

THE LEPROUS MESSIAH, OR, THE  
RESURRECTION OF JESUS IN OLD TESTAMENT SYMBOL

## Introduction

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One of the first things that becomes apparent to the searcher of the Old Testament prophecies is the precision and detailed information which they present. In the prophecies that deal with the nature, life, and work of the promised Messiah, this is particularly true, as in seem when one compares the records of what Jesus said and did, in the New Testament, with what was predicted in the Old Testament; both explicitly and through ceremony and symbol. It is the fact of this precision and detail in the Old Testament prophetic passages and symbols that is the milieu of the questions which this paper is seeking to answer.

Many readers of Scripture, who have been impressed with the importance of Jesus resurrection as it is presented by the writers of the New Testament in such verses as Rom. 1:4 where Paul says of Jesus, "And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead", or the witness of Peter when he writes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to this abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3), etc., are also aware that the Old Testament is not often understood as clearly predicting His resurrection, in spite of the fact the Old Testament is characterized by its detailed Messianic portrayals; both explicitly in prophecy and symbolically through ceremony.

When this writer became aware of this apparent lack in the messianic passages of the Old Testament two questions came to mind; is the resurrection of Jesus really not portrayed there, or, have we but failed to recognize it? Therefore it was with great interest and excitement that I read the following words in the writings of Mrs. White: "The wonderful symbol of the living bird dipped in the blood of the bird slain and then set free in its joyous life, is to us the symbol of the atonement. There were death and life blended, presenting to the searcher for truth the hidden treasure, the union of the pardoning blood with the resurrection and life of our Redeemer."<sup>2</sup> So, the resurrection of Jesus is presented, in symbol, in the Old Testament! But certain questions crowd themselves into one's mind. The writer said, "To the searcher for truth" and atonement and the resurrection of Jesus was here presented. This means the presence of the resurrection of the Savior in symbol is 'seeable' by all of us;

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<sup>1</sup> \_\_\_\_\_.

<sup>2</sup> Letter 87 (1894), quoted in Francis D. Nichol, et al., The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Vol. I. (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1954), p. 1111.

not just by a prophet of God through revelation. But how can a few verses (5) out of a chapter (57 verses) that deals with the ceremony for cleansing a person or a house cured of leprosy, be a recognizable symbol of the resurrection of the Messiah? By what process of thought can one see in these verses a record of a ritual that proleptically portrayed the resurrection of the promised Messiah? And no less significantly we might ask, by what association of ideas might the Hebrew people have been enabled to find this great truth? In other words, what hermeneutic enables one to see the resurrection of Jesus in this passage? The answers to these questions constitute the purpose and aim of this paper.

As we take up this study we will begin by looking at leprosy, and noting how religious writers usually treat it. In chapter two we will look quickly at leprosy in the Old Testament. Chapter three will deal with leprosy in Rabbinic Judaism, while chapter four, growing out of chapter three, will be a study of the significance of the word Nahgag in Isa. 53:4. The 5<sup>th</sup> chapter will be an attempt to set forth the message of Lev. 14:4-8 in the light of the findings of this paper.

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CHAPTER 1

Leprosy is generally connected with sin

Not much is known of the origin or cure of leprosy. The disease was known in Egypt in olden times. It was probably there that the children of Abraham first came into contact with it.<sup>3</sup> "Leprosy was corrosive, and penetrated almost unfelt and unseen until it blossomed in ulcers and raw flesh, and wasted away parts of the body."<sup>4</sup> Sometimes years elapsed between the first appearance of the disease and its full development. "Sometimes the symptoms would nearly disappear and give hope of recovery, only to reappear and become more active than ever. In advanced stages the person presented a loathsome sight. The nose and fingers might drop off, the eyelids disappear, the sight completely vanish, and the sufferer look more like an apparition than a living being."<sup>5</sup> "His voice became a grunt, his breath unbearable, his contorted joints buried in or completely dislocated by tubercles, and his body covered by blue-black or leaden-colored patches of raw flesh where the disease had not yet completed its work. The affliction spread until it reached some vital organ, and then culminated in the death of the victim."<sup>6</sup> Leprosy is not generally a specifically painful disease,<sup>7</sup> but the dread and horror of it must have had affect on the life of the afflicted one long before the disease advanced to its final stages; it must also have had affect on those who were made aware of its existence. "Of all diseases known in the East the leprosy was most dreaded. Its incurable and contagious character, and its horrid effect on its victims, filled the bravest with fear."<sup>8</sup> Thus we realize how meaningful must have been God's promise to the Jews to put none of the diseases of Egypt among them if they obeyed Him. (Ex. 15:26.) "If the Israelites had manifested a spirit of submission to God's wise prohibitions, he would have removed from them everything injurious to their health, and would have suffered no sickness to be among them."<sup>9</sup> "God

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<sup>3</sup> BC I, 761.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 768.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 761.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 762.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 768.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1940), p. 262.

<sup>9</sup> Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol, 4, a (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1945), p. 124.

expressly commanded the children of Israel not to eat swine's flesh, ...It would fill the system with humors, and in the warm climate often produced leprosy."<sup>10</sup>

The fact that leprosy did appear among the Israelites after the conditional promise of EX. 15:26 was made, would seem to indicate that the presence of leprosy was evidence of their not obeying God; possibly in regard to the prohibition against using swine's flesh for food.

An implicit connection between leprosy and disobedience of God's commandments appears in the Spirit of Prophecy occasionally; as for example the statement quoted above. An explicit connection is drawn when the word leprosy is used as a type for sin – rather than as a designation of the physical disease. The following is an example of this type of statement:

1. Sin spread abroad in the earth like a deadly leprosy. PP 82
2. Sin is corrupting in its nature. One man infected with its deadly leprosy may communicate the taint to thousands. 2BC 996
3. But their deeds were tainted by the leprosy of selfishness and covetousness. 4BC 1149
4. Bid sinner look to Christ who alone can heal the soul leprous with sin. 6T 279
5. The presence of Christ manifest among us, would cure the leprosy of unbelief that had made our service so weak and inefficient. 8T 46
6. Ignorance, pleasure loving, and sinful habits, corrupting soul, body, and spirit, make the world full of moral leprosy; .... AH 329
7. What is the cure of the leprosy of strife and dissention? Obedience to the commandments of God. 2SM 160
8. Those for whom you labor are your brethren in distress, suffering from physical disorders and the spiritual leprosy of sin. 4T 568
9. How few make this truth, that only through faith in the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ there is forgiveness of the sins that cling to human beings like the foul leprosy, a living reality. 1SM 107

We know that at times some of the Jews were using pork for food, but we don't know how early the Jews began to use it. Pork was widely used for food in the ancient world, but prohibited as unclean

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<sup>10</sup> SG IVa, 124, 146.

for food in Lev. 11:7; Deut. 14:8.<sup>11</sup> Isaiah rebukes the Jews for eating pork in Isa. 65:4, and 66:17, and notes that those who eat swines flesh will be destroyed by the Lord when evil is destroyed.<sup>12</sup> Not only were God's people not to eat swines flesh, but they were not to traffic in hogs to make a profit. Regarding Luke 8:26-40 Mrs. White writes, Christ "allowed the evil spirits to destroy the herds of swine as a rebuke to those Jews who were raising these unclean beasts for the sake of gain".<sup>13</sup>

When a man was suspected of having leprosy he was taken to the priest who examined him, and if according to a diagnosis based on God's directions, he was found to have leprosy, he was pronounced unclean. "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, command the children of Israel, that they put out of the camp every leper,..." (Num. 5:1, 2.) "And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, unclean, unclean." (Lev. 13:45.)

Girdlestone sees this designation of leprosy as unclean to be a contrast to the fact that "One of the essential attributes of God is His purity. This truth is constantly set forth in Scripture, both in plain declarations and also in symbolic representations. He then adds, "The ideal condition of man is to be godlike, that is, to be pure and unpolluted in heart, and deed. But he fails to live up to this ideal. There is a fearful gulf between the purity of the Divine Being and that defilement which is, in greater or lesser degree, and sad inheritance of every child of Adam. How is this gulf to be spanned? Who is it that can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? 'If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean, yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch' (Job 9:30, 31). 'Though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord God' (Jer. 2:22). But what man cannot do, God Himself has done, according to the Scriptures. He has opened a fountain for sin and for uncleanness."<sup>14</sup> In this passage Dr. Girdlestone is identifying purity with God and Godlikeness. He is also associating 'unpurity' with uncleanness – that which befalls all of Adam's children – and when in this context he notes that leprosy was marked as uncleanness he is saying that leprosy is associated with sin. Von Rad concurs when he notes that behind the rites of purification for leprosy "lies as an unexpressed

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<sup>11</sup> Siegfried H. Horn, "Swine", Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary, Vol. VIII of the Seventh-day Adventist Commentary Reference Series, ed. by Don F. Neufeld (10 vols.; Washington D.C.: Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1953-1966), p. 1052.

<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 66:17.

<sup>13</sup> Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy (Mountain View California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), p. 515.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Baker Girdlestone, Synonyms of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1897 (p. 142f.)

though basic presupposition the idea that there was a very close connection between sin and physical disease".<sup>15</sup> Harrison makes the same connection when in reference to leprosy he writes, "Its incidence was regarded as an act of God, and in consequence the healing of the leper was invariable interpreted as a miracle of divine grace".<sup>16</sup> This same thought is expressed in The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Savior where a girl is said to be cleansed of leprosy by having part of the bath water from the baby Jesus poured over her.<sup>17</sup> The S.D.A.B.C. also compares leprosy and sin; "Toward the last the leper was a specter of death, and illustrated in a graphic manner the wages of sin. For this reason leprosy has throughout the ages been considered, among both Jewish and Christian commentators, a symbol of sin and its results."<sup>18</sup> "...Leprosy was not specifically painful, but the dread and horror of it must have vitally affected the whole life of the sufferer. In like manner sin may not be felt so keenly, and a man may hardly be conscious of its malignant nature. Leprosy was corrosive and penetrated almost unfelt and unseen until it blossomed in ulcers and raw flesh, and wasted away parts of the body. So sin also eats out all spiritual life and beauty, even though outwardly there may be no striking evidence of the condition with in. Finally the disease broken forth externally, and the man became a living skeleton, a mass of loathsome corruption. So sin at last comes to fruition, until the image of God in man is practically obliterated. As Leprosy ended in death, so sin ends in death. It would seem, therefore, that leprosy is a disease especially adapted to typify sin in its various features as no other malady could."<sup>19</sup>

This association of the uncleanness of leprosy with the uncleanness of sin is expressed most clearly by Stewart and Baith when they write, "The leper was a striking emblem of the polluted soul; and the great general lesson taught by the cleansing of the healed leper is the method by which the polluted soul is made clean in the sight of God".<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Gerhard Von Rad, Old Testament Theology (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), I, 275.

<sup>16</sup> R.K. Harrison, "Leprosy," The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible, ed. By George Arthur Buttrick, et al. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962) III, 113.

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951), VIII, 408, 411.

<sup>18</sup> BC I, 768.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Alexander Stewart and Alexander Baith, The Mosaic Sacrifices (Edinburg: Macniven & Wallace, 1883), p. 219f.

## CHAPTER II

### Leprosy in the Old Testament

This identification which connects leprosy with sin is the result of the physical symptoms of leprosy, as has been noted. It is also the result of exegetical implications that connect leprosy and sin; a point which will be studied later in this paper. We now wish to examine the hypothesis that the uncleanness of leprosy is a constituent element of sin in the Old Testament.

When Miriam, the first woman called a prophetess in Scripture, sinned against God<sup>21</sup> by murmuring, "...the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow:..." (Num. 12:10). When Moses interceded for her she was healed but not allowed to re-enter the camp for seven days;<sup>22</sup> the period of time required for one healed of leprosy in Numb. 14.

Again we read of the experience of Gehazi, who has been associated with Elisha for several years, being smitten with leprosy as a result of his sin. This sad experience is summarized in 2 Kings 5:27: "The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed forever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow."

In regards to the experience of Uzziah we read: "Under ordinary circumstances only the priests were allowed to enter the Temple, and only they were permitted to offer incense on the golden altar before the veil (see Num. 18:1-7). Uzziah was guilty of presumption in his attempt to assume this sacred priestly prerogative."<sup>23</sup> When he was rebuked by the priests he became very angry. "But he was not permitted to profane the sanctuary against the united protest of those in authority. While standing there, in wrathful rebellion, he was suddenly smitten with a divine judgment. Leprosy appeared on his forehead."<sup>24</sup> "...And they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hastened also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him. And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord: and Jotham his son was over the kings house, judging the people of the land" (2Chron. 26:20, 21). The S.D.A. Bible Commentary writes in regard to this experience: "The record of Uzziah's leprosy shows that quarantine was imposed on a

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<sup>21</sup> Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1958), p. 384f.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 385.

<sup>23</sup> BC III, 284.

<sup>24</sup> Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings (Mountain view, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1917), p. 304.



victim who contracted the disease, and that even a king was required to submit to enforced isolation during life and was given a separate burial when he died.”<sup>25</sup>

These three accounts from Old Testament Scripture set forth clearly that sometimes particularly overt acts of sin against God were punished immediately by the person in rebellion being smitten with leprosy. They also set forth, in the story of Miriam, that the result of one’s sins (sickness) can be healed and person cleansed, thereby becoming one of the covenant people again.

Dr. Girdlestone notes that the word which is in general use in Old Testament to express the process of cleansing from ceremonial impurity is thaher. This word signifies “in the intensive form, to make clear, bright, or shining, and hence to make or pronounce clean”.<sup>26</sup> As a ceremonial word for purification thaher appears repeatedly, including: Gen 7:2, 8; 8:20; Lev 2:25, where it is used to distinguish the clean animals from the unclean; Ezra 6:20 to express the cleansing of the priests and Levites, and it also appears in regard to the gates and walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 12:30; 13:9, 22, 30), and the land (Eze. 39: 12, 14, 16). In the Psalms and the Prophets the word has added a moral or spiritual emphasis though the concept of cleansing is still present: Ps. 12:6 reads, “The words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried in an earthen furnace, purified seven times”. In Ps. 51, verses 2, 7, and 10, David prays to be washed by the Lord in order that he may be clean from his sin. This association of cleansing and the removal of sin is again present in Jer. 33:8 where we read, “I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me: ...”, and Eze. 36:25, “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you”. “Thus saith the Lord God; In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities ....” And finally Eze. 37:23 “...but I will save them out of all their dwelling places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them”.<sup>27</sup>

The word translated ‘cleanse’ in these passages (thaher) is the same word that appears in Lev. 14:7 where Scripture notes of a leper who has been healed, that at the proper time the priest “shall pronounce him clean”. Thus we have seen that the word which is used in pronouncing a thing or person clean, whether it is an animal, a priest, a city gate, land, a leper, or a forgiven sinner, is the same Hebrew word, thaher. This means that the linking of the uncleanness of leprosy with the uncleanness of sin, by

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<sup>25</sup> BC II, 86.

<sup>26</sup> Girdlestone, p. 145.

<sup>27</sup> Taken partly from Girdlestone, p. 144f.

religious writers is an Old Testament principle, where the uncleanness of leprosy and the uncleanness of sin are both made clean by a process which is called in Hebrew, thaher.

## CHAPTER III

### Leprosy in Rabbinic Judaism

Buchler writes, “God purges by punishments the sins of Judah and the guilty individuals, and in His mercy cleanses the offenses of the people in preparation for Israel’s restoration”.<sup>28</sup> Edersheim notes rabbinism loved to trace disease to moral causes. They had some favorite clichés regarding sin and sickness such as the following: ‘No death without sin, and no pain without transgression’;<sup>29</sup> ‘the sick is not healed, till all his sins are forgiven’.<sup>30</sup> He then adds, “These are oft-repeated sayings; but, when closely examined, they are not quite so spiritual as they sound. For, first, they represent a reaction against the doctrine of original sin, in the sense that if it is not the fall of man, but one’s actual transgression, to which disease and death are to be traced according to the saying: ‘not the serpent kills, but sin’.<sup>31</sup> Dr. Edersheim then writes, “The story, of which this saying is the moral, is that of the crushing of a serpent by the great miracle-monger Chanina ben Dosa, without his being hurt. But I cannot help feeling that a double entendre is here intended – on the one hand, that even a serpent could not hurt one like Chanina, and, on the other, the wider bearing on the real cause of death: not our original state, but our actual sin.”<sup>32</sup> Dr. Edersheim then adds that the real unspirituality of such phrases becomes most clear when we remember how special diseases were traced to particular sins by the Rabbis. He notes as an example that childlessness and leprosy, which were described as chastisements which procured for the afflicted one forgiveness of his sins, were also designated as being different from other afflictions, in that they could not be regarded as the result of love, nor were they to be received in love.<sup>33</sup>

“Of the various attitudes of men to visitation the ideal one is submission in humility to the chastisements inflicted by God’s decree without murmuring and criticism, the recognition of God as just in inflicting the gravest calamity or loss, and of the visitation as fully deserved and as a sign of His love, sent to purge man from sin and to prepare him for paradise.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> A. Buchler, Studies in Sin and Atonement (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1967), p. 459.

<sup>29</sup> Shabb. 55a.

<sup>30</sup> Nedar. 41.

<sup>31</sup> Ber. 33a, quoted in Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, N.D.), I 494.

<sup>32</sup> Edersheim, I, 494, fn. #1.

<sup>33</sup> cf. Ber 5b, Edersheim, I, 494.

<sup>34</sup> Buchler, p. 458.

The purpose of this purging is made clear in the footnotes on a strange passage<sup>35</sup> that reads: “R. Hamnuna said: Yea, even with those of whom it is written, and ye are My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, are men – Adam (Eze. xxxiv, 31),<sup>36</sup> they are not plagued. Therefore did Moses warn Israel, when ye are come into the land of Canaan ...and I put the plague of leprosy in a house of the land of your possession, etc.” The footnotes I have indicated are located where they are placed in the Midrash. The footnote, that I have designated number 36, reads, “I.e. the wicked are not visited by the plagues which Scripture says are to be visited upon Israel. These plagues are sent on Israelites to purge them of their sins. The wicked ones described are not visited with such punishments; they are kept sound for the day of judgement.”<sup>37</sup> Footnote number 4 adds, “Israel were as it were promised their punishments, and were thus assured that they would not have to bear their sins till the very end – they would rather pay the penalties for them as they went on, and the penalties would thus not be allowed to accumulate.”<sup>38</sup>

This doctrine of ‘personal retribution’ permeates rabbinism, even to the extent that a Rabbi may list the sins that are punished by a particular disease. In the case of leprosy Rabbi Johanan said: “All these are punished by leprosy, (i) Haughty eyes, (ii) A lying tongue, (iii) hand that shed innocent blood, (iv) A heart that deviseth wicked thoughts, (v) Feet that are swift in running to evil, (vi) a false witness that breatheth out lies, (vii) he that soweth discard among brethren”<sup>39</sup>

God is also seen by the Rabbis as using leprosy to benefit His people. At the time of the Exodus God is said to have put the leprosy on the house of a Canaanite so that a Hebrew would tare it down and find the treasure hidden in its walls.<sup>40</sup>

The Rabbis also saw the absence of sickness, or the places from which sick people were excluded, as holy, “There are ten degrees of holiness. The land of Israel is holier than any other land. Wherein lies its holiness? In that from it they may bring the Omer, the Firstfruits, and the Two Loaves, which they may not bring from any other land. The walled cities (of the Land of Israel) are still more

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<sup>35</sup> (J. Israelstam and Juday J. Slotki, Leviticus, Vol. IV of The Midrash, ed. By H. Freedman and Maurice Simon (10 vols.; London: Soncino Press, 1939), p. 214.)

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., fn. #5.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., fn. #6.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 220. f.

holy in that they must send forth the lepers from the midst; moreover they may carry around a corpse therein wheresoever they will, but once it is gone forth (from the city) they may not bring it back.”<sup>41</sup>

Edersheim also notes that according to tradition, as leprosy attached to the house, the dress, or the person these were to be regarded as progressively heavier strokes, following as each successive warning had been neglected.<sup>42</sup> Hence we read in Vayyikra R., “Also in the case of Mahlon and Chilion, at first the Divine Attributes of Justice attacked their substance, (by way of the famine in the land of Moab)<sup>43</sup> and afterwards, And Mahlon and Chilion died both of them (Ruth 1,5). It is also when (leprosy) plagues come upon man. First they come upon (the fabric of) his house. If he repents, it requires the pulling out (of the affected stones); if not, it requires pulling down. Then they (i.e. the plagues) come upon one’s clothes. If he repents, they require washing; if not, they require burning. They (i.e. the plagues) come upon his body. If he repents, he undergoes purification; if not, he shall dwell alone (xiii, 46).”<sup>44</sup>

From these passages it is quite clear that God is assumed, by the Rabbis, to be afflicting the sufferer. This is explicitly stated in the following passage regarding the purification of a healed leper; “And the priest shall command to kill one of the birds, etc. (xiv, 5). Why should he kill one and leave the other? -- So as to tell you: Even as it is impossible for the slaughtered bird to come back so shall the plague – spots not return. At such a time does the Holy One, blessed be He, summon His legions and say: ‘Not without cause have I smitten this man, but for the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth with him and smote him, I hid Me and was wroth; and he went on frowardly (shobab) in the way of his heart; (Isa lvii, 17).’<sup>45</sup>

Not only is the Lord credited with saying he smites the man because of his sins but according to some rabbis the man is only healed as he merits it; “Saith the Lord: And I will heal him’ (means), I will Myself heal him, as it is said, Heal Me, O Lord, and I shall be healed, save me, and I shall be saved; for thou art my praise (Jer. xvii, 14).” But other Rabbis say rather, “‘I will heal him for his own merit’ (since he has come nigh again, i.e. repented.)”<sup>46</sup> This understanding was also expressed by R. Aha when he said: “It depends on man himself that disease should not come upon him. What is the proof? For, said

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<sup>41</sup> Kelim, 1:6, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Edersheim, I, 494.

<sup>43</sup> Vayyikra R. (Leviticus, The Midrash), 219, fn. #4.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

R. Aha, Scripture saith, The Lord will keep away from thee all sickness (Deut. vii, 15); this means it is from (i.e. dependent on you) that disease should not come upon you.”<sup>47</sup>

This believe that one who was afflicted was suffering for his own sins and was smitten by God might have been expected to raise some compassion in the hearts of those who encountered the sufferer, but it rather had the opposite effect “The sufferers burdens were needlessly increased. True, as wrapped in mourners garb the leper passed by, his cry ‘Unclean!’ was to incite others to pray for him – but also to avoid him. (Moed K. 5a). No one was even to salute him; his bed was to be low, inclining towards the ground. (u.s. 15a). If he even put his head into a place, it became unclean. No less a distance than four cubits (six feet) must be kept from a leper; or, if the wind came from that direction, a hundred were scarcely sufficient.”<sup>48</sup> The leper was even forbidden to wash his face.<sup>49</sup>

In his attempt to keep disease away from himself – which diseases were viewed not as contagious, but as the evidence of a wrathful God – the individual became heartless; the resulting evils being done in the name of God-serving. The story is told of a Rabbi who wouldn’t eat eggs purchased on the street where a leper was.<sup>50</sup> Again we read “Resh Lakish, when he saw one of them (a leper) in the city, threw stones toward him, and said: ‘Go to your place, and do not defile other people, ...’”<sup>51</sup> Another rabbi is said to have hid from lepers.<sup>52</sup> Dr. Edersheim comments “We can now in some measure appreciate the contrast between Jesus and His contemporaries in His bearing towards the leper. Or, conversely, we can judge by the healing of this leper of the impression which the Savior had made upon the people. He would have fled from a Rabbi; he came to lowliest attitude of entreaty to Jesus” seeking healing.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted Edersheim I, 495.

<sup>49</sup> Moed. K., 15a; Edersheim I, 495.

<sup>50</sup> Vayyikra R., p. 205.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Edersheim I, 495. “It is a remarkable instance of the reserve of the Gospel-narratives, that of the second journey of Jesus in Galilee no special event is recorded than the healing of the leper. And it seems also to indicate, that this one miracle had been so selected for a special purpose. ...The healing of leprosy was recorded as typical. With this agrees also what immediately follows. For, as Rabbinism stood confessedly powerless in the face of the living death of leprosy, so it had no word of forgiveness to speak to the conscience burdened with sin, nor yet word of welcome to the sinner. But this was the inmost meaning of the two events which the gospel-history places next to the healing of the leper: the forgiveness of sins in the case of the paralytic and the welcome to the chief of sinners in the call of Levi-Matthew.” Edersheim I, 499.

Dr. Edersheim then writes, “In truth, the possibility of any cure through human agency was never contemplated by the Jews. Josephus speaks of it as possibly granted to prayer, (ant.. iii, II, 3) but in a manner betokening a pious phraseology without serious meaning.”<sup>54</sup> This can also be seen in the fact that “Whatever remedies, medical, magical, or sympathetic, Rabbinic writings may indicate for various kinds of diseases, leprosy is not included in the catalogue.”<sup>55</sup> This point is further substantiated by Jesus in Luke 4 when He points out that none of the lepers in Israel went to Elisha for healing – even after the healing of Naaman. “And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them were cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.”<sup>56</sup>

Regarding the healing of leprosy by faith, or the avoidance of it by obedience, the Jews had a story. “This may be compared to the case of a lady of rank who, on entering the king’s palace, saw whips hanging (around), and was terrified; but the king said to her: ‘Be not afraid: these are meant for the male and female slaves, but you are here to eat and drink and make merry’. So, too when Israel heard the section of Scripture dealing with leprous affections, they became afraid. Said Moses to them: ‘These are meant for the wicked nations, but you are intended to eat, drink and be joyful’, as it is said, many are the sufferings of the wicked; but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy compasseth him about (Ps. xxxii, 10).”<sup>57</sup> If this is compared with Vayyikra R. p. 208, etc., quoted above, it either produces a contradiction or means that an Israelite who had leprosy was regarded not only as having sinned against God, but also as having thereby forfeited his membership in the covenant people, and therefore, was counted as a foreigner, a member of the wicked nations, and deserving of the treatment which was shown them. This is in fact what happened.

The rabbis sought support for this system by appealing to Scriptures accompanied by a rabbinical interpretation; the interpretation totally ignoring the context, or obvious meaning if necessary. An example of this type of passage follows: “When ye are come into the land of Canaan, which I give you for a possession, and I put the plague of leprosy in a house of the land of your possession, etc. (xiv, 34). This (i.e. the lesion to be derived) is indicated by what is written, surely God is good to Israel, even to such as are pure of heart (Ps. lxxiii, I). You might have thought (God is good) to all; Scripture therefore declares, ‘To such as are pure (bare) in heart’, i.e. whose heart is south (bari) in

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 491.

<sup>56</sup> Luke 4:27.

<sup>57</sup> Vayyikra R., p. 191.

its attachment to divine precepts. – Happy is the man, he has strength in Thee (ib. lxxxiv, 6). You might have thought every man; Scripture there declares, In whose heart are the highways (ib.), i.e. they in whose heart the paths of the Torah are well trodden. – Do good, O Lord, unto the good (ib. cxxv, 4). You might have thought to all; Scripture therefore declares, yea, to them that are upright in their hearts (ib.). – The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble (Nahum 1, 7). You might have thought to all; Scripture therefore declares, yea, He knoweth them that trust in Him (ib.). – The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him (Lam. III, 25). You might have thought to all; Scripture therefore declares, To the soul that seeketh Him (ib.). – The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him (Ps. cxlv, 18). You might have thought to all; Scripture therefore declares, To all that call upon Him in truth (ib.).<sup>58</sup>

In the passage just quoted the text dealt with leprosy while the ‘lesson’ failed to mention leprosy. In Job 20:28 Job’s enemy ‘talking’, we read “The increase of his house shall depart, and his goods shall flow away in the day of his wrath”. In the Midrash (Vayyikra R.) the following comment on this text appears: “(The latter clause means), They will drag it out. – when? – In the day when the Holy One, blessed be He, will stir up His wrath against the man concerned. How is this to happen? – A man says to his friend: ‘Lend me a kab of wheat’, and the other says: ‘I have none’; or one asks for the loan of a kab of barley, and the other says: ‘I have none’; or one asks for a kab of dates, and the other says: ‘I have none’; or a woman says to her friend: ‘Lend me a sieve’ and the other says: ‘I have none’; or one says ‘Lend me a sifter’, and the other says: ‘I have none’. What does the Holy One, blessed be He, do? – He causes leprosy to light on this house, and as he takes out his household effects, (result of command in Lev. xiv, 36)<sup>59</sup> people see and say: ‘Did he not say: “I have none”? See how much wheat is here, how much barley, how many dates! Cursed be the house of such cursed inmates!”<sup>60</sup> In the light of such passages it is also interesting to note that according to Tos. Neg. vi “no case of leprosy of houses had ever occurred, but was only mentioned in Scriptures, in order to give occasion to legal studies so as to procure a Divine reward”.<sup>61</sup> Dr. Edersheim notes that “...Rabbinism, took, in the measures prescribed in leprosy, primarily a moral, or rather a ritual, and only secondarily a sanitary, view of the case”.<sup>62</sup> The same inference must also be drawn from the circumstance, that the priestly examination and

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>59</sup> (*Ibid.*, p. 215, fn. #1)

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214f.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted Edersheim I. 493, fn. #4.

<sup>62</sup> Edersheim I, 491f.



subsequent isolation of the leper were not to commence during the marriage-week, or on festive days, since, evidently, infection would have been most likely to spread in such circumstances.<sup>63</sup>

Perhaps the most unexpected comments by the rabbis regarding leprosy is the following: “And I put the plague of leprosy in a house, etc., alludes to the Temple, as it is said, Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will defile My sanctuary, the pride of your power, the desire of your eyes, and the longing of your soul (Ezek. xxiv, 21).’ This was all to be due to the ‘filth of idolatry’; ....”<sup>64</sup> Here the rabbis say the temple is ruined due to the sins of the Jewish people; the punishment of leprosy – realized under Shishak and Nebuchadnezzar. Edersheim writes regarding this passage “And yet Jewish symbolism saw in the sufferings of Israel and the destruction of the Temple the real fulfilment of the punishment of leprosy with its attendant ordinances, while it also traced in the healing of that disease and the provisions for declaring the leper clean, a close analogy to what would happen in Israel’s restoration”.<sup>65</sup>

This linking of the healing of physical leprosy with the spiritual restoration of Israel is perhaps why the Jews didn’t understand the Gentiles to be included in the Lord’s command to Moses to put out of the camp every leper: “The isolation...which banished lepers from all social intercourse except with those similarly stricken, and forbade their entering not only the Temple or Jerusalem,<sup>66</sup> but any walled city, could not have been merely to prevent infection. For all the laws in regard to leprosy are expressly stated not to have application, the case of heathens, proselytes before their conversion, and even of Israelites on their conversion, and even of Israelites on their birth. (Neb. li ,I; vii, I, xi, I; xii, I)”<sup>67</sup>

As the Jews looked forward to the time of restoration – the time of the Messiah – it was with the anticipation that leprosy would be removed from them;<sup>68</sup> when, as in the days of the giving of the law at Sinai, they would be free from all sickness and death;<sup>69</sup> but they saw this blessing as coming only to themselves. They interpreted Zech. 14:12 to mean that even in the Messianic age leprosy would be present among the Gentiles.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 492.

<sup>64</sup> Vayyikra R., p. 221.

<sup>65</sup> Vayyikra R. 15, 17; Yalkut 1, par. 551, 563; quoted Edersheim I, 495.

<sup>66</sup> “...in the Synagogues lepers were to be the first to enter and the last to leave, and that they should occupy a separate compartment (Mechitasah), the palms high; and six feet wide.” Edersheim I, 493.)

<sup>67</sup> Edersheim I, 492.

<sup>68</sup> (Michaelis, “Lepra, Lepras,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. IV.)

<sup>69</sup> (Hermann L, Strack und Paul Billerbeck, *Zommentar Zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Munchen: C.H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1922). I, 595.)

<sup>70</sup> Tanchuma Gazria, end. Quoted Edersheim I, 494, fs. #3.

As we have reviewed the attitude of Rabbinic Judaism toward leprosy, and we think of how it differs from the percepts set forth in Scripture regarding the leper, we can easily see that “In the days of Christ the rabbis put a forced, mystical construction upon many portions of Scripture. Because the plain teaching of God’s word condemned their practices, they tried to destroy its force”.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1941), p. 39f.

## CHAPTER IV

### Nehgag as a Synonym for leprosy in Isa. 53:4

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With this understanding of the Jewish view of leprosy as being a direct affliction from God resulting from one's own sins, we now know that there is a tie between sin and leprosy, not only in Scripture, but in Rabbinic Judaism. The question that confronts us now is whether this principle of a smitting with leprosy being caused by a person associating himself with sin, is ever connected with or applied to the sin-bearing of the Messiah; the one who voluntarily associated Himself with us and bore our sins? To determine the answer to this question we will study briefly the word leprosy and its synonyms.

In Hebrew the word leprosy is derived from sara', which has the general meaning of to strike down, or to strike to the ground. The pual participle, according to Davidson, means "struck with a skin disease";<sup>73</sup> so also Koehler-Baumgartner.<sup>74</sup> The Englishmans' Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance lists the pual participle as appearing fifteen times, all with the meaning of being smitten with leprosy:

Ex. 4:6, his hand (was) leproous as snow.

Lev 14.2, the law of the leper.

Num. 12:10, Miriam (became) leproous.  
behold, (she was) leproous.

2 Sam. 3:29, or that is a leper.

2 Kings 5:1, (but he was) a leper.

11, and recover the leper.

27, he went out from his presence a leper.

7:3, there were four leproous men.

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<sup>72</sup> B. Davidson, The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon (London: Samuel Bogster & Sons Limited, 1966), p. 651.

<sup>73</sup> William L Holliday, A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), p. 310.

<sup>74</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951), p. 817.

8, when these lepers came.

15:5, he was a leper unto the ay of his death.

2 Chron. 26:20, he (was) leprous in his forehead,

21, Uzziah the King was a leper.

Dwelt in a several house, being a leper.

23, they said, He (is) a leper.

In our English Bible there are five words, in addition to the word leprosy, which can refer to leprosy, or which designate one as being afflicted with leprosy; they are stroke, smitten, plagued, smote, and stricken. Collectively these words are used to translate ten or eleven Hebrew words which appear in the Old Testament. In each appearance of the five English words listed above, where the context denotes leprosy, the Hebrew has the same word; nehgag. This word is associated with leprosy the majority of the times it appears in the Old Testament. It is translated most often by the word ‘plague’ (c. 75 times), and it also appears as the ‘plague of leprosy’ (Nehgag and sara) about fifteen times. With the definite article, Ha Nehgag, it can stand alone and mean leprosy, as in Lev. 13:46. The Kal, piel, and pual of the verb are also found. The piel form (preterite) appears in 2 Chron. 26:20 ‘the Lord had smitten him’. This is a quotation, of course, from the story of Uzziah’s rebellion and attempt to offer incense in the Temple, during which activity God smote Nehgag him with leprosy. The piel with wow conversive appears in 2 Kings 15:5, where we read again of King Uzziah, ‘and the Lord smote the king’; and in Gen. 12:17 where it is recorded, ‘And the Lord plagued Pharaoh’. If we rest our case on a comparison of passage we would see in this phrase an announcement that God caused Pharaoh and/or his house to have leprosy. This is the understanding of the rabbis, for we read, “And whence do we know that he was smitten with leprosy? – From, And the Lord plagued Pharaoh (Gen. xii, 17)”.<sup>75</sup> The word ‘plagued’ is given a footnote that states that the word is “applied chiefly to leprosy”.<sup>76</sup> The kal participle appears in Ps. 73:14; ‘All the day long have I been plagued’. When this verse is compared with what the psalmist says in verse 5 it seems most unlikely he was referring to leprosy. The other occurrence of a kal participle is in Isa. 53:4; “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted”. The word stricken is a translation of the Hebrew word Nehgag. As we have seen, this word often connotes leprosy, and the fact that it is applied to the Messiah in this passage could mean that leprosy is here ascribed to the Messiah. This implication

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<sup>75</sup> Vayyikra R., p. 202.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., fn. #3.

is apparently reinforced by the fact Isaiah immediately adds, “smitten of God” a hofal participle literally meaning ‘struck by God’.<sup>77</sup> As we recall the rabbinic concept that leprosy is the result of a Divine judgement on a man for his sin, it is easy to see here a phrase that a rabbi would interpret to mean – ‘God smote Him; He was stricken with leprosy, on account of his sins’. Isaiah, too perhaps, saw this as a possible meaning of the phrase, so he immediately adds, “But He was wounded for our transgressions. ...” Regarding this association of leprosy with the sin bearing of the Messiah Hengstenberg writes in connection with Isa. 53:3, “It is not without reason that Koppe and Ammon conjecture, that the image is taken particularly from the leprosy, which was not only one of the most terrible diseases, but was also, in a special manner regarded as a Divine punishment. By this supposition many expressions in the following verses are explained”.<sup>78</sup>

We have seen that the vocabulary of Isa. 53:4 allows for one to see the Messiah being presented as afflicted with leprosy; which association is noted by some commentators, The question that now needs to be answered is, ‘did the Jewish exegetes ever make such an association’?

In the Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin tractate, 98a, this dialogue appears: R. Joshua b. Levi met Elijah standing by the entrance of R. Simeon b. Yohai’s tomb. He asked him: ‘Have I a portion in the world to come’? He replied, ‘if this Master desires it’. R. Joshua b. Levi said, ‘I saw two, but heard the voice of the third’. He then asked him, ‘When will Messiah come’? ‘Go and ask him himself’, was his reply. ‘Where is he sitting’? – ‘At the entrance.’ And by what sign may I recognize him?’ – ‘He is sitting among the poor lepers: all of them untie (them)<sup>79</sup> all at once, and rebandage them together; whereas he unties and rebandages each separately (before treating the next), thinking, should I be wanted, (it being time for my appearance as the Messiah) I must not be delayed (through having to bandage a number of sores).”

In this passage the Messiah is presented as a leper; not just as an assistant to other lepers as is clear from the fact He is distinguished from the others at the gate, not by their being lepers, but by the manner which He dresses His sores as compared with the manner in which they dress theirs. The following passage, also taken from the Babylonian Talmud, makes this clear; “Rab said: the world was created only on David’s account. Samuel said: On Moses account; R. Johanan said: For the sake of the

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<sup>77</sup> Holladay, p. 238.

<sup>78</sup> E. W. Hengstenberg, Christology of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1970), p. 235.

<sup>79</sup> “The bandages of their sores for dressing”, fn. #8.

Messiah. What is his (the Messiah's) name? – The school of R. Shila said: His name is Shiloh, for it is written, until Shiloh come. The school of R. Yannai said: His name is Yinnon, for it is written, His name shall endure forever: e'er the sun was, his name is Yinnon. The school of R. Haninah maintained: His name is Haninah, as it is written, Where I will not give you Haninah. Others say: His name is Menahem the son of Hezekiah, for it is written, Because Menahem ('the comforter'), that would relieve my soul, is far. The Rabbis said: His name is 'the leper scholar', as it is written, Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him a leper, smitten of God, and afflicted."<sup>80</sup> The footnotes give the source of Isa. 53:4.

As we noted above the vocabulary of Isa. 53:4 allows for, or even strongly suggests, a leperous – Messiah concept, but the word leper in the quotation of Isa. 53:4 in the tractate Sanhedrin, is an insertion with its only basis being the implied meaning of Nahgag. There is no manuscript variant that gives this reading.

Jerome has added his support to this understanding of the Hebrew of Isa 53:4, though when he translates the last half of the verse, "et nos putavimus eum quasi leprosum et percussum a Deo et humiliatum". It does seem that he is modifying the Rabbinic position when he writes, "et nos putavimus eum quasi leprosum. ..." According to Harden quasi here means 'as if'.<sup>81</sup> But the association of leprosy with the Messiah, our sin bearer, in Isa 53:4, whether taken in the Rabbinic sense or the Vulgate, supplies the answer to our question; the Messiah is seen by Jewish exegetes as being stricken with leprosy; and some non-Jewish scholars have on occasion drawn the same inference.

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<sup>80</sup> I. Epstein, "Tractate 'Sanhedrin', "Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud (London: The Soncino Press, 1969), 98b.

<sup>81</sup> J.M. Harden, Dictionary of the Vulgate New Testament (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921), p. 98.

## CHAPTER V

### The Cleansing of the leper was Proleptic of Cleansing from Sin

We have seen this far that leprosy is generally connected with sin, and that the uncleanness of leprosy is identified with the uncleanness of sin in the Old Testament. The rabbis have also taught there was a connection between sin and leprosy, which connection they see as cause and effect – man sins; God inflicts judgment. We also noted that Rabbinic Judaism saw the Messiah presented as a leper in Isa. 53:4.

Regarding the significance of this typing-together of sin and leprosy Dr. Girdlestone writes, “The process whereby moral impurity was to be done away was typified or shadowed forth by the purifications of the Levitical rituals; ...”<sup>82</sup> Stewart and Barth are more explicit when they write, “The leper was a striking emblem of the polluted soul; and the great general lesson taught by the cleansing of the healed leper is the method by which the polluted soul is made clean in the sight of God.”<sup>83</sup> Mrs. White identifies this method, in the quotation cited in the introduction of this paper, when she says the ceremony of the two birds portrayed the atonement; “the union of the pardoning blood with the resurrection and life of our Redeemer”.

As we take up a study of Leviticus 14, we will be working from the hypothesis – based on the quotation from Mrs. White in our introduction, and referred to above, and the findings in the preceding chapters of this paper – that the cleansing of the leper, following his being healed, was proleptic of the cleansing from sin that was to be part of the results of the work of the cross. We will therefore be looking for the Messianic-soteriological significance of the ceremony.

Leviticus 14 is divided into two parts; the first dealing with the cleansing of a man who had been afflicted with leprosy, and the second dealing with the cleansing of a house having been suspected of containing leprosy.

For our discussion we will focus on verses 1-20; however verses 1-3 and 9-20 will be studied only as they help us to understand the significance of verses 4-8; the ritual of the two birds.

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<sup>82</sup> Girdlestone, p. 143.

<sup>83</sup> Stewart and Baith. 219f.

The S.D.A. Bible Commentary notes the following in regard to the portion of the passage we are particularly interested in: verse 2 –

“THE LAW OF THE LEPER. The purification of a leper is given in more detail than that of the purification for any other defilement. As the leper was excluded not only from the sanctuary but from the camp, there were two ceremonies included in the restoration. The second, a week later, was performed in the court of tabernacle and restored him to full fellowship and to all the privileges of the covenant relationship.

“3. OUT OF THE CAMP. The first ceremony, which restored the leper to the camp, took place outside the camp.

“4. TWO BIRDS. These were probably sparrows. They must be untamed birds, for a tame birds would not fly away as required by the symbolism (v. 7). Some commentators compare the two birds to the two goats used in the Day of Atonement service, the one the Lord’s goat, the other the goat for Azazel. To this there are weighty objections. There is nothing said of atonement in connection with the birds. Cleansing is mentioned, but it should be remembered that the birds were not used for cleansing. The man had been already pronounced clean. In the case of the birds there was no blood sprinkled on the altar for atonement. In fact, the ceremony did not take place at the sanctuary at all, but out in the field. The birds were not of a kind used in any sacrifice at the altar; they were wild birds. The blood used was blood mixed with water, a drop or two in a vessel large enough to hold the cedarwood, which according to the Talmud, was one cubit long. It was therefore a very weak solution, a token solution, and apparently had no symbolic atoning properties. The birds are not said to be a sin offering, or a trespass, or burnt, or peace, or meat offering. They were, in fact, not sacrifices at all. When the ceremony was finished, the man was not permitted to go to the sanctuary. Indeed he could not even go to his own tent. It was not until seven days later that the man was permitted to offer his meat, trespass, and burnt offerings. At that time atonement was made (vs. 18-21, 29, 31).

“6. CEDAR WOOD. We are not informed as to the meaning of the cedarwood, hyssop, and scarlet. Perhaps the fragrant cedarwood suggested the fragrant incense that was used only in the sanctuary. Hyssop was symbolic of cleansing (Ps. 51:7). The “scarlet” was a tongue or band of twice-dyed wool used in tying the hyssop to the cedar, since both were dipped in the blood.

“7. LET THE LIVING VBIRD LOOSE. Before letting the bird go, however, he sprinkled seven times the person to be cleansed, and pronounced him clean. He then commanded the man to wash his clothes, to shave, and to wash himself. After that he might enter the camp. It must have been a joyful company that escorted him into the camp. But he was not yet fully restored. He had not offered a sacrifice. He had not yet been to the sanctuary. He could not even enter his own tent. But he had been found clean, and he was happy.

The ceremony constituted a beautiful picture of what God had done and would do for the leper. A wild bird is killed, and another dipped in its blood and set free. This is a picture of the leper worthy of death, and of his release. Indeed, he was already dying. But he is healed, and the healing miracle performed for him is symbolically related to blood and water. There is only a hint of blood, as it were, a drop or two, but it is sprinkled on him, and he is declared clean. The real sacrifice has not yet been



made. The man has not been to the altar. The blood of the wild bird has no cleansing virtue. But presently the priest will take a lamb, and atonement will be made.”<sup>84</sup>

As my study has led me to express my thoughts in regard to some points in a different way than the writers of the Commentary did, these point will be considered separately. For purpose of clarity we will follow the general outline of the Commentary.

As has been noted, the Commentary says: “Some commentators compare the two birds to the two goats used in the Day of Atonement service, the one the Lord’s goat, the other the goat for Azazel. To this there are weighty objections. There is nothing said of atonement in connection with the birds.”

It is true that the two birds could not have served the same purpose as the two goats; the Day of Atonement was a special day set apart by the order of God (Lev. 23:27-32), a day in which the high priest went alone into the second apartment of the tabernacle, “once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: ...” (Heb. 9:7) and for the cleansing of the tabernacle from the sins of the people (Lev. 16:2-34). These sins were then transferred in type to the second goat and sent away into the wilderness (Lev. 16:21, 22), that the people might be clean from all their sins before the Lord (Lev. 16:30). This day was of such importance as to be designated a sabbath (Lev. 23:32). There is no reason to think that the ceremony of the two birds that was part of the process prescribed for the cleansing of the healed leper, and which took place outside of the camp for the one man, by any priest, was intended to be a supplement to this great day (As regards the element of atonement see below.).

Next the Commentary adds, “cleansing is mentioned, but it should be remembered that the birds were not used for cleansing. The man had already been pronounced clean.”

In view of the fact the K.J.V. writes in verse 2 “This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing: ...” and that in v. 4 and 7 we read of “him that is to be cleansed”, the Commentary statement that “the man had already been pronounced clean” seems to mean we should look at the Hebrew of this passage. First it may be significant to note that Bagster translates the Septuagint to read, “This is the law of the leper: in whatsoever day he shall have cleansed”.<sup>85</sup> This is the correct ideas probably, if we understand this verse to refer to the past experience of his being healed of leprosy.<sup>86</sup> That this is what

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<sup>84</sup> BC I, 766.

<sup>85</sup> Samuel Bagster, The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament (London: Samual Baster & Sons Limited, 1884), p. 145f.

<sup>86</sup> As Bagster notes: fn. Beta, p. 145.

is meant is clear from the fact the Hebrew form in verse two is simply a construct state of a feminine singular noun with a third person singular masculine suffix, and reads, 'in the day of his cleansing'; verse 3 continues And the priest shall go out of the camp; ...and the priest shall look, and behold, if the plague of leprosy be healed in the leper; (verse 4) then shall the priest command to take for him that is to be cleansed two living birds, and cedarwood, and scarlet, and hyssop"<sup>87</sup> The phrase, 'if the plague be healed' to be cleansed' (verse 4) is the translation of a present hithpiel participle, plus Le, meaning 'to be cleansed', or, 'the one who is to cleanse himself'.<sup>88</sup> Again in verse 7 we read, "And he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let go the living bird into the open field."<sup>89</sup> The phrase 'to be cleansed' is again the hithpiel present participle meaning 'being cleansed'; while the leper is next recorded as being pronounced clean; the first time such a pronouncement is recorded as having been made in regard to the leper being cleansed. Though this pronouncement is the only one explicitly mentioned as being made over the healed leper, the cleansing process continued.

It is significant to our study that the pronouncement was made during the ceremony of the two birds; after the one had been slain in an earthen vessel over running water and the leper had been sprinkled with its blood seven times. Therefore it is quite clear that the man had not already been pronounced clean, and that this pronouncement didn't finish or complete the process of cleansing as is indicated by the following verses.

In verse 8 we read, "And he that is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, and shave off all this hair, and bathe himself in water, and he shall be clean; and after that he may come into the camp, but he shall dwell outside his tent seven days".<sup>90</sup> 'To be cleansed' is the same form found in verse 7, while 'he shall be clean' is a qal perfect (future). Verse 9 – "And it shall be on the seventh day, that he shall shave all his hair off his head and his beard and his eye-brows, even all his hair he shall shave off; and he shall wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and he shall be clean".<sup>91</sup> 'He shall be clean' is the same qal perfect (future) form that appears in verse 8. Verse 11 reads, "And the priest that cleanseth him shall set the man that is to be cleansed (present hithpiel participle), and those things

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<sup>87</sup> I. Slothki, "Isaiah," Vol. V of The Soncino Bible, ed. By A. Cohen (14 vols.; London: The Soncino Press, 1965), p. 689.

<sup>88</sup> Holladya, p. 122.

<sup>89</sup> Cohen, Isaiah, p. 689.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 690.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

before the Lord, ..." Verse 14: "And the priest shall take of the blood of the guilt 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."<sup>92</sup> 'To be cleansed' the present hithpiel participle is used here again as in the earlier verses. It might also be translated, as has been noted, 'the one being cleansed', showing the continuous process of progressive cleansing being described. So also verses 17, 18, and 19. Verse 20, "and the priest shall offer the burnt-offering and the meal offering upon the altar; and the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be clean" (qal perfect (future)).

In these verses we have seen; the man was healed in his leprosy; he called for the priest who went and examined him, and finding him healed, instituted the ceremony of cleansing, (the ceremony of the two birds which took place outside of the camp, and during which the leper was pronounced clean) through the reinstatement of the leper into the congregation did not occur until the eighth day after the ceremony of the two birds. This eighth day ceremony was considered part of the cleansing process. Thus we see it is not correct to assume the man was clean prior to the ceremony of Leviticus 14 which was a continuing process of progressive cleansing as is revealed by the Hebrew verbs used by the writer.

Next the Commentary notes, "There is nothing said of atonement in connection with the birds. ...In the case of the birds there was no blood sprinkled on the altar for atonement. In fact, the ceremony did not take place at the sanctuary at all, but out in the field. The birds were not of a kind used in any sacrifice at the altar; they were wild birds." Again we read, "The ceremony constitutes a beautiful picture of what God had done and would do for the leper. A wild bird is killed, and another dipped in its blood and set free. This is a picture of the leper worthy<sup>93</sup> of death and of his release. Indeed he was already dying. But he is healed and the healing miracle performed."

Mrs. White writes regarding the significance of blood being sprinkled on the altar; "This signified that the people had consecrated themselves – body, mind, and soul – to God".<sup>94</sup> Therefore if the ceremony of the two birds was to portray the atonement of Jesus, it would of necessity exclude the sprinkling of blood on the altar; Jesus' atonement did not include the dedication by the people of themselves to God. The fact that the ceremony took place outside of the camp is symbolic of the fact that Christ would die outside of the camp (cf. Heb. 13:11, 12). The statements that "The birds were not of a kind used in any sacrifice at the altar; they were wild birds" and, "These were probably sparrows.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Does this word mean the leper was being punished by God for a sin, in the eyes of the Commentary?

<sup>94</sup> BC I, 1107.

They must be untamed birds for a tame bird would not fly away as required by the symbolism (vs. 7)" is perhaps misleading. All that is known for sure is that the Lord designated two birds; which are therefore capable of portraying atonement.

To interpret the ceremony as a "healing miracle performed for him" (the leper) is too superficial. In light of the association of leprosy and sin and the Messiah, that we have seen in this study, this passage seems to have much more meaning than just being a portrayal of the situation of the leper before and after his being healed. Such an interpretation of necessity omits the element of cleansing symbolized by the lepers being sprinkled with the blood and then being pronounced clean; and that the phrase 'being cleansed' appears ten times in this passage. It also implies that the leper was present in the ceremony only by representation when the fact, the leper was personally present and participated literally in the ceremony. Whatever meaning one might assign to the individual elements of the ritual, corporately they represented that by which he was made clean and restored to oneness with God and His people. This is seen from the fact that the whole ceremony took place after the leper had been healed, and that it resulted in his being reinstated in the congregation of God's people.

The innocent bird was slain for no fault of his own – as was Jesus for no sin of His own. The second bird was dipped in the blood of the first and released to life. That the life represented here can't be symbolic of the leper is seen in the fact his 'participation' in the ceremony was his being sprinkled with the slain birds blood and pronounced clean; while the second bird that represented life, was dipped in the blood. As blood represents death, so coming up out of blood would represent resurrection from the dead.

The last statement from the Commentary that we will give special notice says, "The blood used was blood mixed with water, a drop or two in a vessel large enough to hold the cedar wood, which, according to the Talmud, was one cubit long. It was therefore a very weak solution, a token solution, and apparently had no symbolic atoning properties."<sup>95</sup> The Bible Commentary in this quotation follows the Talmud and other commentaries. The Bible text reads, "And the priest shall 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 the running water: as for the living bird, he shall take it, and 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: And he shall sprinkle

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<sup>95</sup> It is of interest to note the rabbis saw atonement here; Vayyikra R., p. 208.

upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose into the open fields.”<sup>96</sup>

As can be seen from the Biblical passage the blood and the water were not mixed; the blood was caught in the vessel held over running water. The explanation of these symbols also denies their being mixed; the blood of the bird slain represented the pardoning blood of Jesus,<sup>97</sup> while of the running water we read: “that flowing stream was a symbol of the ever flowing, ever cleansing efficacy of Christ; ...the fountain that was open for Judah and Jerusalem, wherein they may wash and be clean from every stain of sin”.<sup>98</sup> The fact that they were mixed in later Judaism serves to substantiate the statement that the sacrificial system became so corrupt as to veil God from the people – rather than being a revelation of Him. As the Jews departed from God, they lost sight, to a great degree, of the teaching of the ritual service. “That service had been instituted by Christ Himself. In every part it was a symbol of Him; and it had been full of vitality and spiritual beauty. But the Jews lost the spiritual life from their ceremonies, and clung to the dead forms.”<sup>99</sup>

“Many of them regarded the sacrificial offerings much as the heathen looked upon their sacrifices as gifts by which they themselves might propitiate the Deity.”<sup>100</sup> “The very priests who ministered in the temple had lost sight of the significance of the service they performed. They had ceased to look beyond the symbol to the thing signified. In presenting the sacrificial offerings they were as actors in a play. The ordinances which God Himself had appointed were made the means of blinding the mind and hardening the heart.”<sup>101</sup>

To conclude these thoughts on the significance of the ceremony of the two birds, a few words about the eighth day ceremony seem appropriate.<sup>102</sup> Stewart and Baith<sup>103</sup> writes, “The priest was then directed to touch, with the blood of the trespass offering, the ear, the thumb, and the toe of the healed leper; and again upon the blood to put the oil – the efficacy of the Holy Spirit as a sanctifying agent

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<sup>96</sup> Verses 4-7.

<sup>97</sup> BC I, 1111.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> DA p. 29.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 112f.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>102</sup> A detailed discussion is omitted because the required procedure is generally that which is normal in the Old Testament dispensation, though it should be added that “There is propriety in the combination of the ordinary sacrifices in this ritual, for they have a combined accomplishment in the ONE GREAT SCRIFICE offered ONCE FOR ALL - ....” Stewart and Baith, p. 219.

<sup>103</sup> Stewart and Baith, p. 218.

resting on the atonement effected through the shed blood". The atonement symbolized in the first half of the ceremony was that which was made at the cross; the atonement here referred to is that which results in the blotting out of my sins. Haskell has understood this when he writes regarding the eighth day service. "This service was not an empty form, but a type of a blessed antitype, which is fulfilled in every christian who presents himself for service before the Lord after the Lord forgives his sins and pronounces him clean".<sup>104</sup> Mrs. White writes "The work of Christ in cleansing the leper from his terrible disease is an illustration of His work in cleansing the soul from sin".<sup>105</sup>

This means that the message of Leviticus 14:4-8, as revealed through this study, is that as the leper could bring nothing to that phase of the cleansing which took place outside of the camp, and which represented the atonement made by Jesus – His life, His death, His atoning blood, and His resurrection – so we have no part in providing salvation; only the Christ could do that, while verses 9-20 tell us a man must himself come to Jesus if the atonement made at the cross is to be effective for him and enable him to be accepted as one of God's covenant people. "We must believe, not only that He died for the whole world, but that He died for us individually. We must appropriate to ourselves the virtue of the atoning sacrifice."<sup>106</sup>

The symbol of the resurrection in this passage is not to be seen as secondary to the message of salvation proleptically portrayed there for "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, ..." "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sin s." (1Cor.15:14, 17)

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<sup>104</sup> Stephen H. Haskell, The Cross and Its Shadow (South Lancaster, Mass.: The Bible Training School, 1914), p. 167f.

<sup>105</sup> DA, p. 162.

<sup>106</sup> PP, p. 277.

## CHAPTER VI

### Summary

1. Leprosy produces uncleanness ritually as a result of its contagiousness and its connection with sin.
2. The uncleanness of leprosy is a constituent element of sin in the Old Testament.
3. Leprosy was considered by Rabbinic Judaism as a punishment inflicted by God for sin.
4. The uncleanness of leprosy is ascribed to the Messiah by the rabbis, and possibly in Isa. 53:4, in connection with His saving work.
5. The ritual for the cleansing of the healed leper is proleptic of cleansing from sin; the ceremony of the two birds symbolizing the atonement of Jesus; His life, His death, His atoning blood, and His resurrection, while the running water symbolized the fountain opened for the cleansing of sin. The eighth day ceremony taught the necessity of our personally responding to what has been done for us by Jesus at the time of His death.

The two parts of the ritual are portrayals of the objective and subjective atonement.

## CONCLUSION

The association of leprosy and sin and the Messiah finds its center in the ritual of cleansing presented as a requirement in the Old Testament, which is itself without hope apart from the resurrection. The resurrection is that element which sets before those under the penalty of death the Character of the one requiring cleansing by all those polluted by the leprosy of sin. The bird flying free after being dipped in blood is the proleptic portrayal of our future.



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