times were dry coastal areas near the Mediterranean. Early trade routes centered on Spain, Italy, Greece and Egypt. Many of the caravan trade routes were developed to transport salt, and Genoa, Pisa and Venice emerged as centers for the salt trade. Throughout history, wars have been fought over salt or lost for the lack of it. During the Revolutionary War Benjamin Franklin made a secret deal with Bermuda to supply salt to the American forces. In 1783, after the Revolutionary war was won, salt works were set up along the Atlantic Coast. Major salt deposits found near Syracuse provided one of the main reasons for the construction of the Erie Canal which opened in 1825.

The exact meaning of the expression *“lost its savour”* (in the KJV) is disputed, in part because salt, as mentioned above, has had a wide number of uses in the ancient world. The commentator Schweizer notes that a common Jewish expression at the time was to call the *Torah* the *“salt and the light”* of the world, which may mean this section is an introduction to the discussion of the *Torah* that will soon commence. In the Rabbinic literature of the period salt was also a metaphor for wisdom and also salt was important as a preservative. In this light, the most common interpretation of this verse is to see the duty of the disciples as preserving the purity of the world. Gundry notes that salt was a minor but essential ingredient in fertilizer, and he feels that earth should be translated as soil (land), and the disciples are thus to help the world grow and prosper. However, most scholars disagree with Gundry's translation of earth as soil, most see it as referring to the world and in Schweizer's words *“the totality of mankind.”* Since salt plays a role in sacrificial purity and all sacrifices had to contain salt, Nolland argues that the many different uses of salt show its importance in the life of the period, and it is this importance of the disciples that is being referenced as salt.

Still, the issue of salt losing its “flavor” is somewhat problematic. Salt itself is sodium chloride (NaCl), which is extremely stable and cannot really lose its “flavor”. The most common explanation for this is that what would have been called salt in that era was quite impure, containing a wide array of other compounds. Of the substances in this mix the NaCl was the most soluble in water and if exposed to moisture the NaCl would disappear leaving a white powder looking just like salt, but not having its flavor or its preservative abilities. The salt used in the area mostly came from mines around the Dead Sea and material extracted from that area demonstrates these same properties today. Some other explanations have been proposed. Salt was extremely valuable and unscrupulous merchants may have replaced the salt with other substances. For some purposes gypsum was added to salt, but this would erase its flavor and make it unfit for consumption. Schweizer notes that some early versions have this verse read *“earth lose its salt”* rather than *“salt lose its flavour”* and is thus an illustration of how important the disciples are to the world.

The literal translation of the Greek phrase translated *“lost its savour”* is *“became foolish.”* In Aramaic the same term is used both for losing savour and becoming foolish. Some have speculated that “became foolish”

would be thus a mistranslation by someone who did not realize the dual meaning of the Aramaic. Gundry feels that the idea of foolish salt is such “*utter nonsense*” that no translator would ever make such a mistake, he feels it is more likely that the Semitic expression had been assimilated into Greek and that became foolish was an expression for losing savour. English language translators universally accept that the verse is talking about flavor rather than intelligence. But some scholars do feel that this may be wordplay related to the Rabbinic use of salt as a metaphor for intelligence. Today “*salt of the earth*” has become a common English expression.

Salt has been used since ancient times as a seasoning, a preservative, a disinfectant, etc. In a booklet put out by a salt company in the 1920s, the list of uses include keeping the colors bright on boiled vegetables; making ice cream freeze; whipping cream rapidly; getting more heat out of boiled water; removing rust; sealing cracks; removing spots on clothes; putting out grease fires; killing poison ivy; and treating sprains, sore throats, and earaches. The salt industry goes still further, claiming 14,000 different uses for this under-appreciated substance!

The Bible contains numerous references to salt. In various contexts, it is used metaphorically to signify permanence, loyalty, durability, fidelity, usefulness, value, and purification, and as a unit of exchange. “*We are the salt of the earth.*” Salt preserves from corruption. As the disciples of Messiah we are to preserve the world from general corruption. Whatever becomes utterly corrupted is doomed to be destroyed. Just like food left out on the counter, our world is corrupt and doomed for destruction unless we do something about it. Corrupt means: (1) willing to act dishonestly in return for money or personal gain, or (2) evil or morally depraved. The remedy for our world is us. We are the salt of the earth. That means we need to be like salt is to food, if we are going to save this world from corruption and destruction.

How does salt preserve food from corruption? It must come in contact with food. If we are going to save this world from corruption and destruction, we must come into close contact with people so that we can preserve them. To preserve is to: (1) keep safe from harm or injury, or (2) to treat (food) to prevent its decomposition. If we are simply in physical contact with the world, we won’t preserve it. We need to treat the world, and do something to prevent corruption from taking place. Our words and actions are needed to preserve people from corruption and destruction. First, we may need to help people realize they are corrupt. If you don’t believe your food needs to be wrapped in salt, or put in the fridge, you’ll leave it on the counter. We first must realize the food will perish if not covered in salt or put in the fridge. If people don’t think they are sick, they won’t go to the Doctor. First, we must help people realize they are corrupt; that they have a problem and are not in right standing with *Elohim*. Once they believe this, things can change.

The heart and mind of people must change if they are to respond. Psalm 14:1-3 states: “*The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. Adonai looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.*” We can make laws that line up with the Bible, but that alone will not work. Israel was a theocracy; the Bible was its law book. It didn’t work. There were godly laws, but the people had corrupt hearts. I know that we need to have godly laws, but if we want to save people from corruption their hearts must change. Godly laws won’t change people but changed hearts will!

### ***The Covenant of Salt***

The “*covenant of salt*” implies that we are to be the salt of the earth for a long time. All of God’s covenants are intended to last forever. This world needs to see that covenants can last forever. Covenants, as well as contracts and agreements are being broken every day. So-called marriage contracts are being broken every day. (e.g., “*Sorry, I’ve changed my mind. I want to be with someone else.*”) However, marriage covenants are in-

tended to last as long as they both shall live. Young people today need to meet those of us who have been married for 30, 40 and 50 years. They need to meet people who honor their marriage covenants, and learn how one does it so they can do it too. Married couples need us to be the salt of the earth.

In biblical times, men carried pouches of salt on their belts. When a pact, promise, or contract was made, the men from each of the participating parties would intermingle the salt from their own pouches with the salt from the pouches of the other party. This reminded the men that they could not retrieve their own salt from the other pouch, symbolizing the fact that they could not go back on their word.

The apostle Paul said that our speech (communication) should always be full of grace & seasoned with salt (see Col. 4:6). Our words should preserve relationships, not destroy them. Our words should be words of life to the hearers. Our conversation should be “*savory (tasty and flavorful)*” for others. When our words are edifying, rather than condemning, we are following the injunction to be salt & to season our words with salt, and of course, salt speaks of being truthful, loyal & protective - the truth & protection of a covenant.

*Yeshua* said without equivocation that we - his people - are the salt of the earth. As salt we are called to persevere in our commitment to Messiah. Out of this commitment will flow the actions which serve to preserve the legitimate human activities and institutions of this life. Finally our saltiness will serve to enhance the overall life experience highlighting the pleasure *Elohim* intended this world to provide.