

4-20-24 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene – Under the Law – Part 7 - Mtzora (the infected one)
Torah Portion: Leviticus 14:1 – 15:33
Haftarah: Special for Shabbes HaGadol is Malachi 3:4-24
Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: Matt 15:10-20

Celebrate the Feast in Purity!

Central question of this message: Have you put away all evil speech so that you can participate in the festival of redemption in purity?

Today we are in the fifth portion of the book of Vayikra (Leviticus), which is called *M'tzora*, which means “the afflicted one.”

The name of our parasha, comes from the second line of the passage, at the fifteenth word in the English, and the ninth word in the Hebrew.

Lev 14:1-3

14 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "This shall be the law of the leper¹[Heb. *m'tzarah*] in the day of his cleansing. Now he shall be brought to the priest, 3 and the priest shall go out to the outside of the camp. Thus the priest

¹ The English word “leper” is a persistent mistranslation of the affliction of tzarat. Tzarat cannot be caught, is not contagious, cannot be cured, and comes on suddenly as a result of sinful conduct, specifically evil speech (loshan hara).

shall look, and if the infection of leprosy [Heb. *tzarat*] has been healed in the leper [Heb. *m'tzarah*].

וַיִּדְבֹּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר: 14:1
 And spake the Lord unto Moses, saying,
 1696 3068 413 4872 559

זֹאת תְּהִיָּה תוֹרַת הַמִּצְוֶה בְּיוֹם טְהִרְתּוֹ 2
 This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing:
 2063 1961 8451 6879 3117 2893

וַהֲבִיֵּא אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן:
 He shall be brought unto the priest:
 935 413 3548

וַיֵּצֵא הַכֹּהֵן אֶל-מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה וַיִּרְאֶה הַכֹּהֵן 3
 And shall go forth the priest out of the camp; and shall look, the priest
 3318 3548 413 2351 4264 7200 3548

וַהֲגֵה וְנִרְפָּא נִגְעַ-הַצִּרְעָת מִן-הַצִּרְוֹעַ:
 and, behold, be healed plague of if the leprosy in the leper;
 2009 7495 5061 9999 6883 4480 6879

Today is also known as “Shabbes HaGadol”, the “great Sabbath”. It is called “great” because today is the Shabbes immediately preceding Passover. We are already at the 11th day of the month of Nisan, the first month of our calendar, and on Monday night the 14th day will be here – Passover.

Today I continue the series of “Under the Law.” I am speaking about issues that trouble the body of faith. One of these pressing issues is the way we speak to one another, and about one another. We are to come to

the L-rd's table in purity, putting all sin out of our houses (and out of our lives).² If we are going to expect the Messiah to come join us one day at our festival table, then we should be dressed in clean robes and we should be well-washed so that we will not be ashamed when He comes to take His seat. It is clear that our evil speech defiles us.

Before I get into the Passover, I wish to address some things found in the parasha for today. The entire parasha is dedicated to the process for dealing with tzarat when it is presented to the priest, and how the priest is to proclaim the one who was afflicted with tzarat clean. The amazing thing about this year's timing of Passover and this parasha, is that they have a commonality in theme. I am excited to show you that.

This entire parasha, together with a large portion of last week's parasha are dedicated to the proposition that some in Israel will be afflicted with tzarat, and what then is to happen to them from that point forward.

Added to that is the large amount of discussion found in the ancient writings - Talmud, Mishneh, and Gemarah - which offer great detail and commentary on these scriptures as well. Having read them, I find no instance of any one person among Israel actually having the affliction of tzarat removed, so that these provisions would be put into use.

² The *bedikat chametz*, the "purging of leaven" before the start of the Passover symbolizes this important task.

And our sages then concluded that only the Messiah could deliver an afflicted one from tzarat. Thus, if any one among Israel were to be actually delivered, then that would be one of the “signs of Messiah” which heralded His arrival.

So, let’s begin our study by looking at a number of Scripture passages. I am going to remove the errant translations in the passage and replace them with the proper Hebrew term, to avoid confusion.

Let’s first find out why tzarat comes upon a person. We can begin with Miriam.

Num 12:1-8

12 Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married a Cushite woman); 2 and they said, "Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?" And the Lord heard it. 3 (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.) 4 And suddenly the Lord said to Moses and Aaron and to Miriam, "You three come out to the tent of meeting." So

the three of them came out. 5 Then the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the doorway of the tent, and He called Aaron and Miriam. When they had both come forward, 6 He said,

"Hear now My words:

If there is a prophet among you,

I, the Lord, shall make Myself known to him in a vision.

I shall speak with him in a dream.

7 "Not so, with My servant Moses,

He is faithful in all My household;

8 With him I speak mouth to mouth,

Even openly, and not in dark sayings,

And he beholds the form of the Lord.

Why then were you not afraid

To speak against My servant, against Moses?"

9 So the anger of the Lord burned against them and He departed. 10 But when the cloud had withdrawn from over the tent, behold, Miriam was *m'tzarah*, as white as snow. As Aaron turned toward Miriam, behold, she was *m'tzarah*. 11 Then Aaron said to Moses, "Oh, my lord, I beg you, do not account this sin to us, in which we have acted foolishly and in which we have sinned. 12 Oh, do not let her be like one

dead, whose flesh is half eaten away when he comes from his mother's womb!" 13 And Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, "O God, heal her, I pray!" 14 But the Lord said to Moses, "If her father had but spit in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days? Let her be shut up for seven days outside the camp, and afterward she may be received again." 15 So Miriam was shut up outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on until Miriam was received again.

And we see the same haughty spirit, and evil speech, in King Uzziah, who became king of Judah at the age of 16. He initially did right in the sight of the L-rd (a somewhat rare description given to kings of our people) and he continued to seek G-d during the days of the prophet Zechariah.

But Uzziah's success caused him to be prideful (he thought all his success was by his hand, not G-d's). And that caused him to make a very serious error. We see it unfold in 2 Chronicles 26.

2 Chron 26:16-21

16 But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the Lord his God,

for he entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. 17 Then Azariah the priest entered after him and with him eighty priests of the Lord, valiant men. 18 And they opposed Uzziah the king and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful, and will have no honor from the Lord God." **19 But Uzziah, with a censer in his hand for burning incense, was enraged; and while he was enraged with the priests, the tzarat broke out on his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord, beside the altar of incense.** 20 And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he was with tzarat on his forehead; and they hurried him out of there, and he himself also hastened to get out because the Lord had smitten him. **21 And King Uzziah was a m'tzorah to the day of his death; and he lived in a separate house, being a leper, for he was cut off from the house of the Lord.**

What is the commonality we see in these two instances? A combination of pride, and the evil speech that flows from it.

Our sages have noticed that the very word מצורע [*m'tzarah*] contains a hint that describes why a person has been afflicted. The word *m'tzarah* contains the first and last letters of the Hebrew phrase describing one of the most vile segments of evil speech [*loshan hara*]. It is מוציא שם רע [*motzi shem ra*] which means “the bringer of an evil name,” or one who maliciously maligns someone. It is like gossip, but with the added element of intent to cause harm added-in.

Thus, our people have understood that *tzarat* afflicts people who have engaged in *loshan hara*, or “evil speech.” The same theme is found elsewhere. Solomon in Ecclesiastes 5:5 warns, אל תתן את פיהך לחטיא את בשרך, “let not your mouth bring guilt on your flesh.”

And in Proverbs 18:21 he said: מות וחיים ביד לשון, “death and life are within the power of the tongue.”

One sage³ has said, that “the Torah is the remedy with which the sin of evil gossip can be atoned for. It is known as the עץ חיים, “the tree of life.” We know this also from Solomon, in Proverbs 15,4: מרפא לשון עץ חיים, “the tree of life can heal (the harm caused) by abusing one’s power of speech.”

³ Daat Zkenim on Leviticus 14:2:1

Having discovered that evil speech is the sin which brings *tzarat* upon a person, you may ask why do we not have *tzarat* with us today? I believe that it is because of G-d's mercy. He has caused in this age a distance between Himself and us, so that when we sin in this way, we are not immediately covered by *tzarat*. But I tell you I believe that the affliction of *tzarat* will come once again, when Yeshua returns. In that day, the holiness that existed only in the holy of holies will expand outward and encompass not only the Temple itself, but all of Israel.⁴

We can begin to explore the connection between the healing of the *m'tzarah*, and the Passover we will celebrate in only two more days. Let's begin with the parasha for today.

Lev 14:1-9

14 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "This shall be the law of the *m'tzarah* in the day of his cleansing. **Now he shall be brought to the priest, 3 and the priest shall go out to the outside of the camp.** Thus the priest shall look, and if the infection of *tzarat* has been healed in the *m'tzarah*, 4 then the priest shall give orders to take two live clean birds and cedar wood and a scarlet string and hyssop for the one who is

⁴ See Zechariah 14.

to be cleansed. 5 The priest shall also give orders to slay the one bird in an earthenware vessel over running water. 6 As for the live bird, he shall take it, together with the cedar wood and the scarlet string and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was slain over the running water. 7 He shall then sprinkle seven times the one who is to be cleansed from the *tzarat*, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the live bird go free over the open field. **8 The one to be cleansed shall then wash his clothes and shave off all his hair, and bathe in water and be clean. Now afterward, he may enter the camp, but he shall stay outside his tent for seven days. 9 And it will be on the seventh day that he shall shave off all his hair: he shall shave his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair. He shall then wash his clothes and bathe his body in water and be clean.**

The Torah makes it clear that the person afflicted with *tzarat* must immediately leave the camp – go outside the boundary walls – to be alone and removed. It is contemplated that this person would use this time of isolation to reflect upon the sins which caused this affliction, and repent of them.

Our sages have noted that even if the *m'tzarah* has had all of the outward manifestations of his affliction removed, he cannot yet be restored to purity unless he goes through the priest, and offers the proper sacrifices in the proper way.

Can human traditions supersede G-d's commands regarding defilement? It seems they have in the past, and today in the present.

Yeshua was confronted at one point by people who suggested that His disciples were defiled because they ate with unwashed hands. Yeshua then resorted to a common rabbinic technique, called *kal v homer* (light and heavy), which compares two good things, but elevates one so far above the other as to make the lesser one even to appear as an opposite.⁵

Matt 15:10-20

10 And after He called the multitude to Him, He said to them, "Hear, and understand. **11 "Not what enters into the mouth defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man."** 12 Then the disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?" 13 But He

⁵ Recall the scene in the movie *Crocodile Dundee* where he says, "That's not a knife... THIS is a knife!"

answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be rooted up. 14 "Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit." 15 And Peter answered and said to Him, "Explain the parable to us." **16 And He said, "Are you still lacking in understanding also? 17 "Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? 18 "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. 19 "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. 20 "These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man."**

Of course it's good to wash one's hands before eating. But evil speech is the true defilement that was being demonstrated by those questioning Yeshua on that topic, because their hearts were not given over to G-d, but against Him in this instance.

And now we will see how the laws of the *m'tzarah* and Passover intersect.

If you have been looking at the night sky, paying attention to G-d's calendar (not man's calendar), then you are noticing that the moon is nearly full.

It will be completely full on the 14th. G-d's calendar is in the sky, not on our walls.

And so it will be completely full on Monday night this coming week, as we who worship G-d take our places at the Passover tables across the world.

Why do we, as believers, feel the obligation to celebrate Passover as our ancestors did for thousands of years? Several reasons.

First, it is a commandment.

Lev 23:4-8

4 'These are the appointed times of the Lord, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at the times appointed for them. 5 'In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month [at the full moon] at twilight is the Lord's Passover. 6 'Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is the Feast

of Unleavened Bread to the Lord; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. 7 'On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work. 8 'But for seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the Lord. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work.'"

For many of our sweet brothers in the faith, this “commandment” isn’t really a “commandment”, because they believe that it was done away with by the cross.

But I believe that pretty much all Christians believe that one of the high ordinances of the church is what they call “the Lord’s Supper”.

They celebrate it on many days every year, but have abbreviated the celebration down to only a tiny piece of matzoh (or even a pinch of leavened bread), and a single tiny sip of grape juice.

But if you read the scriptures closely, you will discover that what they are calling “the Lord’s Supper” was really Passover. There are accounts of this event in the gospels, but I like the one found described by Luke as the best, because it supplies more details.

Luke 22:7-17

7 Then came the first day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. 8 And He sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it." 9 And they said to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare it?" 10 And He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house that he enters. 11 "And you shall say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says to you,' 'Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?' " 12 "And he will show you a large, furnished, upper room; prepare it there." 13 And they departed and found everything just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover.

14 And when the hour had come He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. 15 And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God. "

So, He had the final Passover with His *talmidim* before he went to die.

And all the Christians I know will quote from what Yeshua said at that meal, and most churches will carve His words on the little table in the front of the church for all to see, as an important commandment.

Luke 22:19

19 And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; **do this in remembrance of Me.**"

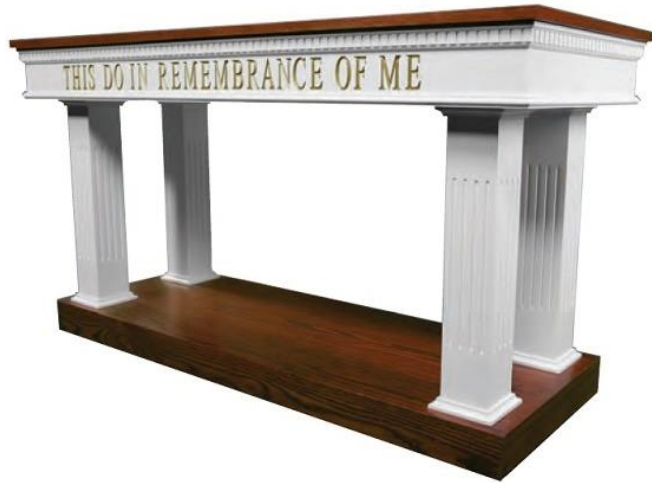
Although Luke didn't record this phrase more than once, Rv. Shaul (Paul) wrote of it being used twice by Yeshua.

1 Cor 11:23-27

23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, "This is My body, which is for you; **do this in remembrance of Me.**" 25 In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; **do this**, as often as you drink it, **in remembrance of**

Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

Regardless, whether it was said once or twice during that Passover meal, it was said for a certainty. And the church has seized upon that phrase as a very important aspect of Christian worship.



Many Christians have forgotten, or maybe denied, that Yeshua celebrated Passover. And when you ask some of them why they don't keep Passover in their churches, some will say it is because of the teachings of Paul.

But did Paul teach the churches he founded to abandon Passover?

1 Cor 5:6-8

6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our **Passover** also has been sacrificed.

8 Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

So, we can see that Paul was teaching the congregation at Corinth, as a minimum, that they were to keep the Passover.

And not only that, he was using the very same rabbinic interpretations that were used then, and even today, in the orthodox community.

Rb. Ari Kahn has said,

Talmudic teachings regarding Passover associate leavened bread with the evil inclination: The difference between leavened bread, chametz, and matzah, the unleavened "bread of poverty," is that bread is puffed up, indicating haughtiness or pride.

And it is pretty clear that Paul was celebrating the days of Unleavened Bread while he was on his missionary journeys.

Acts 20:4-6

4 And he was accompanied by Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus; and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. 5 But these had gone on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas. 6 And we sailed from Philippi **after the days of Unleavened Bread**, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days.

So, it does seem that Paul was teaching, as well as demonstrating, the proper ways of observing the Levitical festivals to those new congregations.

In just a few days we will be sitting down to Passover tables across this city, and across this nation. But today, let's look more deeply into the restoration process for the *m'tzarah* and see some spiritual hints regarding Messiah and His work of redemption.

The *M'tzarah* Must Leave the Camp. If we are sinful, we are condemned to be outside the presence of G-d. ⁶

⁶ Romans 7:7.

The *M'tzarah* Must Trust in Messiah's Cleansing Work. If we fall at the feet of Messiah, with a repentant heart, and accept His sacrifice, we can be healed of the affliction of sin.⁷

The *M'tzarah* Must Show Himself to the Priest at the Door to the Camp to be Judged. Before we are permitted to enter into the presence of G-d, and enter the house that is prepared for us in the camp of Israel around His Temple, we are judged by the Priest, who is the only one who can certify us as clean.⁸

Once Cleansed, the *M'tzarah* is Not Yet Restored, Until the Sacrifice Has Been Offered. The shedding of blood is required for our forgiveness.⁹ And the blood of Yeshua has been sprinkled for us.¹⁰

The *M'tzarah* is to Wash Himself, and Change his Clothes to Clean Fresh Ones. At the end of the judgment process, those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb must first wash themselves.¹¹ Then they are permitted to clothe themselves in fine linen, bright and clean.¹²

⁷ Romans 6:8, Luke 17:11-19, Matthew 8:1-4

⁸ Hebrews 8, 10:30, and James 5:9

⁹ Hebrews 9:22

¹⁰ Hebrews 10:19-22

¹¹ Hebrews 10:22

¹² Revelation 19:7-9

Then the One Cleansed of *Tzarat* Can Enter His Home, to Dwell in the Presence of G-d. We have a home in the camp of Israel, around the Temple of G-d. Yeshua has assured us of that truth, and we can trust that it is so.¹³

The cleansing and restoration of the *m'tzarah* speaks to us of Yeshua's work. The Passover speaks of Yeshua's work, as well. It's all connected.

As we spend the next few days preparing for the Passover celebration, and as we clean out the leaven of our homes (and our lives) so that we will be pure at that holy table, then let us also keep our garments clean by avoiding *loshan hara*, evil speech.

¹³ John 14:1-4