

To Cleanse a Leper

God gave the Israelites specific instructions for purification from certain “uncleanesses.” These include purification from Leprosy, contact with the dead, male or female discharge, “seed of copulation,” and childbirth. Some purifications were simple, such as the purification from “seed of copulation,” while others were elaborate, like the purification from Leprosy.

The laws of purification served a practical purpose in keeping Israel free of infectious disease and also taught spiritual lessons. One such spiritual lesson can be seen in the cleansing of leprosy.

The Purification

In ancient times, leprosy was looked upon as a symbol of sin. Here is an insightful comment:

“Of all diseases known in the East, leprosy was most dreaded. Its incurable and contagious character, and its horrible effect upon its victims, filled the bravest with fear. Among the Jews, it was regarded as a judgment on account of sin, and hence was called “the stroke,” “the finger of God.” Deep-rooted, ineradicable, deadly, it was looked upon as a symbol of sin. By the ritual law, the leper was pronounced unclean. Like one already dead, he was shut out from the habitations of men. Whatever he touched was unclean. The air was polluted by his breath. One who was suspected of having the disease must present himself to the priests, who were to examine and decide his case. If pronounced a leper, he was isolated from his family, cut off from the congregation of Israel, and was doomed to associate with those only who were similarly afflicted. The law was inflexible in its requirement. Even kings and rulers were not exempt. A monarch who was attacked by this terrible disease must yield up the scepter and flee from society.”—*Desire of Ages*, pg. 262.

As sinners are cut off from the family and communion of heaven, likewise the lepers were cut off from their family and community. If a leper thought he was free from leprosy, he could not enter Jewish society again unless he was first inspected by the priests and participated in the ritual purification required. It was this cleansing that Christ referenced when He told the ten lepers, “Go shew yourselves unto the priest” (*Luke 17:14*).

We can find the requirements for this purification in *Leviticus 14*.

“And the priest shall go forth out of the camp; and the priest shall look, and, behold, if the plague of leprosy be healed in the leper; Then shall the priest command to take for him that is to be cleansed two birds alive and clean, and cedar wood, and scarlet, and hyssop: And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water. . .”—*Leviticus 14:3-5*.

Though the leper may have felt he was cured, he could not re-enter Jewish society until the priest inspected him outside the camp. If the plague was not healed, he had to remain outside the camp—but if the plague was healed, then he could begin the purification ritual by bringing two birds. These would have been the acceptable sacrifices of pigeons or turtledoves. One of these birds was to be killed in an earthen vessel over running water.

The light of the knowledge of the glory of God is seen in the face of Jesus Christ, and indeed He who is from above and above all came into the world in an earthen vessel. His divinity is represented by the bird—His humanity by the earthen vessel. Christ came to share our sorrows, temptations, and griefs. He was from above, but His divinity was veiled from sight in humanity. He was to be killed over running water, that is, in fulfillment of the word of God. The water symbolizes the word of God (*Ephesians 5:26*), and the movement symbolizes the word of God in action. Christ is the fulfillment of every promise that God has given. He is the Amen.

“For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.”—*2 Corinthians 1:20*.

The promise of salvation was given to mankind with the words:

“I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”—*Genesis 3:15*.

Though the promise seemed to linger for nearly four thousand years, it was fulfilled exactly when God said it would be. The promises of God know no haste and no delay.

“As for the living bird, he shall take it, and

2 the cedar wood, and the scarlet, and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water. . .”—*Leviticus 14:6*.

Scarlet Wool and Hyssop

The other materials used in the cleansing of the leper; the cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop, have spiritual significance too. The cedar speaks of the divine majesty of Christ, whose principles were as lofty as heaven and as unbending as the cedar. The Hebrew word for cedar is derived from the stubborn persistence and resilience of its roots. The imagery of roots depicts a relationship built upon trust. Jesus spoke of a group of His followers that had no root. He taught that when tribulation, persecution, or a time of temptation came upon this group, they would leave the faith (Matthew 13:20-21, Mark 4:16-17, Luke 8:13). It was not so with Christ. The faith of Christ remained stubbornly rooted in the words and power of His Father in every situation. Isaiah records:

“The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.”—*Isaiah 50:5-7*.

Even unto death, He was faithful, and in death His faith and perfect obedience were rewarded. They slew the body but could not destroy the root. Christ prophesied of His resilience in these words:

“Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”—*John 2:19*.

In all things Christ is our example; the leprosy of sin can only be cured if we are rooted in the promises of God. Our faith in our Saviour and His words must be stubborn and resilient. The leprosy of sin can only be cleansed through the power of God unto salvation.

Scarlet woolen thread was used in the cleansing of the leper. Scarlet came from the Kermes vermilio, a worm in the Mediterranean region. The life-cycle of the mother teaches us a lesson about salvation. Before the mother lays her eggs, she attaches herself to a specific type of tree. She then creates a crimson shell around herself. She lays her eggs and protects them with her own body. When the eggs hatch, the babies feed on their mother’s body for three days. During this time, crimson dye oozes from her. This dye permanently stains the baby grubs and the tree’s bark where she gives her life. The grubs are pre-

pared to face the world after the third day. By the fourth day, her body has lost its crimson color, her tail has pulled up to her head, forming a heart, and she has transformed into a snow-white, waxy substance that flakes off and falls to the ground.

Christ gave His body to protect and nourish His children. If it were not for His sacrifice, none of us would ever live. He says:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.”—*John 6:53-56*.

The apostle tells us that Christ has been slain as our passover. He protects us with His own body and blood from the destroying angel. It is by eating His flesh and drinking His blood that we receive life.

The wool symbolizes the righteousness of Christ; it is dyed crimson to symbolize His self-sacrificing love. This was then spun into a thread. This scarlet thread was used in the cleansing of the leper. It symbolized that our severed connection to the family of heaven was restored through the righteousness and self-sacrificing love of Jesus.

In the sacrificial services, there were only two acceptable methods of applying blood to its uses—the priest’s finger or a sprig of hyssop. The offerer was not permitted to apply the blood, except on the Passover, and only with a sprig of hyssop. The Hebrew word *Ezob* (hyssop) has an interesting Semitic root. It is based on an old Canaanite root meaning “from times of old” or “ancient times.” It is associated with recalling ancient times or memories. The application of blood with hyssop would cleanse the offerer of their sinful history, but more can be learned. The blood must be applied by the finger of Him whom the priest typified, the finger of Him who has been “from of old.”

“But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”—*Micah 5:2*.

Christ is the only priest who has been from of old. The one afflicted by the leprosy of sin must have more than a man as a mediator, more than the blood of bulls and of goats to be cleansed. Christ, the everlasting Priest, must apply His own blood with His own hand. The spotless righteousness of Christ, the Lamb slain from the

foundation of the earth, is the only atonement that can suffice for the spiritual leper. Christ's blood, applied by His finger, is able to cleanse not only Heaven's records, but the conscience of sin. The hyssop is noted by Solomon (1 Kings 4:33) for its ability to spring out of places most unfavorable to life. So also, He who has been from of old, from everlasting, sprung forth "As a root out of dry ground." Isaiah 53:2. He was not attractive to the carnal heart, but His life was given for the healing of the nations.

The cedar, scarlet wool, and hyssop are dipped, with the living bird, into the blood of the bird that was killed in a jar over running water. The blood is also sprinkled upon the leper seven times:

"And he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose into the open field."—*Leviticus 14:7*.

Christ came from heaven to dwell in an earthen vessel of flesh. He died in fulfillment of the promises of God's word. Whosoever will lay hold upon His merits with stubborn, resilient faith, eating His flesh and drinking His blood, accepting the soul cleansing work of the finger of Him who has been from everlasting, will be free. Free from sin, free to grow into the image of Christ, free to enter the community of heaven, free to be a child of God.

"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."—*John 8:36*.

The Second Cleansing

After the ritual for purification was complete, the leper was allowed inside the congregation, but he must remain outside his own tent for a probationary period of seven days. On the seventh day, he would shave off all his hair, even his eyebrows, wash his clothes, and bathe. Then, on the eighth day, he would present another sacrifice, and he would be allowed into his tent. The sacrifice on the eighth day consisted of three lambs, two males and one female, and three tenth deals of fine flour mingled with oil as a meat offering and close to a half liter of olive oil.

Shaving

Shaving has many meanings in the Bible, The most applicable is seen when Job lost everything:

"Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."—*Job 1:20-21*.

Job shaved himself as a sign of his nakedness.

This symbolic act testified that he was hiding **3** nothing from God or man. Paul supports this concept when he speaks of a woman's hair in 1 Corinthians 11:15.

"But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering."

Hair is a covering, and the spiritual leper must come before God without a covering; only then could he truly be pronounced clean.

"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."—*Hebrews 4:12-13*.

Hypocrites cannot stand before the eye of God, for He sees the nakedness of the soul. Those who seek to hide their secret sins from God will never be cleansed of their spiritual leprosy. The ministers of the Temple of God were also required to come before God without a covering:

"Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them. And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purifying upon them, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean."—*Numbers 8:6-7*.

Let no man deceive himself;

"For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known." "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."—*Luke 12:2, Proverbs 28:13*.

One male lamb was offered as a trespass offering, then the sin offering and burnt offerings were offered. Only the trespass offering was required to be a male lamb. The sin offering and burnt offering were either the specified lambs, or two turtle doves if the leper was poor. The sin offering and burnt offering were offered as they normally would be, but the trespass offering had a unique ceremony.

"And the priest shall take some of the blood of the trespass offering, and the priest shall put it upon the tip of the right ear of him that is to be cleansed, and upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the great toe of his right foot: And the priest shall take some of the log of oil, and pour it into the palm of his own left hand: And the priest shall dip his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand, and shall sprinkle of the oil with his finger seven times before the LORD: And of the rest of the oil that is in

4 his hand shall the priest put upon the tip of the right ear of him that is to be cleansed, and upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the great toe of his right foot, upon the blood of the trespass offering: And the remnant of the oil that is in the priest's hand he shall pour upon the head of him that is to be cleansed: and the priest shall make an atonement for him before the LORD."—*Leviticus 14:14-18*.

The blood of the sacrifice is put upon the ear of the leper, cleansing it from all the times it was closed to the commands of God. Blood is put on the thumb of the right hand, cleansing the hands from all the wicked works they have performed. Blood is put upon the big toe, cleansing the feet from the wicked ways that they have walked in. The application of the blood of the offering to the ear, thumb, and toe only appears elsewhere in the dedication of the priests in *Leviticus 8:23-24*.

Then the priest pours some of the oil in his hand and sprinkles it before the Lord seven times. The ear of the cleansed leper is anointed with oil, opening it to hear the still small voice that says, "This is the way, walk ye in it." —*Isaiah 30:21*. The right thumb of the cleansed leper is anointed with oil, empowering him through the Holy Spirit to do the works of his Heavenly Father. The big toe of the right foot is anointed with oil, from henceforth the cleansed leper will walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh (*Galatians 5:16*). The oil covers the blood of the trespass offering already placed upon the leper, for it is through the blood of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit that the spiritual leper is at last cleansed. The remaining oil is poured out on the head of the leper, an act only done when one was set apart, especially as a priest or king.

This purification ritual, from beginning to end, pictures the work of salvation. Jesus came from heaven into an earthen vessel, with stubborn persistence and perfect obedience, He offered His own life for sinners. He takes the unclean, dying outcasts of heaven, and nourishes, strengthens, and feeds them with His own body and blood. Through the mediation of Him who has been from of old, their connection to heaven is re-established, and they are cleansed from their wicked thoughts, works, and ways. Then He opens their ears to hear His voice and He gives them power to do His works and walk in His ways. Anointing their heads as His priests, He draws them into heavenly places, into His very presence, and onto

His throne.

"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."—*Revelation 3:21*.

For all eternity, they remain closer to Him than before they became outcasts.

"Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."—*Revelation 1:5-6*.

"By His life and His death, Christ has achieved even more than recovery from the ruin wrought through sin. It was Satan's purpose to bring about an eternal separation between God and man; but in Christ we become more closely united to God than if we had never fallen. In taking our nature, the Saviour has bound Himself to humanity by a tie that is never to be broken. Through the eternal ages He is linked with us. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son." *John 3:16*. He gave Him not only to bear our sins, and to die as our sacrifice; He gave Him to the fallen race. To assure us of His immutable counsel of peace, God gave His only-begotten Son to become one of the human family, forever to retain His human nature. This is the pledge that God will fulfill His word. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder." God has adopted human nature in the person of His Son, and has carried the same into the highest heaven. It is the "Son of man" who shares the throne of the universe. It is the "Son of man" whose name shall be called, "Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." *Isaiah 9:6*. The I AM is the Daysman between God and humanity, laying His hand upon both. He who is "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," is not ashamed to call us brethren. *Hebrews 7:26; 2:11*. In Christ the family of earth and the family of heaven are bound together. Christ glorified is our brother. Heaven is enshrined in humanity, and humanity is enfolded in the bosom of Infinite Love."—*Desire of Ages*, pg. 25.

Praise God for His unspeakable gift!

For a finished work

Jonathan Taylor

Wisdom is justified of all her children. -Luke 7:35

More Food for the Little Flock —