

“Put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the NEW man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness,” Ephesians 4:22-24.



New Year Greetings Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus,

Here is the first question of the day. Did you make any New Year's Resolutions for 2019? None were made this year in our household. However, I have been known to make a few in years past. In listening to other people talk about their resolutions, it always seemed to me that they planned to start over, correct, or just be better at something. While these may seem important to them at the time, their resolutions always seem a little, pardon me, a little shallow on the larger scale of life. I mean, for the most part, resolutions are not world or life changing events. They are more of a life style adjustment, tweaking, or correction. Moreover, I think that the word **“correction”** is a better description of the type of changes they want to make. Here is a list of the most common “corrective” New Year's Resolutions:

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| <i>Diet / Eat Healthier;</i> | <i>Save More Money / Spend Less Money;</i> | <i>Exercise More;</i> |
| <i>Live Life to the Fullest;</i> | <i>Lose Weight;</i> | <i>Quit Smoking;</i> |
| <i>Get Organized;</i> | <i>Spend More Time with Family;</i> | <i>Learn a New Skill or Hobby;</i> |
| <i>Read More;</i> | <i>Find Better Job;</i> | <i>Volunteer;</i> |
| <i>Travel More;</i> | <i>Manage Stress;</i> | <i>Drink Less Alcohol.</i> |

If you would, please mark or circle any (and/or all) of the New Year's Resolutions listed above that you made for this year of 2019. If you made resolutions that are not listed above, please take a little minute and write them down right now, before you read the remaining portion of this letter.

Now, here is your second question. How many of your resolutions for 2019 have you kept and how many have already been broken? Of those broken resolutions, how many were made for 2018 and how many will be 2020's resolutions and are again likely to be broken by this time next year?

Next question. Why do we make New Year's Resolutions at all? Simply put, making New Year's Resolutions is mostly a Western tradition for a person to make a change in habits, lifestyles, or goals which will improve and change their life in the direction which they think is important. For the majority of people, these resolutions tend to correct/change a negative action, habit, or lack of action. Why is the first of January chosen as a day for change? A new year gives us a starting point to look forward. We are hoping (in some cases – praying) for better times or results the following year, at least better than last year. However, it could be any day of the year that we set to be a day of change for the betterment of our lives. I know that *January 2nd, February 14th, May 10th, July 13th, September 14th, August 5th, October 22nd, November 2nd, December 7th, December 15th, and December 16th* are all dates of a new beginning, or at least a major change and improvement in my life. They are changes that will forever be important to me as they are dates of new beginnings within our family. Some dates mark new starts physically. Some dates are new starts spiritually. All are life altering.

Our society is not the only one that has chosen this date to make promises to change lifestyles. The Babylonians promised their god to return borrowed items and pay back debts. The Romans offered sacrifices and made promises of good conduct to their god, Janus, the two-faced god believed to inhabit doorways and arches, looking forwards and backwards, symbolically, into the previous year and ahead into the future. Bringing it closer to home, the Jewish nation's Fall Celebration includes reflection of wrong doings and seeking forgiveness during *Yom Kippur* with hopes and prayers of a better year.

Therefore, the desire to improve one's life by marking a new starting date is in our nature, whether we know it or not and whether we mark it with a date or just strive to do better. The epitome of a new change is found in the Bible, and we are not looking at the birth or death of Jesus Christ. However, His death is the pinnacle of this new beginning which was first recorded in the Torah. *"And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the [basin], and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the [basin]; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning," Exodus 12:22.*

We all have read and know this account in the Old Testament when the nation of Israel was enslaved by Egypt. The main focus of this entire evening was predicated upon the **blood** of their sacrifice that was applied to the door posts of the houses of the children of Israel so the angel of death would pass over their houses as he moved through Egypt, killing the first born of every creature in the nation. Thus, the death angel fulfilled the last and greatest plague in Egypt, freeing the nation of Israel from the bondage of slavery of Egypt. *Hyssop* was used in the first physical and spiritual act of freedom, the first release from the bondage of slavery, and the first new beginning of the nation. This is important here because it ties the Old Testament to the New Testament in a way that is not expected, as we will see later.

This writing is about *new beginnings*. Let us look at another actual and symbolic new beginning of the cleansing process that was carried from God's Law in the Old



Testament of the fatal skin disease of leprosy through to the New Testament's cleansing of the fatal condition of sin. Leprosy could be compared to the **black** plague in Europe and Asia that killed millions because there were no known cures. Sin in the Bible is **darkness, blackness** that kills the soul. [Again, the term "**black**," as used in the Bible, is not a racial term or slur; rather, it refers solely to the darkness of the soul – sin – **the absence of being clean, the absence of righteousness in Jehovah, or the absence of the light of Jesus Christ in the souls of men.**]

Later in the Torah, God gave His Law for the cleansing of lepers: *"The LORD [spoke] unto Moses, saying, "This shall be the Law of the Leper in the day of his cleansing ... the priest shall go forth out of the camp ... shall look ... if the plague of leprosy be healed in the leper; Then shall the priest command to take for him that is to be cleansed two birds alive and clean, and cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop: And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over 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 upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose into the open field," Leviticus 14:1-7.*

These verses speak of several powerful truths and principles, and of a couple of new beginnings. The most obvious is the new beginning for the leper that was healed and cleansed from the disease. He (she) was given a new life of a healthy body. A new life freed from sickness, pain, disgrace, humiliation, isolation, discrimination, poverty, separation from family, and death. I'll step out on a limb here and say they were given *new skin*.

Later in the same chapter, God deals with the curse of leprosy when it was found in a dwelling place. When the plague was "*healed*" and the dwelling pronounced clean, the spiritual purification and cleansing was performed by the priest. *"And he shall take to cleanse the house two birds, and cedar wood, and scarlet, and hyssop: he shall kill the one of the birds in an earthen vessel over running water: he shall take the cedar wood, and the hyssop, and the scarlet, and the living bird, and dip them in the blood of the slain bird, and in the running water, and sprinkle the house seven times: And he shall cleanse the house with the blood of the bird, and with the running water, and with the living bird, and with the cedar wood, and with the hyssop, and with the scarlet: But he shall let go the living bird out of the city into the open fields, and make an atonement for the house: and it shall be clean,"* verses 49-53.

Here, we see the spiritual plot thicken. We see the same dark curse of the fatal disease leprosy and the same items of purification and cleansing. Now we see two additional elements of the cleansing ritual. There were other new

HAITIAN ORPHANAGE



The Haitian orphans are dressed up for the Haitian Holiday of Christmas. While the Americans take Christmas off for a holiday, the Haitians make a Celebration of the Christmas Holiday. We are supporting almost 50 children and young people in the orphanage. There is always a need in Haiti and in the orphanage.

beginnings, seldom if ever thought of, in this verse. First is the cleansing of the dwelling place, it also received a new beginning. For if the dwelling was not “healed” it would be torn down, stone by stone; and taken outside the city and dumped at a location that was deemed unclean. Second was the new life of the second bird. Yes, while the first bird was sacrificed for the cleansing of the leprosy in the dwelling place, the second bird played a principle part of the leprosy cleansing. Its part symbolized freedom, a new start, a healing, and yes, in being spared, a new life itself. This time the bird was released outside of their city to live and die, much like the escape goat of the atonement for the sins of the nation. This cleansing was physical and spiritual.

In **Numbers Chapter 19** we read of a purely spiritual ritual of separation for a person who has become unclean because they touched a dead body, body parts, been inside a dwelling which contained a body, or anything that was on or touching a dead person. Imagine if you will the magnitude of spiritual cleansing required for the Israelites after a battle, invasion, or plague. As in the cleansing of leprosy, cedar wood, scarlet, and *hyssop* were used in their purification ritual. However, here we are talking about death and not a disease and a **red heifer** was used as the required sacrifice instead of a bird. The **blood** of both sacrificed creatures was used as an element of supernaturally changing disease for health, unclean for clean, and bondage for freedom.

Other items instructed by the LORD to be used in this ritual of cleansing are *Hyssop* and scarlet. Until recent days, very little has been said about the herb *Hyssop*. Oh, occasionally, we may see it in other Scriptures, but give it little or no additional thought. Why was it used as a cleansing agent and referred to in God’s Word? *Hyssop* is so very interesting. You may call it one of the best-kept secrets of the Bible. *Hyssop* is a wild mint shrub of several varieties. It

has small aromatic and brightly colored flowers and leaves that grow in different areas of Egypt and Israel. Its blooms and bitter tasting leaves are used for oils, cooking, aromatherapy, and as herbal medicine. Because of its cleansing properties, it was used for cleansing and purification in Egyptian, Jewish, Grecian, and Roman cultures. It is still used today for its health benefits, aroma, and cleaning attributes. Because it also has spiritual, ritual, and commercial value, it is against Israeli law to harvest wild *Hyssop* plants. Its 24” stems are woody at their base with finer and more pliable twigs at the tips. This plant was used to make paintbrushes by binding many stems together. It is a good cleaner, so good that it is used today in many industrial cleaning compounds as a degreaser.

Hyssop has a deeper meaning and usage in the Word of God. Its name comes from the Hebrew word *adobe* or *ezob*, which literally means “*holy herb.*” *Hyssop* is the most humble plant in the land around Egypt and Israel because it is one of the shortest perennial plants and grows in the poorest soil found on the mountain ledges. *Hyssop* is next mentioned by King David after sinning with Bathsheba, “*Have mercy upon me ... blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin ... my sin is ever before me. Against thee ... have I sinned ... I was shapen in iniquity ... thou desirest truth in the inward parts ... Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow,*” **Psalms 51:1-7**. King David is not referring to his dirty skin. No, he is confessing his spiritual sinful act of having sex with another man’s wife out of his pure lust for her body while watching her from his palace bedroom window as she took a bath on her rooftop. [Now there is a sermon against watching pornography if I have ever read one.] David knew of the outward cleansing ability of *Hyssop* and asked God to cleanse his heart from this black sin, making it clean and pure again, as good as *Hyssop* cleans the outward skin of man. David is asking more than forgiveness, he is asking for white as snow cleanliness that would give him a new beginning, new life before his LORD. He was not asking God to cross out, cover over, atone, or redact [black out] his sin. No, he is asking God to blot out, remove, and totally eradicate his sinful and selfish act. David knew his God, he knew of His love and grace, and he knew the cleansing power of *Hyssop*. David’s cleansing was purely spiritual, but was complete.

Now we come to the good part. If we were watching a musical, this would be the grand finale. If we were attending a baseball game, this would be the game winning grand slam homerun in the bottom of the ninth inning. However, we are not talking about a measure of music written by man, or a lucky swing by an athlete. No, we are talking about the words and actions of a man



that changed Heaven and Earth, forever. *“After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, ‘I thirst.’ Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a [sponge] with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to His mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, ‘It is finished:’ and He bowed His head, and gave up His [Spirit],” John 19:28-30.* Receiving the bitter drink from a sponge stuck on *Hyssop* stems was the very last act of Jesus Christ on Earth before saying *“It is finished”* and releasing His Spirit. *Hyssop* was part of the eternal freeing of mankind from the bondage of slavery to sin. *Hyssop* was used to give mankind new life – an eternal life in Jesus Christ. *Hyssop* was used in the death of a man, but the new beginning of His eternal Holy Body. *Hyssop* was used in the purification of dirty mankind of sin into a sin forgiven child of God. *Hyssop* was *the first part of the redemption* of the nation of Israel fleeing Egypt and the *last part of the redemption* of all nations from sin. *Hyssop* was the *end of the curses* of Egypt, and the *end of the curse of the Law* over man. *Hyssop* was used to *start the separation of Israel from Egypt* and to *end the separation of God from man*. *Hyssop* was used to *atone for sin* in the Old Testament and *redeem man* in the New Testament.

You ask me why was *blood*, water, cedar wood, scarlet, and *Hyssop* required of God to free, to cleanse, to purify, to end separation, to atone, and to *redeem*. Because that was the Word of God! We can make justifications, reasonings, and theories of the power and properties of *Hyssop* and everything else but we won't know the true power or significance of God's use of *Hyssop* until we ask Him face to face. The Church takes for granted much of the Word of God because we don't read it and we don't ask God for His guidance and wisdom when we do read it. Everything written in and under His inspiration is for a reason and is significant to us. He thought it was important enough for us to know so God inspired His servants to write His Words down for us. However, we are accountable to read,

meditate upon, to learn, to know, and hide His Word in our heart in order for us to live a productive and righteous life. The Law in the Old Testament provided shed *blood* for healing, renewed life, and atonement for sins. God's New Covenant provides healing, a new life, and redemption from sins through the shed *blood* of Jesus Christ. Our Heavenly Father loves us enough to provide for us a path to *redemption* and a path to eternal joy, health, peace, and life with Him!

Your Covenant Brother in Jesus Christ, our LORD and Savior,

Phillip Buttram

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>>> SIGN OF THE TIMES <<<



“McJesus,”

Artwork depicting a crucified Ronald McDonald remains on display in Israel's Haifa Museum of Art despite protests and calls for its removal from the country's Arab Christian community.

Courtesy WorldViews

DC Comics is introducing its newest superhero,

Jesus Christ, in March. The animated work is claiming that Jesus needed to return to earth to learn how to become the “true messiah” from a Superman-like character called “Sun-man.”

Courtesy Christian Post Reporter.



“Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in Heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets,” Luke 6:22-23.