

Is There Reward and Retribution for People? The Evolution of Biblical Thought

Early Biblical Thought on Reward and Retribution

The first authors of the Old Testament were convinced that evil is always punishable, while righteousness is rewarded still during the life of man. “The scepter of the wicked will not remain over the land allotted to the righteous, for then the righteous might use their hands to do evil” (Ps.125:3). The idea that punishment of the wicked and reward of the righteous may not come for a long time, or even at all during their lives, seemed dangerous. It could have placed under doubt the faith in one, all-mighty God, and consequently, his commandments, which were received by Moses on Mt. Sinai. Human righteousness must be rewarded during the course of one’s life – thus thought the biblical authors of the First Temple period (10th-6th centuries B.C.E.); otherwise, people will not be interested in observing the morals given by God, and idolatry and lawlessness will triumph. This idea is best expressed in the psalms of King David: “The Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight. To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the devious you show yourself shrewd. You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty” (Ps.18:24-27). David’s psalms confirm that even in our earthly lives, we can receive reward for our service. But repayment may be given for not only goodness, but also for acts of evil: “Repay them for their deeds and for their evil work; repay them for what their hands have done and bring back on them what they deserve” (Ps. 28:4).

All of the biblical authors believe that the only way of communication with God is through prayer. Moreover, the earliest of them tell of the unquestionably positive experience of contact with God through prayer: “In you our ancestors put

their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame” (Ps. 22:4-5). At the same time, these very authors admitted that even persistent prayer not always, and more importantly, not immediately could bring forth results: “My God, I cry out by day” – lamented King David – “but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest” (Ps. 22:2). However, the Old Testament repeatedly warns that salvation through prayer may be possible only under the condition that the person is pleasing to God. “He trusts in the Lord,” they say, “let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.” (Ps. 22:8). But God favors the righteous or those who sincerely try to lead a righteous way of life. Only prayers of the righteous can be heard by Him. If a person commits a sin, then God will not be pleased with him and his prayers will not be heard. “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened” (Ps. 66:18). And so, God’s mercy extends only to those favored by Him – that is, the righteous – such is the main idea of early biblical authors.

“Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days?” – is the question asked in the psalms of David. If the answer is yes, then one must behave righteously. But what does that mean? The same psalm defines it as follows: “Fear the Lord, you his holy people, for those who fear him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.” But fearing and searching for God is merely the first step towards righteousness. Additional steps must follow: “keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it (Ps. 34:9-10, 12-14).

If a person becomes righteous, then he is pleasing to God; therefore, he has every chance to have his prayers heard because “The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry... The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles” (Ps.34:15-17). The point of view on prayer of the righteous was straightforward and did not tolerate the slightest doubt in its effectiveness. For example: “I sought the Lord, and he

answered me; he delivered me from all my fears” or “This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles” (Ps.34:4,6). The same is said in the psalm of David: “Lord my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me” (Ps.30:2). Reward and retribution were just as simply seen: “Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord’s unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him... The Lord will rescue his servants; no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned” (Ps.32:10; 34:22).

Psalms, describing the faith of King David himself, became the poetic illustrations of the early biblical view on reward and retribution: “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint” – very vividly complained David of the disaster that struck him. “My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me. My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet... They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment” (Ps. 22:14-16, 18). But passionate prayers to God bring comfort and reward to the righteous king still during his earthly life. “You make your saving help my shield” – he thanks God – “and your right hand sustains me; your help has made me great... You made my enemies turn their backs in flight, and I destroyed my foes... I beat them as fine as windblown dust; I trampled them like mud in the streets. You have delivered me from the attacks of the people; you have made me the head of nations. People I did not know now serve me, foreigners cower before me; as soon as they hear of me, they obey me... The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God my Savior! He is the God who avenges me, who subdues nations under me, who saves me from my enemies” (Ps.18:35,40,42-44,46-47).

And so, the righteous person, having chosen God as his refuge and trusting only Him, should await, in the opinion of early biblical authors, the following: “Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that

stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked. If you say, 'The Lord is my refuge,' and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent" (Ps.91:3,5-13). The first authors of the Old Testament supposed that the Creator cannot ignore the prayer of a righteous person and imagined God's reaction to be like this: "Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation" (Ps.91:14-16). During the entire First Temple period, – that is, for almost four centuries – there dominated a point of view that boiled down to the following: "The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon... though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, they will be destroyed forever" (Ps. 92:12,7).

According to the Old Testament's moral, even the righteous person should rejoice when retribution is brought upon the sinners, and evil is paid with evil. "The righteous will be glad when they are avenged, when they dip their feet in the blood of the wicked. Then people will say, 'Surely the righteous still are rewarded; surely there is a God who judges the earth.'" (Ps.58:10-11). The same David calls upon vengeance in his psalm for the evil done to him: "Let death take my enemies by surprise; let them go down alive to the realm of the dead, for evil finds lodging among them... But you, God, will bring down the wicked into the pit of decay; the bloodthirsty and deceitful will not live out half their days" (Ps.55:15, 23).

The bearers of biblical tradition – the Levites and Aaronites – assumed that God records accurately all good and evil done by people, and later rewards and

punishes accordingly: “Because of their wickedness do not let them escape; in your anger, God, bring the nations down. Record my misery; list my tears on your scroll are they not in your record?”- questions one of King David’s psalms (Ps.56:7-8). This early biblical point of view was first realized in canonical works like the Book of Psalms and Book of Proverbs.

And so, the moral of the Old Testament concluded that for all deeds, good and evil, one received the appropriate treatment – reward or retribution – still during his earthly life, and thus warned: “Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away... Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart... For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land. A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity” (Ps. 37:1-2,4,9-11). The psalm of David also elaborates on this inevitable and fairly immediate reward and retribution system: “I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread” (Ps. 37:25).

Reconsideration of the Idea of Reward and Retribution

But what to do if the prayers of the righteous are unheard, and reward is not given for virtue and strong faith in God? Already during the First Temple period, experience of day-to-day life gradually deteriorated initial ideas of immediate and certain reward to the righteous and retribution to the sinners. The destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.E. and captivity of part of the Judahite people put under doubt the infallibility of early biblical truths. “O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple, they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble... Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the kingdoms that do not call on your name; for they have devoured Jacob and devastated his homeland” (Ps. 79:1,6-

7). For an entire half-century, Jerusalem and the Temple lay in ruins, while the Judahite nobility, together with the more literate and wealthy part of their people, remained in Babylonian Exile. Why did God not hear their prayers or help them? How could it happen that God allowed his name to be insulted by pagans? The people, who were the first to arrive at the idea of monotheism and discover the true God, were now caught in a state of doubt and hesitation. “We are given no signs from God; no prophets are left, and none of us knows how long this will be... I say to God my Rock, ‘Why have you forgotten me? ...But now you have rejected and humbled us; you no longer go out with our armies. You made us retreat before the enemy, and our adversaries have plundered us. You gave us up to be devoured like sheep and have scattered us among the nations’” (Pss.74:9; 42:9; 44:9-11).

Before the bearers of religious tradition – the Levites and Aaronites – arose a difficult task: how can the disaster that occurred be understood and, perhaps more importantly, what kind of explanation can be offered to the people? Their first reaction were desperate prayers to God and persistent reminders of loyalty to Him as His chosen people: “All this came upon us, though we had not forgotten you; we had not been false to your covenant. Our hearts had not turned back; our feet had not strayed from your path. But you crushed us and made us a haunt for jackals; you covered us over with deep darkness... Awake, Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression? ...Rise up and help us; rescue us because of your unfailing love” (Ps.44:17-19,23-24,26).

To the challenge of tragic reality and doubt regarding reward and retribution, the biblical authors had their own answer: “Take notice, you senseless ones among the people; you fools, when will you become wise? Does he who fashioned the ear not hear? Does he who formed the eye not see? ...For the LORD will not reject his people; he will never forsake his inheritance” (Ps.94:8-9,14). The authors of the Old Testament, among whom was the prophet Jeremiah, witness to those events, were convinced that it was neither their king who lost the

war nor the Babylonian hordes that overcame Judah, but God who was responsible for their dire situation – God who was angered at His people and left them helpless. They saw the manifestation of God’s will in everything – victories and losses alike. “I put no trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory” – recalls one of the psalms – “but you give us victory over our enemies, you put our adversaries to shame” (Ps. 44:6-7). The bearers of tradition saw the fall of Judah and destruction of the First Temple as God’s punishment for the idolatry that was committed among His chosen people. As that, which is forgivable to ignorant pagans, is impermissible to the people who came to know the true God. It was not in vain that the prophet Amos, passing the will of God, warned his brethren: “You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins” (Amos 3:2).

However, the dramatic events that cast into doubt early biblical ideas on reward and retribution suddenly concluded successfully for everyone. In 539 B.C.E. the Persian King Cyrus conquered the powerful Babylonian empire and freed all the peoples captured by it. The Judahite prisoners triumphantly returned home to Judah and rebuilt both the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. During all subsequent years of Persian rule, Judea took advantage of broad autonomy and total religious freedom.

But the evolution of religious thought, caused by historical upheavals, led to new conclusions. Firstly, the human mind is incapable of cognizing all of God’s intentions. The world surrounding us is so complex that even extraordinary people cannot understand the will of the Creator. “No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all their efforts to search it out, no one can discover its meaning. Even if the wise claim they know, they cannot really comprehend it” (Ecc. 8:17). The acts of the Lord are incomprehensible – such is the main conclusion of the Book of Job. Secondly, the bearers of tradition were forced to admit that reward for good and retribution for evil does not come immediately; moreover, too long a time period between one’s act and the corresponding reward or retribution for it

emboldens sinners and causes desperation to the righteous. This problem was also noticed by early biblical authors who mentioned it in the Book of Psalms the following way: “For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from common human burdens; they are not plagued by human ills... This is what the wicked are like — always free of care, they go on amassing wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been afflicted, and every morning brings new punishments” (Ps.73:3-5; 12-14). A later book, Book of Ecclesiastes, tells of the same evil: “The righteous perishing in their righteousness, and the wicked living long in their wickedness” (Ecc. 7:15). Trying to understand why the righteous suffer for so long, biblical thought went in the direction that only God, not man, can appreciate true righteousness, and therefore those who we deem righteous, may not be so at all. But even a true righteous person may unknowingly commit sins. Thus, attempting to find a solution to this problem, the authors of the Old Testament limited themselves to an assertion that no matter how long the sin lasted, the sinners would still get their deserved punishment. “When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, people’s hearts are filled with schemes to do wrong” (Ecc. 8:11). They paid attention to the fact that the human mind is incapable of understanding how God chooses the time for reward and retribution. “I choose the appointed time; it is I who judge with equity” – thus responded one of the psalms to those who sought an answer to why it took so long for reward and retribution to be given to people (Ps. 75:2). Until the end of the second century B.C.E., biblical tradition supposed that reward for the good and retribution for evil, be it sooner or later, certainly comes during man’s earthly life. Thus on days of disaster, the righteous must have patience, faith, and good judgment to live to see “judgment by truth”, and not to question the Lord’s omniscience and omnipotence. “Blessed is the one you discipline, Lord, the one you teach from your law; you grant them relief from days of trouble, till a pit is dug for the wicked” (Ps.94:12-13).

The reconsideration process of early biblical ideas on reward and retribution is best reflected upon in the books of Ecclesiastes and Job. But even in these works the problem of reward and retribution did not get a definitive resolution, as the people saw that most often, judgments by truth did not occur until the end of one's life.

The New Testament's View on Reward and Retribution

By the end of the second century B.C.E., two movements of Judaism, the Pharisees and Essenes, significantly changed their ideas on reward and retribution. These religious groups began to view human life as a brief moment in the immortal existence of the soul – the only incorporeal substance in people. The Pharisees and Essenes came to the conclusion that the most important in man is not his mortal physical body, but the soul, given by God, which brings to life the body and is later taken back by the Almighty at His discretion. The material life of man is ephemeral and carries meaning only in the sense of perfecting the soul. So why then protect and nurture the mortal physical body? What matters is that one must try not to harm his soul, which, after the body's death, transitions to another, immaterial world – a world that is the primary "home" for man. Consequently, reward for good and retribution for evil do not have to necessarily occur in our earthly world. Should they fail to come during one's life, then they will certainly catch up to the soul in the other, more important, immaterial world. There, the souls of sinners will be punished with suffering, while the souls of the righteous rewarded with closeness to God. And while the Pharisees and Essenes still did not clearly or similarly imagine this afterworld, the issue of reward and retribution was, for the most part, resolved. Now, knowing of the existence of the immaterial world, where one's soul went, it was possible to comprehend the prosperity of sinners and suffering of the righteous in our quickly passing earthly world. These Pharisaic and especially Essene ideas on reward and retribution were reflected in later Old Testament Apocrypha (for instance, in the "Wisdom of Ben Sira" and in the Book

of Enoch), as primarily in the books of the New Testament. And this is not accidental, as the first Christians almost entirely comprised those very Pharisees and Essenes. Unlike New Testament literature, the canonical works of the Old Testament contain no trace of the idea of reward and retribution in the afterlife. Not one of them states that man has an immortal soul that will continue to exist after the body's death.

There is reason to suspect that the Pharisees also believed in reincarnation – that is, the soul's rebirth in another body. As Josephus witnessed, "They say that all souls are incorruptible, but that the souls of good men only are removed into other bodies, - but that the souls of bad men are subject to eternal punishment" (*War of the Jews* 2.8.14).

On their part, the Essenes subjected the idea of righteousness to complete reconsideration. They concluded that true righteousness cannot have selfish motives. People should not await reward for their righteous acts; otherwise, what would the righteous be worth if their deeds of goodness were driven by the hope of being rewarded? Would they differ much from the selfish? Moreover, any person committing an act of goodness with the secret thought of being rewarded for it in the future, cannot expect to be rewarded at all. This idea of the Essenes was fully included in the New Testament. The Gospel of Matthew warned: "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:1).

"Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?" – questioned the confounded prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 12:1). And how can the dismal statement made by the Book of Job be understood? – that "man is born to trouble" (Job 5:7). Why is it that our earthly world is full of suffering and allows evil and injustice to triumph? Neither the Pharisees nor the Essenes were able to resolve these questions. These questions were answered only by Jesus, who preached that the dominance of evil in our material world is not accidental, but natural, and that this world was created for the sole purpose of testing the

human soul. Unlike the soul, the physical body of man does not mean anything to God, as it comes from the ash and then returns to it. The body is merely a temporary refuge for the soul, in which the latter must go through suffering and improve itself. It is not in vain that the biblical Book of Genesis warns man: "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return" (Genesis 3:19). Man's goal should be neither prosperity in his insignificant and short earthly life nor the preservation of his body, but rather the salvation of his soul for the Kingdom of God. But in order to get there, man must be righteous, and therefore suffer greatly in our world where evil dominates. It is no coincidence that the material world, created by the Almighty, was given to something the likes of a "prince" to rule till the time of the apocalypse. This force of darkness plays a special role in the temptation and suffering of human souls, for the Kingdom of God in itself cannot bring evil upon man. Admittedly, biblical authors paid attention to the fact that suffering is not necessarily brought upon man as punishment. Often, it is used as a means of uniting man with God, as only suffering forces the majority of people to seek the path to God. "As they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools" (Ps. 84:6).

In general, evolution of biblical thought on reward and retribution in a period of more than a thousand years led to the following conclusions. First, reward for man's good deeds and retribution for his evil ones undoubtedly comes. Secondly, reward or retribution may either come during man's earthly life or in the immaterial world, to which his immortal soul goes. Moreover, reward or retribution may catch up to one's soul after its reincarnation – that is, its return to the earthly world in a new body. Thirdly, the time of reward and retribution, and the way in which they are given are determined by God, whose intentions are incomprehensible to man. And finally, only the sinner's deep and sincere repentance can save him, completely or partially, from the inevitable punishment for his committed evil; on

the other hand, the slightest insincerity in one's repentance will only worsen the punishment.

Narrating the mournful fate of man on Earth, the biblical book "Ecclesiastes" comes to a disappointing conclusion: "it is better for one to be neither alive nor dead, but to have never come into our world – that is, to have never been born" (Ecc. 4:1-3).

The Ephemerality and Vanity of Man's Earthly Life

Calling man only "flesh, a passing breeze that does not return", biblical authors pointed to the other weak side of this flesh – the shortness of its days: "We finish our years with a moan. Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away" (Ps. 78:39; 90:9-10). The earthy lives of people are incredibly short: "The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more" (Ps.103:15-16). Moreover, material labor and one's life accumulations are also pointless. "Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure. Surely everyone goes around like a mere phantom; in vain they rush about, heaping up wealth without knowing whose it will finally be" (Ps. 39:5-6). Therefore, even the first authors of the Old Testament warned the wealthy and the strong that no amount of wealth and strength in the world would prevent their inevitable death and oblivion. "Those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches. No one can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for them—the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough—so that they should live on forever and not see decay. For all can see that the wise die, that the foolish and the senseless also perish, leaving their wealth to others. Their tombs will remain their houses forever, their dwellings for endless generations, though they had named lands after themselves. People, despite their wealth, do not endure; they are like the beasts that perish... Do not be overawed when others

grow rich, when the splendor of their houses increases; for they will take nothing with them when they die, their splendor will not descend with them” (Ps.49:6-12, 16-17). Already, early biblical authors called for man to not try to multiply his wealth, but to enrich himself with God. They believed that one should calmly regard the pursuit of material wealth: “Though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them” (Ps. 62:10). Instead, one should invest his heart into love for God. Jesus mentioned the same: “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions” (Luke 12:15).

Man cannot rely on his own strength and wealth, or even on those who possess power because they are of the same flesh as anyone else. “Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing” (Ps.146:3-4). Whatever power one may have, he cannot be an alternative to God and His capabilities, cannot be of help or joy, “for human help is worthless... Surely the lowborn are but a breath, the highborn are but a lie. If weighed on a balance, they are nothing; together they are only a breath” (Ps. 60:11; 62:9). As the biblical authors state, man can find salvation only in God. “Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge” (Ps. 62:8). Admittedly, following all of God’s commandments is not easy, as God puts a burden on us – biblical thought confesses – but He also saves us. Not believing in God and not following his commandments is craziness that, in the opinion of the Bible’s authors, is the main reason for man’s immoral conduct. If there is no God, then all morals come from man and can hence be easily neglected by him: “They say, ‘How would God know? Does the Most High know anything?’ This is what the wicked are like—always free of care, they go on amassing wealth” (Ps. 73:11-12). But godlessness will, sooner or later, lead man to perish. “Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you” (Ps. 73:27). Even if reward to the righteous and retribution to the sinners do not come until the end of their earthly

lives, then it does not matter: “I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked” (Ps. 84:10).

Not long before the beginning of the Common Era, the two most well-known religious schools of the Pharisees – Shammai and Hillel – argued for two and a half years over what would be best for man: to come into this world or to not. Notably, both of these schools came to a rather dismal conclusion: “It would have been preferable had man not been created than to have been created.” Admittedly, another conclusion that was just as interesting followed: “However, now that he has been created, he should examine his actions that he has performed and seek to correct them” (Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 13b:1).

Repentance Instead of Sacrifice

Being a way of expressing gratefulness to the gods in ancient times, animal sacrifice became a means of sin redemption in early Judaism. Admittedly, already during the United Monarchy (tenth century B.C.E.), the bearers of religious tradition – the Levites and Aaronites – understood the inadequacy and conditionality of animal sacrifice as a means of one’s sin redemption. In this regard, the psalm of King David – who suffered from guilt of having committed the crime against the first husband of his beloved wife Bathsheba – is of interest: “You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise” (Ps. 51:16-17). From this it is seen that even back then the redemption of the guilty was considered to be much more important than any animal sacrifice. The same could be said of one’s relationship with God. The first biblical authors gave preference to glorifying God, rather than performing animal sacrifice. “I will praise God’s name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving. This will please the Lord more than an ox, more than a bull with its horns and hooves” (Ps. 69:30-31). Jewish prophets of the First Temple Period (10th-6th centuries B.C.E.) took an even more radical position. They were completely opposed to any animal sacrifice,

demanding that it be replaced with prayer of redemption and adherence to God's commandments.

The prophet Micah questioned: "With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? (Micah 6:6-7). The prophet Isaiah likewise said that man's crimes cannot be redeemed by animal sacrifice – be it one or a thousand. Trying to deliver the will of God to his people, Isaiah gave them the following words: "The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?' says the Lord. 'I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats" (Isaiah 1:11). But what then did the prophet demand of his contemporaries? "Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow" (Isaiah 1:16-17). That is, sins must not be redeemed by animal sacrifice, but by righteousness and good deeds. The prophet Hosea similarly explained God's will: "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6). Jeremiah, a later prophet who witnessed the destruction of the First Temple, set to persuade the people that God wanted them not to perform animal sacrifice, but to follow his commandments (Jeremiah 7:22-23).

A famous biblical Book of Proverbs goes even further, declaring animal sacrifice to be that of the wicked – "The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him (Proverbs 15:8). In any case, the book believes: "To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice" (Proverbs 21:3).

Already in the first century B.C.E., the Pharisees preferred prayer and study of the Torah (Pentateuch) to any sacrifice in the Temple of Jerusalem. Moreover, they proceeded to create their own prayer houses – synagogues, which used prayer and the study of the Torah as an alternative to Temple sacrifices. As for the

Essenes, they did not participate in any sacrifice at all. Consequently, by the start of the Common Era, Judaism was gradually outliving the idea of sacrificing innocent animals for the sins of man. And when the Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E., Judaism became the first religion in the world that refused any kind of sacrifice, replacing it with prayer and man's redemption.

The Eschatological Reason for Enmity towards Israel

The Old Testament does not say a single word about the enmity of the people of the world towards Israel. On the contrary, the books of the Old Testament are full of statements that Jews' faith in one, all-mighty God attracted to them the neighboring peoples. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he chose for his inheritance." Therefore, "the nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham" (Pss. 33:11; 7:9). These sayings are very typical of early biblical literature. The authors of the Old Testament supposed, with good reason, that Israel, the only people in the ancient world who found the true God and remained faithful to Him in any circumstances, had something to be proud of among all the empires and kingdoms of that time. "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm" (Ps. 20:7-8).

The New Testament confirmed the special mission of the Jews, saying in the words of Christ that "salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22). However, the works of the New Testament, unlike the early biblical ones, divided the world into the material – the earthly world – and the immaterial – the kingdom of God. In man himself, the authors of the New Testament also saw two very unequal beginnings: the mortal body and the immortal soul. Furthermore, according to the New Testament's point of view, in our world of suffering, till its very end – the apocalypse, a special role belongs to a certain "prince", a sly tempter of the human race (John 14:30; 16:11). This prince of darkness, who was mentioned by Jesus, chose, out of all the people in the world, to take up arms primarily against the Jews.

And this is no coincidence: Israel was the first to find the path to God and accept His commandments. From the ranks of the Jewish people, came out Jesus Christ who became the Savior of the human race. It was the Jews who spread the idea of monotheism among the other peoples and thus gave rise to the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), practiced now by most of mankind. Israel became a tool, through which God spread His commandments among many peoples. But the convergence of humanity with the Creator's world and His moral limits the power of the prince of darkness; thus, Israel's special mission in our material world always evoked extreme enmity from Satan to this people. What's notable is that anti-Semitism emerged long before the birth of Jesus, back in ancient times, when the Jews began to preach the idea of monotheism to pagans. Therefore, the falsified accusation of the crucifixion of Christ was not a reason for, but an outcome of the then existing anti-Semitism in the ancient Greco-Roman world. Throughout the entire course of human history, the devil repeatedly tried to devastate Israel, and only God's intervention saved this people from utter annihilation. But while our earthly world of suffering exists and its rule, be it limited, is in the hands of the prince of darkness, the enmity towards the Jews will not disappear, and the attempts of Satan's servants to deal with this people will not stop. The end of the enmity towards the Jews will come only with the end of this darkness's rule – meaning, with the onset of the apocalypse in this material world. The true roots of anti-Semitism are, by nature, eschatological and lie in Israel's special relationship with God and in its enmity towards the Devil.