

METZORA

FUSION
WITH RABBI JASON



*with
Rabbi Jason Sobel*

5784 - A YEAR OF OPEN DOORS

TORAH PORTIONS
Parashat Metzora



THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTIONS

LEVITICUS 14:1-15:33

Parashat Metzora / פרשת מצרע

In this weeks guide...

COMMENTARY..... 1

It can be difficult for people living in a modern, post-industrial society to wrap their heads around the protocols described in this week's reading. In an age of technology and medical advancement, the notion of a priest being the sole arbitrator of one's social standing based on his cursory physical examination might be a tough pill to swallow. But what if there's something beautiful here...?

NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN..... 2

Let's delve deeper into that ritual impurity, but from the perspective of someone who suffered with it. The abstract, meticulous details in this week's *parsha* take on profound humanness in an incredible story found in the Gospels. Perhaps more importantly, all of this has significance for our lives.

HEBREW WORD STUDY..... 3

Are you ready to celebrate? This study will help prepare your heart and mind for that most epic of biblical feasts: Passover! It's easy to feel bombarded with religious terminology during this time of year: Easter vs. Resurrection Sunday, Passover, Seder, *Pascha*, *Pesach*, and more! This study breaks down the official title of the celebration that is based on Israel's rescue from Egypt.



OVERVIEW

While typically paired with *Parashat Tazria*, this year we read the portion known as *Metzora* on its own. *Metzora* is Hebrew for "one being diseased" and is the title of the 28th weekly parashat. The parashat details ritual impurity, including cleansing from skin disease, houses with an eruptive plague, and the bodily discharges of men and women. While it might be popular fodder with junior high boys, most of us would rather skim this section of Scripture. But when we read them with an eye for symbolism, these texts can come alive!

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Weekly Torah Portion – *Parashat Metzora* / פרשת מצרע | with **Rabbi Jason Sobel**

Staff Contributor

COMMENTARY

Not to over-romanticize the concept, but it is always so exciting to see the beauty of the revelation of Messiah in the Torah. It blows my mind to see throughout the Word of God this distinct and direct continuity of His will pointing us directly to *Yeshua*, the One who can make all things clean.

Then *ADONAI* spoke to Moses saying: This is the Torah of the one with *tza'arat* in the day of his cleansing. He should be brought to the *kohen*, and the *kohen* is to go to the outside of the camp. The *kohen* is to examine him, and behold, if the mark of *tza'arat* is healed in one with *tza'arat*, then the *kohen* is to command that two clean living birds, cedar wood, scarlet and hyssop be brought for the one being cleansed. –Leviticus 14:1-4

Last week, we began reading about *tza'arat* (commonly referred to as “leprosy”) and its effect on human flesh and material goods. What is interesting here, to me, is that only the *Kohen* (priest) could declare someone clean or unclean. Notice how the person was to appear before the priest: he was to examine the situation and then make a declaration one way or the other. And only the priest could make such a declaration—not the person’s dad, best friend, or husband. Only the priest was qualified to make such a call.

Tza'arat was not just a punishment for sin but a vivid representation of sin. Like sin today, which is alarmingly prevalent in society, *tza'arat* profoundly impacted a family, the community, and could even impact a nation. If you were found to be afflicted, you had to leave the community, live alone, and proclaim “Unclean, Unclean” if someone came near. Only the priest was qualified to make such a call.

These details underscore the gravity of sin and the importance of our spiritual cleanliness. Sin is destructive, it is despicable, and it goes against everything God has called us to be. However, we are blessed today with *Yeshua* as our High Priest. Remember, only the priest could proclaim clean or unclean, and through the blood atonement of *Yeshua*, we all have the opportunity to be declared clean by our High Priest. Not even our spiritual enemy can bring us down. He continually tries to proclaim our uncleanness as “the accuser” (*Hasatan* in Hebrew). But no matter how disqualified he insists we are, no matter how hopeless he makes our circumstances seem, our High Priest has removed all guilt, all shame, and all filth. We have been bought by the blood of the Lamb, and He declares us clean, holy, and righteous before the King!

Few times are more powerful to consider this reality than on *Shabbat HaGadol*, the Great Shabbat leading up to *Pesach*. We are at a high point of the year as we commemorate Israel’s Exodus from Egypt, which foreshadows *Yeshua*’s death, burial, and resurrection, which provided the means of our declaration as clean and holy before *HaShem*.

New Testament Tie-In

Let's be honest: this section of Leviticus can be difficult to read. This chapter's heading in one Bible reads, "Laws About Bodily Discharges." Fun.

No one should be scolded for wondering what the point of this passage is. If we stay with the text and pay close attention, however, the purpose is laid out plainly for us: "So you are to keep Bnei-Yisrael separate from their uncleanness, so they will not die in their uncleanness by defiling My Tabernacle that is in their midst" (Leviticus 15:31). Unlike the pagan religions of the Ancient Near East which viewed physical "uncleanness" as evidence of demonic activity, the Hebrew people simply needed to experience cleansing in order to resume the worship.ⁱ This passage of Scripture established a radical perspective on the human body as being intrinsically "good," though imperfect. Of course, this points us to a deeper spiritual reality for us, as members of *Yeshua's* Body, spiritually. Our sins are not insurmountable obstacles, requiring begging or incantations. We must simply and sincerely confess our sins to the Lord in order to receive His cleansing and purification (*cf.* 1 John 1:9).

Perhaps the most direct link back to these regulations and forward to our lived experience in Messiah can be found in the Gospels.

And there was a woman with a blood flow for twelve years, who had suffered much under many doctors. She had spent all that she had without benefit; instead, she grew worse. When she heard about *Yeshua*, she came through the crowd from behind and touched His garment. For she kept saying, "If I touch even His clothes, I shall be healed." -Mark 5:25-28

In light of this Torah portion we now understand that *Yeshua* not only restored this woman's physical body—He restored her ability to participate in worship! After twelve years of being powerless to participate in this most central aspect of Jewish life, *Yeshua's* power immediately opened the door for her return to the rhythms of Israel's worship.

Right away the blood flow stopped, and she felt in her body that she was healed from her disease. At once *Yeshua*, knowing in Himself that power had gone out from Him, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My clothes?" -Mark 5:29-30

But one astounding detail remains for us to consider. Remember: the regulations in Leviticus kept ritually unclean people **away from the Tabernacle** in order to not defile it. In the Gospel account, an unclean woman pressed in and touched *Yeshua*, the "Word [who] became flesh and tabernacled among us" (John 1:14 *emphasis added*). Her supernatural healing suggests that *Yeshua* was no ordinary man, but was the fulfillment of the Tabernacle. His body was the dwelling place of God among His people (*cf.* Exodus 25:8; Colossians 2:9). He was the Great High Priest, qualified to minister in its courts (*cf.* Hebrews 4:14). He was the Lamb, offered on Calvary's cross (*cf.* John 1:29). And in this Gospel story, *Yeshua* was also the altar which was "most holy, and whatever touches it will become holy" (Exodus 29:37).

Friends, this truth is our hope and our confidence, despite failures in our struggle against sin. We don't avoid God, rather, we "draw near to the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace for help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

Hebrew Word Study

Pesach / פסח

Most Christians are familiar with the Eucharist, or “Lord’s Supper,” based on Jesus’ “Last Supper.” Few, however, realize that this so-called “Last Supper,” portrayed in the Gospels, was actually a Passover *Seder*. Many of us have seen a box of *matzah* in the grocery store or heard of a Passover *Seder*, but what exactly is Passover?

The word translated as “Passover” is *Pesach* – פסח in Hebrew. We should also note that the “Greek word *pascha* is borrowed from the Aramaic word for Passover.”ⁱⁱ *Pesach* means to “pass over,” referring to the Almighty passing over the Israelite homes in the judgment of the tenth plague (*cf.* Exodus 12:23). In common practice, the word came to refer to two different things.

- 1) The Gospels describe the Paschal **meal** as a *Pesach*: “When the hour came, He reclined *at the table*, and the apostles with Him. And He said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this [*ho pascha*] with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:14-15 NASB, *emphasis added*).
- 2) The Gospels also identify the **holiday** itself as *Pesach*: “Now the Feast of *Matzah*, which is called [*Pascha*], was *approaching*” (Luke 22:1 *emphasis added*).

How did the word “*Pesach*” become a catch-all term for these two distinct occurrences? Furthermore, we see biblical references to the holiday as the “Feast of *Matzot*” (or “Unleavened Bread” – see Exodus 12:17 and Leviticus 23:6), so why do we call it something different?

The holiday we call “*Pesach*” refers to two overlapping holidays. Before God unleashed His final plague against Egypt, He commanded the Children of Israel to make a special offering called the “*korban Pesach*,” or Paschal offering (*cf.* Exodus 12:1-11). This *korban Pesach* is a thanksgiving offering that the Israelites brought on the fourteenth of the first month during the afternoon and eaten on the evening of the fifteenth: “During the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening, is *ADONAI*’s Passover. On the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of *Matzot*” (Leviticus 23:5-6).

Coinciding with the “*Pesach*” holiday is a seven-day holiday celebrated from the fifteenth to the twenty-first of the month called “the Feast of *Matzot*.” During this feast, we eat *matzah* (unleavened bread) for seven days to remember that God took His people out of Egyptian slavery. This dual nature of the holiday teaches us an important lesson.

From the perspective of God’s people, it would make sense to identify this holiday as the “Feast of *Matzot*” because, after all, God commanded us to eat *matzah*. And yet it curiously became a widespread practice to call it “*Pesach*.” On the other hand, God, who “passed over” the Israelites’ homes, identifies the holiday as “the Feast of *Matzot*” and not *Pesach*. This switch in language seems counterintuitive, but the reasoning has to do with relationship.

In His prophecy to Moses, the Almighty explained the events that were about to unfold: “I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians...[and] I will take you to Myself as a people, and I will be your God” (Exodus 6:6-7). Today we call the holiday *Pesach* to express gratitude for God’s salvation from Egypt on a physical level and His “passing over” our sins on a spiritual level. In comparison, God identifies the holiday as the Feast of *Matzot* because He is pleased with our obedience to His precept to eat *matzah*. This exchange of terms for this holiday demonstrates the deep bond between God and His people.

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the Tree of Life Version.

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HEBREW WORD STUDY

פסח

פֶּסַח / *pesach*: N. **Passover, Passover animal.** Represents both the Passover observance and the animal that is slaughtered during that celebration.¹

The name “Passover” is derived from *pasach* which some think means “to pass (over)” (BDB, p. 820). There are four instances of this. (1) Ex 12:13, “When I see the blood I will ‘pass’ (*ufasachti*) over you.” (2) Ex 12:23, “The Lord will ‘pass’ through (*ve’avar*) ... and the Lord will ‘pass’ (*upasach*) over the door.” (3) Ex 12:27, “It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s passover who ‘passed’ (*pasach*) over the houses of the children of Israel.” (4) Isa 31:5, “The Lord of hosts will protect Jerusalem (*ganon*)’ he will protect (*ganon*) and deliver (*vehitzil*) it. He will pass over (*pasoch*) and deliver (*vehimlit*) it.”²

¹taken from *Lexham Theological Wordbook*

²taken from *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*

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THOUGHTS for REFLECTION

Take some time this week to prayerfully consider and discuss with friends:

- Guilt and shame are awful burdens to bear. Unfortunately, they’re also more common than not. One of the reasons these “adversaries” are so formidable is that they are often based in truth—we actually commit sins and then have to deal with these effects. How does knowing that Yeshua is the Great High Priest who declares us clean affect your feelings about guilt and shame.
- There are many deep, hidden “issues” that afflict us. Perhaps you can relate to that woman in the Gospel story who pressed through the crowd to touch *Yeshua’s* garment. Maybe you’ve spent money and relied on others for help, but things have only gotten worse. Trust in Yeshua’s goodness, in His holiness. He is the Word, the Lamb, the Tabernacle! Reach out and touch Him today!

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NEXT WEEK'S READINGS: *Pesach Shabbat Chol ha-Moed* / פסח שבת חול המועד

TORAH

Sunday / Exodus 33:12-16
Monday / Exodus 33:17-19
Tuesday / Exodus 33:20-23
Wednesday / Exodus 34:1-3
Thursday / Exodus 34:4-10
Friday / Exodus 33:11-17
Saturday / Exodus 33:18-26

Prophetic Reading (Haftarah):

Ezekiel 37:1-14

New Covenant Reading:

Luke 22:1-13

ⁱ Harrison, R. K. *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 3. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980.

ⁱⁱ Spencer A. Jones, "Passover," ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).