

## THE CURE FOR DEATH

### A Devotional Meditation on Metzora (The Leper)

Leviticus 14:1-15:33; 2 Kings 4:42-5:19; Exodus 29:19-21; Numbers 19:5;  
John 8:44, 12:24-26; Romans 6:5-7; Galatians 2:19-20; Hebrews 9:27-28, 13:7-16

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How do we cope with the fact that the two most powerful beings in the universe want to kill us? That sounds peculiar, but it's true. We know that Satan wants to kill us since he has been a murderer from the beginning, but we probably don't think about God wanting to kill us. He is the One Who gives life, and Who wants us to live forever. However, obtaining eternal life is a process that involves a steady transformation from our corrupt natural selves into perfected redeemed selves.



Queens Cemetery. Photo by Scott Bateman, December 10, 2008, [via Flickr](#).

We begin to understand that process when we study what Messiah Yeshua and the apostles taught in statements like these:

Amen, amen I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it produces much fruit. He who loves his life will lose it, and the one who hates his life in this world will keep it forever.

John 12:24-25 TLV

For if we have become joined together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also will be joined together in His resurrection—knowing our old man was crucified with Him so that the sinful body might be done away with, so we no longer serve sin. For he who has died is set free from sin.

Romans 6:5-7 TLV

For through law I died to law, so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Messiah; and it is no longer I who live, but Messiah lives in me. And the life I now live in the body, I live by trusting in *Ben-Elohim* [the Son of God]—who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Galatians 2:19-20 TLV

And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this judgment, so also Messiah, was offered once to bear the sins of many. He will appear a second time, apart from sin, to those eagerly awaiting Him for salvation.

Hebrews 9:27-28 TLV

These passages tell us about a multi-layered death. The first is the physical death that happens to all of us, even though we do our best to ignore it, delay it, run from it, or simply hope that Messiah returns before we have to deal with it. What happens after that depends on what we do with God's offer of redemption through His Living Word (Messiah), and His instructions on how to live through His written Word (the Bible). If we reject His offer, then we continue on to spiritual death, or eternal separation from our

Creator, the Source of all life. If we accept His offer of redemption, then we still get to die spiritually, but it's a redemptive kind of death.

That doesn't sound very encouraging. If we all die, both physically and spiritually, what's the point of having anything to do with God?

That's a valid question. The answer is that God's offer of redemption includes His promise of resurrection. That's the cure for death.

The spiritual death we undergo while still alive is what Paul describes as dying to sin. The more we immerse ourselves into God's Word, and the more we yield to the transforming power of His Holy Spirit, the less susceptible we are to the old sinful patterns, and the more inclined we become to love God and love our neighbors as He designed us to do. That's why Paul can say it's no longer he who lives, but Messiah who lives in him.

Yeshua and Paul understood this from what God revealed through Moses and the prophets. One place we see it is in the commandments regarding *tza'arat*, or leprosy. Like death, *tza'arat* is a physical manifestation of a spiritual condition. The rottenness of the soul and spirit comes out in rotting flesh. Diagnosis and treatment are only possible through spiritual revelation, which is why Israelites were to show themselves to the priests when the signs appeared on their bodies. It's a progressive disease, and it's contagious, just like discord, gossip, and bitterness, so people with *tza'arat* are isolated from society. However, there is hope for healing. One hope is that the disease progresses to the point of covering the entire body. Once that happens, the priest can pronounce the leper clean, and he or she can rejoin society after going through the specified protocols and waiting period.

The cleansing of the leper is a kind of resurrection. Whether the patches of diseased skin clear up, or the whole body is covered, the effect is the same: death is swallowed up in victory. Then come the ritual offerings and protocols, which have echoes in other parts of the Levitical protocols. For example, the priest is to go to the healed leper where he remains isolated outside the camp, bringing two clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop. One bird is killed over running water, and the other, along with the cedar, scarlet, and hyssop, is dipped into the blood of the dead bird. Then the priest sprinkles the former leper seven times, pronounces him clean, and releases the living bird.

The only other ritual involving cedar wood, scarlet, hyssop, and a clean creature slaughtered outside the camp is the ritual of the red heifer. The body of the heifer, along with the other elements, is burned to produce ashes that, when mixed with water, are sprinkled over a person tainted with the corruption of death to make him clean and able to rejoin society. In other words, the ashes of the red heifer, like the birds and elements for cleansing the leper, remove the stain of death that keeps a person separated from God and God's people. That, in a sense, is resurrection.

We learn the purpose of resurrection when we see another echo of Levitical protocols for the leper. The cleansed leper is to bring two male lambs, one of which is given as a trespass offering. The priest takes the blood of that lamb and dabs the right ear, right thumb, and big toe of the right foot of the former leper. The only other place in Torah with a ritual like that is the consecration ceremony for the priests, when blood of a ram is dabbed on the priests' right ears, right thumbs, and big toes of their right feet.

Death and resurrection are the connections between these ceremonies of cleansing and consecration. The priests, like the leper, have died to their former lives, and are reborn to lives of dedication to the Creator. That's why we don't expect priests, of all people, to lie, steal, cheat, drink heavily, and seduce women. They are set apart and made holy in this life of consecration, so they should act like it.

But it's not just the Levitical priests, or the modern clergy, who should act like redeemed and consecrated people. All of us should act that way. It's the purpose of redemption and resurrection. A priest mediates between the Creator and His Creation, acting as the living expression of God to everyone and everything He has made. That's why He made humanity in the first place, but our decision to redefine our purpose caused the stain of death to come on us all.

We are doomed to die, but that's not such a bad thing. Once dead to all that can corrupt us, we are raised to new life to take our places in the Kingdom of Priests established by the God of Israel. This is why we have to die in every sense of the word – and why the only cure for death, is new life.