

Psalms 51:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Analysis

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. This verse beautifully expresses confidence in God's cleansing power through imagery drawn from Levitical purification ceremonies. David knows only God can purify him, but he trusts that when God cleanses, the result is complete, spotless purity.

"Purge me with hyssop" (כַּחֲסִיף תְּכַחֵטְאֵנִי/techatte'eni be'ezov) references ceremonial purification. Chata (purge, cleanse from sin) is the verb form of chatta'ah (sin). Ezov (hyssop) was a plant used in purification rituals: cleansing lepers (Leviticus 14:4-6), purifying those defiled by contact with death (Numbers 19:18), and possibly the original Passover (Exodus 12:22).

Hyssop's branches were dipped in blood or ceremonial water and sprinkled on the unclean person, symbolically applying cleansing. David asks God to purify him as thoroughly as Levitical ceremonies purified ritual defilement. Yet he knows no ceremonial ritual can cleanse moral guilt—only God Himself can truly purify the heart. The ritual points beyond itself to divine grace.

"And I shall be clean" (וְעָתִידָאֵתָר/ve'ethar) expresses confident assurance: when God purges, cleansing is certain. The imperfect tense indicates future certainty: 'I will be clean.' This isn't wishful hoping but confident trust grounded in God's character and promises. If God cleanses, the result is guaranteed purity.

"Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (וְתִשְׁלֶנִי וְיִבְלֶנִי/tekhabeseni umisheleg albin) intensifies the imagery. Kabes (wash—same verb as v.2) again pictures vigorous laundering. The result: 'whiter than snow.' Snow represents supreme whiteness, purity, unstained brilliance. Isaiah 1:18 promises: 'though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'

This isn't gradual improvement or partial cleansing but radical transformation. God doesn't merely reduce sin's stain but removes it completely, replacing scarlet guilt with snow-white purity. This anticipates justification: God declares believers righteous, imputing Christ's perfect righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). We're not merely forgiven (debt canceled) but declared righteous (clothed in Christ's righteousness).

Historical Context

Hyssop's ceremonial use appears throughout Old Testament purification rites. Leviticus 14:1-9 prescribes hyssop for cleansing recovered lepers: two birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop were used in an elaborate ceremony involving blood and water. Numbers 19:1-22 describes the red heifer ceremony for purifying those defiled by contact with death—ashes mixed with water were sprinkled using hyssop. These ceremonies removed ritual impurity, restoring fellowship and worship privileges.

Yet David's sin (adultery and murder) had no prescribed ceremonial purification. Levitical law addressed ritual defilement and unintentional sin through sacrifices, but intentional, high-handed rebellion demanded death (Numbers 15:30-31). David should have been executed. His only hope was God's extraordinary mercy transcending the law's requirements. He appeals beyond the ceremonial system to God's grace.

The New Testament sees Christ fulfilling purification symbolism. Hebrews 9:11-14 contrasts Levitical ceremonies (purifying the flesh) with Christ's blood (purging the conscience from dead works to serve the living God). John 19:29 notes hyssop was used to offer Jesus sour wine on the cross—possibly John's deliberate

connection to Passover and purification imagery. Christ, our Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7), provides the cleansing the Old Testament ceremonies foreshadowed.

1 John 1:7 promises: 'the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.' Revelation 7:14 describes those who 'have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' This paradox—blood making white—reveals grace's mystery: Christ's sacrificial death cleanses completely, making sinners whiter than snow. His righteousness covers our guilt; His purity replaces our defilement.

Church history's hymnody celebrates this cleansing: 'Rock of Ages' ('let the water and the blood, from thy riven side which flowed, be of sin the double cure, save from wrath and make me pure'); 'Nothing but the Blood of Jesus' ('what can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus...white as snow'); countless hymns echo David's confidence that God's cleansing makes sinners spotless.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does the imagery of hyssop and Levitical purification ceremonies point forward to Christ's cleansing work?
2. What does it mean to be made 'whiter than snow,' and how does this differ from merely being forgiven?
3. How does the promise 'I shall be clean' express confident assurance rather than uncertain hope?
4. In what ways does Christ's blood provide the cleansing that Old Testament ceremonies could only symbolize?

Interlinear Text

תְּחַטֵּא נִי	בִּאֵז וּבִ	וְאֶטְהַר	תְּכַבֵּשׁ נִי	וְיָמֶשׁ לָג
Purge	me with hyssop	and I shall be clean	wash	than snow
H2398	H231	H2891	H3526	H7950
אֶלְבִּין:				
me and I shall be whiter				
H3835				

Additional Cross-References

1 John 1:7 (Parallel theme): But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

Isaiah 1:18 (Parallel theme): Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Revelation 1:5 (Parallel theme): And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,

Hebrews 9:19 (Parallel theme): For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people,

Exodus 12:22 (Parallel theme): And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the bason; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning.