

Hyssop

Written and compiled by Gary Kukis

These studies are designed for believers in Jesus Christ only. If you have exercised faith in Christ, then you are in the right place. If you have not, then you need to heed the words of our Lord, Who said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son, so that every [one] believing [or, trusting] in Him shall not perish, but shall have eternal life! For God did not send His Son into the world so that He should judge the world, but so that the world shall be saved through Him. The one believing [or, trusting] in Him is not judged, but the one not believing has already been judged, because he has not believed in the Name of the only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son of God.” (John 3:16–18). “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life! No one comes to the Father except through [or, by means of] Me!” (John 14:6).

Every study of the Word of God ought to be preceded by a naming of your sins to God. This restores you to fellowship with God (1John 1:8–10). If we acknowledge our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1John 1:9). If there are people around, you would name these sins silently. If there is no one around, then it does not matter if you name them silently or whether you speak aloud.

This is also found in **Exodus 20** ([HTML](#)) ([PDF](#)) ([WPD](#)).

1. Sources disagree as to what the hyssop is and some claim that the NT hyssop and the OT hyssop are different plants. Some claim to know what the New Testament plant was but not the Old Testament plant. Some believe that a different plant is used throughout the OT, even though it is called by the same name.
2. When the Bible was translated into the KJV, they certainly did not know what the hyssop was, so they transliterated the word out of the Greek. The Greek word is ὑσσοπος (hus'-sō-pos) and it is found in only two New Testament passages, John 19:29 and Heb. 9:19, and it is found in the Septuagint. This would indicate that the translators of the Septuagint in 300 BC knew what the hyssop was. It was, after all, used in the various purification rites as set down by the OT during that period of time. It is possible that over the centuries, because God's Word had been misplaced and because the Jews were in reversionism many times, that a different plant could have come to be used by the Jews and that would account for the NT hyssop and the OT hyssop being different. Therefore, this change, if it occurred, would have taken place prior to the translation of the Septuagint.
3. The opinions: Dr. William Smith in *Smith's Bible Dictionary* defers Dr. Royle, who claims that the hyssop is not marjoram or some similar aromatic plant, but, after considerable research, claims that it is the caper-plant of Linnæus. He also points out that the Arabic word is quite similar to the Hebrew word translated *hyssop*. *The New Bible Dictionary* asserts that the hyssop is not the plant presently called *Hyssopus officinalis* L., which is found growing in Southern Europe but is not native to Palestine, but very likely the marjoram in the Old Testament and the *Sorghum vulgare* in the New Testament (at least at the crucifixion). Other possibilities are listed there. Although what the plant was exactly is unimportant, it is reasonable to expect that the two references in the New Testament are the same plant and very likely refer to the same plant in the OT (since the Septuagint uses the same word—however, it is found therein in both the male and female gender, which is why, I suspect, that *The New Bible Dictionary* said that the OT references did not always seem to be for the same species). Zodhiates groups the hyssop to a group of plants such as the Egyptian marjoram and thyme. *Their hairy stems would serve well as a brush*, he points out¹.

¹ p. 178

4. Whatever the plant, no previous non-ceremonial, Biblical references exist and it is closely associated with various purification rites in the Old Testament:
- It is used in Ex. 12:22 in conjunction with the first passover. It was dipped into the blood of the lamb (or goat) and the blood was brushed on the top and sides of the doorposts throughout the houses of the Jewish believers. This also helps to explain why God brought so many plagues upon Egypt prior to this plague. We have seen that the Jews did not receive Moses warmly; especially after his first meeting with Pharaoh (where he increased the workload of the Jewish slaves). They had to see continual signs and wonders to become (11) believers and to (2) have the sense to follow Moses. Had God given only or two plagues, then many Jews would not have participated in the Passover and their firstborn would have died. It will be their sons and daughters who will enter the land; not the Jewish slaves of that time period.
 - We do not find hyssop mentioned again until Lev. 14:4,6,49,51 and 52. Here, it is used in the purification rites of a leper (and the house where leprosy was). A leper on the outside has the same appearance as we do on the inside. A leper being cured of leprosy is analogous to an unbeliever believing in Jesus Christ and being cleansed and purified. A leper is considered to be unclean and only the healed lepers were a part of this ritual. This ritual made them ceremonially clean. This ceremony, like most of the OT rites, speaks of Christ dying for our sins on the cross, the just for the unjust and His blood (spiritual death) cleansing us from all unrighteousness.
 - The hyssop is used in the red heifer sacrifice in Num. 19:6,18
 - I Kings 4:33 tells us that the hyssop plant grows on the wall (the context is Solomon's wisdom and academic excellence in all areas).
 - David alludes to the hyssop in one of his Psalms (51:7) and relates it to purification.
5. What is interesting is that Hebrews adds information to what the OT tells us about what occurred in the OT. Since God's Word is accurate, we must accept this additional information as true. In Ex. 24, Moses has just finished reading the Words of the Law to the people in the desert and vv. 6–7- read *And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will be obedient!" So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people and said, "Behold, the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."* Heb. 9:19 tells us *For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people.* That is, Hebrews tells us that the blood was also sprinkled on the book of the Law and that water, scarlet wool and hyssop was involved.
6. John 19:29 is the final reference to hyssop in the Bible. Jesus, after He had died spiritually for our sins, was given a small amount of sour wine on a hyssop. How appropriate that the lamb without spot and blemish would be associated with this plant after our sins had been paid for and that God the Holy Spirit could see down the centuries of time to this when He included the use of the hyssop in the various OT purification rituals.

Although Hyssop is found several times throughout the Old and New Testaments, we do not know exactly which plant from the ancient world is referred to by hyssop. However, the type of plant is not as important as its significance. It is used here at the first Passover and in several other places (the purification rites for lepers and the red heifer sacrifice).

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- When the Bible was translated into the KJV, they almost certainly did not know what the hyssop was;

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therefore they transliterated the word out of the Greek.

- a. The Greek word is hussopos (ὑσσόπος) [pronounced, *HUÇ-sō-positive*].
 - b. This Greek word is found in only two New Testament passages, John 19:29 and Heb. 9:19, and it is found in the Septuagint. This would indicate that the translators of the Septuagint in 300 B.C knew what the hyssop was.
 - c. This makes sense because the hyssop would have been used continuously from the Torah forward in some purification rites.
 - d. It is possible that over the centuries, because God's Word had been misplaced and because the Hebrew people were in reversionism many times, that a different plant could have come to be used by the Hebrews and that would account for the NT hyssop and the OT hyssop being different. Therefore, this change, if it occurred, likely would have taken place prior to the translation of the Septuagint.
3. The opinions:
- a. Dr. William Smith in *Smith's Bible Dictionary* defers to Dr. Royle, who claims that the hyssop is not marjoram or some similar aromatic plant, but, after considerable research, claims that it is the caper-plant of Linnæus. He also points out that the Arabic word is quite similar to the Hebrew word translated *hyssop*.
 - b. *The New Bible Dictionary* asserts that the hyssop is not the plant presently called *Hyssopus officinalis* L., which is found growing in Southern Europe but is not native to Palestine, but very likely the marjoram in the Old Testament and the *Sorghum vulgare* in the New Testament (at least at the crucifixion). Other possibilities are listed there.
 - c. Although what the plant was exactly is not too important to us today, it is reasonable to expect that the two references in the New Testament are the same plant and very likely refer to the same plant in the OT (since the Septuagint uses the same word). However, this word is found therein in both the male and female gender, which is why, I suspect, that *The New Bible Dictionary* said that the OT references did not always seem to be for the same species.
 - d. Zodhiates places the hyssop with a group of plants such as the Egyptian marjoram and thyme. *Their hairy stems would serve well as a brush*, he points out.¹
4. Whatever the plant, no previous non-ceremonial, Biblical references exist and it is closely associated with certain other purification rites in the Old Testament:
- a. It is used in Exodus 12:22 in conjunction with the first Passover. It was dipped into the blood of the lamb (or goat) and the blood was brushed on the top and sides of the doorposts at the front of the houses of the Hebrew believers (it is likely that all of the Hebrew people believed in the Revealed God).
 - b. The obedience of Israel to the Passover requirements helps to explain why God brought so many plagues upon Egypt prior to this final judgment.
 - i. We have seen that the Hebrews did not receive Moses warmly; especially after his first meeting with Pharaoh (which caused the increased workload of the Jewish slaves).
 - ii. Therefore, they had to see continual signs and wonders to become (1) believers and to (2) have the sense to follow Moses.
 - iii. Had God given only or two plagues, then many Hebrews would not have participated in the Passover and their firstborn would have died. It will actually be their sons and daughters who will enter the land; not the Jewish slaves of that time period.
 - c. We do not find hyssop mentioned again until Leviticus 14:4, 6, 49, 51 and 52. In Leviticus, it is used in the purification rites of a leper (and the house where leprosy was). A leper on the outside has the same appearance as we do on the inside. A leper being cured of leprosy is analogous to an unbeliever believing in Jesus Christ and being cleansed and purified. A leper is considered to be unclean and only the healed lepers were a part of this ritual. This ritual made them ceremonially clean. This ceremony, like most of the OT rites, speaks of Christ dying for our sins on the cross, the just for the unjust and His blood (spiritual death) cleansing us from all
 - d. The hyssop is used in the red heifer sacrifice in Num. 19:6,18
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- academic excellence in all areas).
- f. David alludes to the hyssop in one of his Psalms (51:7) and relates it to purification.
5. The book of Hebrews adds some information to what the OT tells us about what occurred in ancient Israel. Since God's Word is accurate, we must accept this additional information as true.
- a. In Exodus 24, Moses has just finished reading the Words of the Law to the people in the desert and vv. 6–7- read *And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will be obedient!" So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people and said, "Behold, the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."* There is a lot to unpack in this passage, but we will wait until we get to this chapter to do that.
- b. Heb. 9:19 tells us *For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people.* That is, Hebrews tells us that the blood was also sprinkled on the book of the Law and that water, scarlet wool and hyssop was involved.
6. John 19:29 is the other reference to hyssop in the Bible. Jesus, after He had died spiritually for our sins, was given a small amount of sour wine on a hyssop. How appropriate that the Lamb without spot and blemish would be associated with this plant after our sins had been paid for and that God the Holy Spirit could see down the centuries of time to this when He included the use of the hyssop in the various OT purification rituals.

¹ *The Complete Word Study Old Testament*; Dr. S. Zodhiates; ©1994 AMG Publishers; p. 178.

[Chapter Outline](#)

[Charts, Graphics and Short Doctrines](#)

Using the Hyssop (a graphic); from [Toward a Sane Faith](#); accessed March 9, 2021. The thing in his hand is the hyssop.

