

Lashon haRa' (Evil Tongue)

Hallel Fellowship (<http://hallel.info>)

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All passages from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

We're taking an excursus from our exploration of Yeshua's "apocalyptic discourse" in Matthew 24–25, Luke 21 and Mark 13¹ to explore one of the most pervasive sins among God's people today. It's not the Sabbath. It's not sexual deviance. This is a study about *kosher* — distinguishing between "clean" and "unclean" — and God's judgment on the Day of the LORD.

- As part of our celebration at Rosh Chodesh, the start of the next month in God's calendar for Israel, we read an apocalyptic passage from Isaiah 66:
 - "For just as the new heavens and the new earth Which I make will endure before Me," declares the LORD, "So your offspring and your name will endure. ²³ 'And it shall be from new moon to new moon And from sabbath to sabbath, All mankind will come to bow down before Me,' says the LORD." (Isa. 66:22–23)
 - In Isaiah 65–66, the LORD details some of the conditions of the people of God and of the nations before that day. In Isaiah 56, there's a blend between conditions before the destruction of the Temple in Yerushalayim (Jerusalem) by Babylon and events leading up to the Day of the LORD. We've mentioned the connection between the multiple "abomination of desolation" situations with the Temple throughout history and coming in the future. Let's look at parts of Isaiah 66, specifically:
 - "Thus says the LORD, 'Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest?' ² For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being,' declares the LORD. 'But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word. ³ But he who kills an ox is like one who slays a man; He who sacrifices a lamb is like the one who breaks a dog's neck; **He who offers a grain offering is like one who offers swine's blood;** He who burns incense is like the one who blesses an idol. As they have chosen their own ways, And their soul delights in their abominations. ⁴ So I will choose their punishments And will bring on them what they dread. Because I called, but no one answered; I spoke, but they did not listen. And they did evil in My sight And chose that in which I did not delight.' ... ¹⁵ For behold, the LORD will come in fire And His chariots like the whirlwind, To render His anger with fury, And His rebuke with flames of fire. ¹⁶ For the LORD will execute judgment by fire And by His sword on all flesh, And those slain by the LORD will be many. ¹⁷ **Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go to the gardens, Following one in the center, Who eat swine's flesh, detestable things and mice, Will come to an end altogether,**' declares the LORD." (Isa. 66: 1–4, 15–17)
 - These closing chapters of Isaiah are tied to Isaiah 1, which also has harsh words against things that are instructions in God's law:
 - "What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?' Says the LORD. 'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. ¹² When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of My courts?' ¹³ Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies — I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. ¹⁴ I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them. ¹⁵ So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen.'" (Isa. 1:11–15)
 - Commentator John Oswalt rightly noted the connection between Isaiah 57–58, 65–66 and Isaiah 1:
 - "Here the prophet returns to a **specific kind of rebellion that has been at the heart of this division's (and this book's) concern from the outset: ritualism.** How easy it is for all religionists to read the predictions of the destruction of the wicked with a certain satisfaction. Yes, God will be avenged on his enemies and we true believers will finally be vindicated. But the satisfaction of such ritualists is not in the biblical tradition, and it is certainly not in view here. Just as in Isa. 57:3-13; 58:1- 5; 65:1-7; and 66:3-4 (as well as 1:11-20), **religion that is nothing other than form and routine and is not demonstrated in a heartfelt obedience to the covenant is as disgusting to God as rank idolatry. It is not pleasing to God, but is as nauseating as the eating of swine and mice.**"²
- God's revelation through his prophets is that following the instructions of God must be "married" to following the heart — the desires, intentions — of God. Otherwise, one might have been better off not to learn God's ways, because doing so without a "new heart" can lead one to his own destruction.
- So there is an important connection between the deeper meaning of *kosher* and what God considers "clean."
 - *Kosher* is a medieval Hebrew term for "what is right and proper" that comes from קָשֶׁר kasher (H3787), which means *to prosper* or *succeed* (Eccl. 10:10; 11:6) and, by extension of the concept, *to be [considered] right and proper* (Esth. 8:5)³.
 - The קַשְׁרוֹת *kashrut* system of dietary laws in Judaism, between what is *kosher* (fit to consume) and *treyf* (not fit to consume), start with the Bible laws on meats that are טָהוֹר *tahor* (H2889, *to be pure*,

1 See the studies in this series at <http://hallel.info/tag/apocalyptic-discourse-luke-21-matthew-24-25-mark-13/>.

2 John N. Oswalt. *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Mich., 1998, p. 635. Cited in J.K. McKee, *Messianic Kosher Helper*, TNN Press, prepublication preview, pp. 272–273.

3 Harris, R. Laird, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, eds. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980.

- i.e., “clean”) and *אָנען* *tame’* (H2931, *to be dirty*, i.e., *impure* or *unclean*).
- In Leviticus 11, we find God’s instructions for how to distinguish between “clean” and “unclean” meat.
 - Eating something unclean makes one unclean only until the end of the day (Lev. 11:24–25, 27–28; cp. Lev 14:46; 15:5–8, 10–11, 16–19, 21–23, 27; 17:15; 22:6; Num. 19:7–8, 10, 21–22).
- Yeshua the Messiah took up the matter of “clean” and “unclean” foods in Mark 7, but not in the way many commentators and translations portray.

The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, ² and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. ³ (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; ⁴ and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) ⁵ The Pharisees and the scribes ⁶ asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?” ⁶ And He said to them, “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. ⁷ BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE

PRECEPTS OF MEN.’ ⁸ “Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.”

⁹ He was also saying to them, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. ¹⁰ “For Moses said, ‘HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER’; and, ‘HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH’; ¹¹ but you say, ‘If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),’ ¹² you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; ¹³ thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.”

¹⁴ After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, “Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what

defile the man. ¹⁶ [“If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”]

¹⁷ When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. ¹⁸ And He ¹⁹ said to them, “Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?” (Thus He declared all foods clean.)

²⁰ And He was saying, “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. ²¹ “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, ²² deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. ²³ “All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.” (Mark 7:1–23)

- Mark 7:19 is translated in a number of versions to the effect that Yeshua did away with the distinctions of “clean” and “unclean” foods.
 - This is outside of the immediate discussion and is discussed thoroughly elsewhere⁴, but suffice it to say at this time that the key to Yeshua’s intended meaning of “purging all meats (foods)” (KJV) in verse 19 is the “eliminated” word in verse 18, literally, “into the sewage.”
 - The lesson of “clean” and “unclean” has always been that there are things that are “good” for the someone with God’s heart and things that are “bad,” and one must be always conscious of when one may encounter it.
- There is a lot of concern about Moses’ commands about eating kosher, but little concern about Yeshua’s command to speak kosher.
 - As we noted from Leviticus 11, eating something “unclean” makes one so only until evening.
 - Yeshua said saying something “unclean” — slander — can put someone on the track toward being barred from the Kingdom, because the heart is moving or has moved away from the heart of God.
- One might say, “I don’t slander! I’m not maliciously attacking someone. Sometimes, truth hurts.”
- Let’s explore that sentiment in Yeshua’s teaching about the “heart” of the Torah”:
 - The greatest commandment Yeshua cited comes from Deut. 6:4–6.
 - The second-greatest commandment, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” comes from Lev. 19:18. The context of the command is Lev. 19:15–18:
 - “You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly. ¹⁶ You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the LORD. ¹⁷ You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.”
 - What does it mean to “love your neighbor”?
 - Justice is necessary and must not be skewed because of a person’s circumstances.
 - Let judgment end with the action taken by those in authority — no grudges or vengeance.
 - Don’t make accusations haphazardly, don’t slander, be a “talebearer.”
 - Lev. 19:16 says, “You shall not *הִלַּךְ* *helekh* as a *רַחֵל* *rakhil* (Strong’s lexicon No. H7400).”
 - The Hebrew word *helekh* is a form of the verb from *הָלַךְ* *halakh* (H1980).
 - *Halakh* literally means *to walk* but is used to mean *behavior* or *character*, i.e., the way one “walks” through life.

⁴ For a thorough discussion of the important historical background and original language considerations in translating and interpreting Mark 7:19, see J.K. McKee, *Messianic Kosher Helper*, TNN Press, prepublication preview posted July 15, 2014, <http://tnnonline.net/bonus_teachings/o7_july_2014/mar_7.pdf>, pp. 320–338.

- *Halakhah* became the name for a rabbi's instruction for those who followed him.
 - *Rakhil* comes from the verb רָכַל *rakhal* (H7402).
 - It literally means *to go about*, but is used in the Bible to mean *traveling merchant*.
 - A familiar-sounding derivative word, מַרְכֻּלֵת *markolet* (H4819), means *a place for merchants, i.e., a market*.
 - So, a talebearer is a merchant of information.
 - Here are enlightening uses of *rakhil*:
 - “He who goes about as a talebearer [רָכַל] reveals secrets [סֵדֶר], But he who is trustworthy conceals a matter.” (Prov. 11:13)
 - More than just secret, סֵדֶר *sohd* means things that are not readily apparent.
 - The “deepest” level of PaRDeS rabbinical Bible interpretation is *sohd/sod*.
 - “He who goes about as a slanderer [רָכַל] reveals secrets [סֵדֶר], Therefore do not associate with a gossip.” (Prov. 20:19)
 - *Gossip* here is translated from לִפְתֵּהּ שְׁפָתָיו לֹא תִתְעַרֵּב *l'poteh s'pataiv lo tit'arav*, literally meaning, *with his simple/deceiving/enticing lips don't mix/associate*.
 - So, one who loves his neighbor conceals matters that aren't supposed to be public — doesn't “peddle” them to other people” — and doesn't stay around people who aren't concealing private matters.
 - It doesn't matter whether the concealed matter is true or not. Keep it concealed!
- Apostle Ya'akov (James) wrote a lot about the essential matter of keeping control of what comes out of one's mouth:

“This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. ²² But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. ²⁵ But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. ²⁶ If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. ²⁷ Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” (Jas. 1:19–27)
- In rabbinical literature, slander and gossip are group together under the term *lashon ha-ra, the tongue that is bad*. Tips from Yeshua, God's prophets and apostles and the sages for taming *lashon ha-ra* include⁵:
 1. Pray daily for help in this area, to control our tongue.
 - Compare what you plan to say or what you're hearing with these instructions from apostle Paul:

“... whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.” (Phil. 4:8)

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, ⁵ does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, ⁶ does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (1st Cor. 13:4–7)
 2. Remain silent rather than speak evil, especially when you are upset.

“Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.” (Prov. 19:11 ESV)
 3. Give others the benefit of the doubt.
 4. Verify negative reports directly, in private. Not in a public area or semi-public area where others can easily walk by and over hear you without context.
 - In Matthew 18, Yeshua provides a dispute resolution process:
 1. Go directly to the person at issue and work it out.
 2. If that doesn't work take a trustworthy witness or two.
 3. If that doesn't solve the matter, take it to the leaders of the congregation.
 - If there is a serious matter that involves safety, try to combine steps 2–3 while bringing in peace officers.
 5. Change the subject when gossip comes up in a group conversation. Don't let it continue. Jewish teaching says listening to *lashon ha-ra* is akin to wagging yours.

5 Adapted from Toby Janecki, “Guarding One's Speech,” Video, First Fruits of Zion.