

## SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-01-06—PASSOVER SACRIFICE & CLEANSING

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Being clean before God is extremely important. The ancient Israelites were required to perform rituals to cleanse the tabernacle and temple as well as the altar and furniture; the priests and Levites<sup>1</sup>; land that was polluted by blood (murder)<sup>2</sup>; anyone who touched a dead person, animal, or 'creeping thing'<sup>3</sup>; soldiers after battle<sup>4</sup>; bodily discharges<sup>5</sup>; etc. God even required them to eat only certain clean animals<sup>6</sup>. Those who came before Him had to be clean in every respect.

But it went beyond the physical. In addition to the rituals, God also expected the ancient Israelites to cleanse their minds and hearts. He told them to “**distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean,**” (Lev. 10:10). Being clean meant KNOWING what is holy and unholy, clean and unclean. To do that requires examining one's inner thoughts of the mind and heart.

Being clean is especially important when keeping the Passover memorial sacrifice and it requires everyone to be exceptionally clean, which is a theme continued in the meaning behind the Days of Unleavened Bread that follow. But spiritual cleanliness is rarely emphasized when it comes to the Passover even though a primary purpose of the blood shed by Jesus Christ was CLEANSING:

EPHESIANS 5:25-27 ... Christ also loved the [ekklesia = called out ones] and gave Himself for her, 26 that **He might sanctify and cleanse her** with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious [ekklesia], not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but **that she should be holy and without blemish.**

So, what does it mean to be clean?

1 JOHN 1:7-9 But if we walk in the light as He [*God the Father*] is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and **the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.** 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He [*God the Father*] is faithful and just **to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

Cleanliness is synonymous with righteousness and sinlessness. But how can anyone be without sin? Verse 8 said that a person who thinks they are without sin is deceived (it is a sin of pride if nothing else). Without a doubt, it is not possible to be without sin in this life so only God can establish someone as clean:

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<sup>1</sup> Num. 8:5-22.

<sup>2</sup> Num. 35:33; Ezek. 39:11-16.

<sup>3</sup> Lev. 11:24-34.

<sup>4</sup> Num. 31:19.

<sup>5</sup> Lev. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Lev. 11:1-23.

ROMANS 4:6-8 just as David also describes the blessedness of the man **to whom God imputes righteousness** apart from works: 7 “Blessed *are those* whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And **whose sins are covered**; 8 Blessed *is the man* **to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.**”

Volumes could be written on the subject of being clean before God. But one cleansing ceremony was particularly significant: the cleansing of lepers. In the days of Jesus' ministry, lepers were often encountered. Healing lepers was even *proof* that Jesus was the Christ<sup>7</sup>. It was also part of the commission to the disciples:

MATTHEW 10:8 “**Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers** ...

Notice the distinction between HEALING the sick and CLEANSING the lepers. The Greek for 'healing' is *therapeuo*, which is the origin of *therapeutic* meaning the treatment and healing of disease. On the other hand, 'cleansing' is from the Greek *katharizo* from which *cathartic* is derived. That means to **cleanse by purging**. When it came to lepers, lepers are CLEANSED rather than healed. Even more interesting is that the Bible never requires a sick person to be cleansed—only lepers. To that end, there was a whole ceremony for cleansing a leper:

LEVITICUS 14:2-7 “This shall be **the law of the leper for the day of his cleansing**: He shall be brought to the priest. 3 “And the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall examine *him*; and indeed, *if* the leprosy is healed in the leper, 4 “then the priest shall command to take for him who is to be cleansed **two living and clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop**. 5 “And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water. 6 “As for the living bird, he shall take it, the cedar wood and the scarlet and the hyssop, and dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird *that was* killed over the running water. 7 “And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed from the leprosy, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose in the open field.

Subsequent verses list the additional requirements for trespass (guilt), sin, burnt, and grain offerings so the entire ceremony itself is quite involved. However, the cleansing ceremony has important connections with the Passover sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The components pertaining to cleansing are: 1) a bird that was killed, 2) a bird that was sprinkled with blood and released alive, 3) cedar wood, 4) scarlet material, 5) running water, and 6) an earthen vessel. Most important, these are exactly mirrored in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In the following, the leper cleansing ceremony is highlighted **gray** and the sacrifice of Jesus is **yellow**.

#### 1) **FIRST BIRD**

**Leper cleansing ceremony → First bird was killed:**

LEVITICUS 14:5 “... command that **one of the birds be killed** in an earthen vessel over running water.

**Sacrifice of Jesus → Jesus was killed:**

MATTHEW 27:22 Pilate said to them, “What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said to him, “**Let Him be crucified!**”

LUKE 23:46 And when Jesus had cried out [*on the cross*] with a loud voice, He said, “Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit.’ “ Having said this, **He breathed His last.**”

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<sup>7</sup> Luke 7:22.

## 2) SECOND BIRD

*Leper cleansing ceremony → Second bird was dipped in the blood of the first bird and released alive:*

LEVITICUS 14:6-7 “As for the **living bird**, he shall take it, the cedar wood and the scarlet and the hyssop, and **dip** them and the living bird **in the blood of the bird that was killed** over the running water. 7 “And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed from the leprosy, and shall pronounce him clean, and **shall let the living bird loose** in the open field.

*Sacrifice of Jesus → A prisoner was released from a death sentence. All repentant sinners are covered in the blood of Jesus:*

MATTHEW 27:16, 21, 26 And at that time they had **a notorious prisoner called Barabbas**. ... 21 The governor answered and said to them, “**Which of the two do you want me to release to you?**” They said, “**Barabbas!**” ... 26 Then **he released Barabbas** to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered *Him* to be crucified.

1 PETER 1:2 [*The*] elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and **sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ**: ...

## 3) CEDAR WOOD

*Leper cleansing ceremony → Cedar wood was dipped in the blood of the first bird:*

LEVITICUS 14:6 “As for the living bird, he shall take it, the **cedar wood** and the scarlet and the hyssop, and **dip them** and the living bird **in the blood of the bird that was killed** over the running water.

*Sacrifice of Jesus →: Jesus died on a wooden cross possibly made of cedar upon which He shed His blood:*

1 PETER 2:24 who Himself [*Jesus*] bore our sins in **His own body on the tree** ...

a) NOTE: Cedar trees grow 130 feet and live for 2,000 years. They are valued for their beauty, fragrance, and durability. Cedar trees were also in the garden in Eden (Ezek. 31:8).

## 4) SCARLET MATERIAL

*Leper cleansing ceremony → Scarlet material was dipped in the blood of the first bird:*

LEVITICUS 14:6 “As for the living bird, he shall take it, the cedar wood and the **scarlet** and the hyssop, and **dip them** and the living bird **in the blood of the bird that was killed** over the running water.

*Sacrifice of Jesus → The soldiers put a scarlet robe on Jesus while He was bleeding after the scourging:*

JOHN 19:1-2 So then Pilate took Jesus and **scourged Him**. 2 And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put *it* on His head, and they **put on Him a [scarlet] robe**.

## 5) HYSSOP

*Leper cleansing ceremony → Hyssop was dipped in the blood of the first bird:*

LEVITICUS 14:6 “As for the living bird, he shall take it, the cedar wood and the scarlet and the **hyssop**, and **dip them** and the living bird **in the blood of the bird that was killed** over the running water.

**Sacrifice of Jesus → Hyssop soaked in sour wine (representing blood) was offered to Jesus:**

JOHN 19:29 Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they **filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth.**

## 6) BLOOD & WATER

**Leper cleansing ceremony → The first bird was killed and its blood drained over running water:**

LEVITICUS 14:5 “... **one of the birds be killed** in an earthen vessel **over running water.**

**Sacrifice of Jesus → Blood and water came out of Jesus when He was pierced:**

JOHN 19:34 But one of the soldiers pierced His [*Jesus*'] side with a spear, and immediately **blood and water came out.**

## 7) EARTHEN VESSEL

**Leper cleansing ceremony → The first bird was killed IN an earthen vessel:**

LEVITICUS 14:5 “... **one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel** over running water.

**Sacrifice of Jesus → Jesus was IN an earthly body when He was killed:**

1 CORINTHIANS 15:47 The first **man was of the earth**, earthy; the second Man is the Master from heaven.

JOHN 1:14 And **the Word became flesh** and dwelt among us ...

By the blood of Jesus Christ we are CLEANSED, whereby God imputes His righteousness to us. Though we should be striving to be clean each and every day, the Passover is a time to be clean above all others.

EZRA 6:19-20 And the sons of the exile performed the **Passover** on the fourteenth *day* of the first new *moon*, 20 for **the priests and the Levites had cleansed themselves – all of them were clean.** And they slew the Passover for all the sons of the exile, and for their brothers the priests, and for themselves.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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