

# TAZRIA-METZORA

FUSION  
WITH RABBI JASON



*with*  
**Rabbi Jason Sobel**

5785 - THE YEAR OF OPEN WINDOWS

**TORAH PORTIONS**  
**Parashat Tazria-Metzora**



## THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTIONS

# LEVITICUS 12:1-15:33

*Parashat Tazria-Metzora / פרשת תזריע-מצרע*

In this weeks guide...

### COMMENTARY..... 1

Sometimes the topics we're most inclined to avoid (because they make us uncomfortable) are the ones we most need to address. Furthermore, our genuine engagement with these difficult subjects can turn out to be life-giving, liberating experiences. "Sin" can be one of those topics and this week's Commentary takes us *right there*...in a hope-filled way!

### NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN..... 2

Have you ever wondered what relevance an obscure regulation regarding "diseased" houses could have for your life today? Yes, you read that right: actual, physical buildings that are infected. There is *Good News* here, as well as deeply moving connections to our recent Good Friday observance.

### HEBREW WORD STUDY..... 3

This week's project may actually be our first-ever "2.0" HWS! We recently provided a foundational understanding of a critical Hebrew term and this week we're going to "journey deeper." You may be pleasantly surprised how academic study can stir up holy longing in your heart...



## OVER VIEW

In certain years, the Torah Portions are combined in order to maintain the proper schedule, and this week is such a "double portion." This week, *Tazria* (Hebrew for "she conceives") is paired with *Metzora* ("one being diseased"). The text covers the theme of ritual and physical cleanness, specifically in the contexts of childbirth and skin diseases. The language is plain and "earthy," providing meticulous details for how the Israelites should conduct themselves in these sorts of ordinary, quite human, realities.

While the text clearly does **not** suggest that a woman's "uncleanness" is associated with sin in any way, the same cannot be said for "leprosy" (*tzara'at*)—the skin condition addressed in both portions.



# Fusion Global

Weekly Torah Portions – *Parashat Tazria-Metzora* / פרשת תזריע-מצרע | with **Rabbi Jason Sobel**

Staff Contributor

## COMMENTARY

This week, we have a double reading: *Parashat Tazria-Metzora*. Both Torah portions primarily deal with *tza'arat* (often translated as "leprosy"), a phenomenon that can appear in several ways, each detailed in these passages. Within the two *parshot*, we read of *tza'arat* on flesh, clothes, buildings, and household items.

In Scripture, there is a punitive connection between *tza'arat* and sin. We see this in the case of Miriam, who collaborated with Aaron in rebelling against Moses. However, no matter the causation, what *tza'arat* ultimately boils down to (pun intended) is ceremonial uncleanness. One enduring this physical affliction would be unable to go into the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), where the *Shechinah* glory of God dwelt. Such people couldn't even be in the midst of the camp.

"The one with *tza'arat* who has the plague-mark should wear torn clothes, the hair of his head is to hang loose, he is to cover his upper lip and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!' All the days during which the plague is on him he will be unclean. He is unclean. He is to dwell alone. Outside of the camp will be his dwelling." – Leviticus 13:45-46

The more I think about it, the more evident this distinct correlation between *tza'arat* and sin (not that one is the same as the other) becomes. When we have sin in our lives and are unrepentant, we are "unclean" and without legitimate claim to be in the presence of God, much like with *tza'arat*. One unsettling difference worth noting: those in the community can spot *tza'arat* much easier than hidden sin.

Conversely, whether suffering from *tza'arat* or unrepentant sin, the person with the condition must go before the *Kohen HaGadol* (i.e., the High Priest) and confess the situation. Much like physical *tza'arat*, the metaphorical *tza'arat* of sin is upon the shoulders of the sinner to personally approach *Yeshua HaMashiach*—our great High Priest after the order of Melchizedek—to rid his or her life of the condition via confession, repentance, and absolution. This exchange allows for reestablishment within the community and access to the *Shechinah*.

Is there hidden sin (spiritual *tza'arat*) within your life you need to bring before the "throne of grace" before entering His presence?

# New Testament Tie-In

A significant portion of Leviticus 14 is dedicated to the cleansing of a house from “the mark of *tza’arat*” – in this instance, something contemporary scholars liken to mold or fungus.<sup>1</sup> What sense can we make of these regulations for our lives today in the New Covenant? Interpreting passages like this through the lens of metaphor can be especially helpful.

## “Leprosy” as sin

Due to its invisible and infectious nature, not to mention the fatal end, our best interpreters have often seen leprosy as a symbol of sin. In his commentary, *On the Second Book of Kings*, Ephrem the Syrian (4th-century theologian) said, “Indeed, sin is the leprosy of the soul, which is not perceived by the senses, but intelligence has the proof of it, and human nature must be delivered from this disease by Christ’s power which is hidden in baptism.”<sup>2</sup>

## “House” as the Church

The New Testament describes our life together as the *ecclesia*, as God’s “house” (cf. Hebrews 3:6; 1 Peter 2:5). In Caesarea Philippi, *Yeshua* identified Himself as the Master Builder of this “house” that we know as the “Church” or community of the Messiah (cf. Matthew 16:18).

## “House” as the individual

Whether *Yeshua* was comparing His body to Herod’s Temple (cf. John 2:19-21), or the Apostle Paul was longing to exchange his “earthly tent” for “a house not made with hands” (2 Corinthians 5:1 NRSV), the human body—or the personal self—has a profound biblical and metaphorical connections to a house.

With this in mind, perhaps one helpful way to read Leviticus 14:33-53 is to see it as a way for believers to address the sin (leprosy/*tza’arat*) within themselves (the “house”). What follows is more an exercise in possibility than a diagnosis and prescription:

- Engage the priest (v. 36): *Yeshua* is our “great High Priest” / Heb 10:21
- Empty the house (v. 37): fasting food and other things creates space in us / Joel 2:12
- Look beneath the surface (v. 37): *Yeshua* was always exposing hearts / Mark 7:21
- Removal & scraping away (vv. 40-41): repentance = change, not just remorse / Rev 2:5
- Plaster over the stones (v. 42): “Blessed are those whose...sins are covered.” / Rom 4:7

According to Paul, we “have redemption through His blood—the removal of trespasses” and “were sealed with the promised *Ruach ha-Kodesh*” (Ephesians 1:7, 13 *emphasis added*). The overpowering blood of our Messiah and Great High Priest confronted the deadly infection of sin at work within us!

But consider this frightening detail in our *parsha*: if the *tza’arat* (leprosy) returns to the house after the cleansing process, then the priest is to “break down the house, its stones, its timber, along with all the house’s mortar, and carry them out of the city into an unclean place” (Leviticus 14:45). This sort of finality is reminiscent of *Yeshua*’s words, “And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away from you. It’s better for you to enter into life crippled or lame than, having two hands or two feet, to be thrown into fiery Gehenna” (Matthew 18:8). Houses that could not be thoroughly rid of *tza’arat* were to be destroyed and taken “out of the city.”

It is no coincidence that they took *Yeshua*’s “house” outside of the city of Jerusalem, and “destroyed” His body (cf. Hebrews 13:12). We are powerless to evict sin from ourselves. In an expression of perfect love, *Yeshua*’s “house” (body/person) became the fullness of “sin” (leprosy/*tza’arat*), and its destruction fulfilled the requirements of the Law as we read it in Leviticus 14. Hence, we no longer need to fear our inability to overcome sin: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21 NRSV).

# Hebrew Word Study

## *kol* [כֹּל] / “sound; voice”

Let's look at a verse in this week's reading from the Prophets:

“For *ADONAI* had caused the army of the Arameans to hear a noise of chariots and a noise of horses—indeed a noise of a huge army. So they said one to another, ‘Look, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians to assault us.’” – 2 Kings 7:6

“Noise” is the Tree of Life Version's translation of the Hebrew word כֹּל / *kol*. The astute reader may recognize that we covered this word recently in *Parashat Yitro*. In that study, we sorted through, to a limited degree, the 506 usages in the Bible and concluded that the word meant the unique sound or voice of an object. More specifically, we noted that no two “voices” sound exactly alike, even with musical instruments. Think about the seemingly indistinct tones generated by striking wood or metal—each sounds slightly different. With our previous word study as a jumping-off point, let's dive into deeper waters.

In the *Haftarah* reading above, God caused an auditory miracle in which the invading army heard **the noise** of horses, chariots, and a large army. Of course, there were no actual horses, chariots, or Hittite soldiers descending upon the Arameans. This supernatural event is not dissimilar to Elijah's encounter in 1 Kings 19:11-13,

“Then He said, ‘Come out and stand on the mount before *ADONAI*.’ Behold, *ADONAI* was passing by—a great and mighty wind was tearing at the mountains and shattering cliffs before *ADONAI*. But *ADONAI* was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but *ADONAI* was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake a fire, but *ADONAI* was not in the fire. After the fire there was a soft whisper of a voice.”

If this mountaintop experience seems reminiscent of Exodus 33-34 (when God passed before Moses), it should. Earlier in that 1 Kings passage, there is a significant sequence of appearances: first, the “Angel/Messenger of the Lord” came to Elijah, then the Word of the Lord, and finally, the Voice. While space will not allow it here, good evidence suggests that these three encounters were “theophanies”—pre-incarnational manifestations of the Messiah. Either way, that biblical account describes a sort of auditory miracle wherein Elijah heard the “voice” of God comforting and speaking to him.

All of this brings us to the following, “Then the man and his wife heard the **sound** of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8 *emphasis added*). They heard a “sound” and recognized it as God Himself moving. In neuroscience, there is a phenomenon known as the “cocktail party effect,” in which the brain can identify a specific voice even in a noisy environment. The ability is enhanced or reduced based on experience, emotional connection, and neural tuning (training your brain that this voice has significance). Many adults experience this when their spouse or child calls out to them across a noisy space, almost supernaturally cutting through the noise.

With all of this in mind, let's consider the words of *Yeshua*, “My sheep hear My voice. I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27). Given the context, He wasn't making some esoteric statement of some vague “inner knowing” or a New Age gnostic experience. Rather, He was saying that the “noise” that Moses and Elijah experienced on the mountain should be normative for those who follow Him. Furthermore, when the noise of life in this fallen world threatens to overwhelm you, the voice of the Shepherd will reach your heart, not unlike that of a beloved spouse in a clamorous room. While you may not be able to describe what the voice sounds like, you know it when you “hear” it.



# FUSION

Rabbi Jason & Fusion Global present  
**HEBREW WORD STUDY**

קול

**קול / kol:** n. masc. **voice, sound, noise.**

*Kol* primarily signifies a sound produced by the vocal cords (actual or figurative). Theological themes in which our word figures prominently are (for lack of better names): prophetic, thunder, covenantal, trumpet. These themes are often intertwined. In Exodus, the voice of God and the voice of Moses (later, the prophets) are interchangeable (cf. Ex 3:18; 4:1; 7:1)...The thunder symbolized God's absolute sovereignty by effecting judgment and evoking fear and submission (Ex 9:23, 29; cf. Ps 29). God's *kol* is the roar of thunder, while man's *kol* in approaching him is the tinkle of bells (28:35). The covenantal theme is seen when, through Moses, God briefly enunciated the principle that the commands (voice) of his servant Moses are his commands (voice) and if the people obey (hearken) and keep his covenant (19:5) they will be blessed...The sovereign power of God which thundered judgment on Pharaoh now appears as a sign of blessing (19:16).

taken from the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*

[fusionglobal.org](http://fusionglobal.org)

## THOUGHTS for REFLECTION

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

- While none of us are suffering with leprosy, we can probably echo Paul's words: "If I do what I do not want, it is no longer I doing it, but sin that dwells in me" (Rom 7:20). Until we die, sin remains an enemy, relentlessly seeking to undermine God's grace in our lives. What better time to invite the Holy Spirit to search our hearts to "see if there be any wicked way in me" (Ps 139:24 KJV).
- Scripture reveals the appropriate pathway to healing from the infection of sin: the Spirit convicts, leading to a sense of godly guilt. We confess our sins. Our heavenly Father absolves and cleanses. We repent. That last "step" might seem out of place, but it's there intentionally. Repentance is the new direction we walk in on the other side of confession and cleansing. Is there a new (i.e., "clean") way of thinking and living you need to embrace today?

# GLOBAL

**NEXT WEEK'S READINGS:** *Parashat Achrei Mot-Kedoshim* / פרשת אחרי מות־קדשים

## TORAH

*Sunday* / Leviticus 16:1-24

*Monday* / Leviticus 16:25-17:7

*Tuesday* / Leviticus 17:8-18:21

*Wednesday* / Leviticus 18:22-19:14

*Thursday* / Leviticus 19:15-32

*Friday* / Leviticus 19:33-20:7

*Saturday* / Leviticus 20:8-27

## Prophetic Reading (*Haftarah*):

Amos 9:7-15

## New Covenant Reading:

Matthew 15:10-20

<sup>1</sup> John H. Walton, Victor Harold Matthews, and Mark William Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary Old Testament*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 130.

<sup>2</sup> Marco Conti and Gianluca Pilara, eds., *1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 167.