

Text: Various

Title: Lord's Table: **Hyssop**

Truth: Our Lord's self-sacrifice cleanses the Christian from guilt.

Date/Location: Sunday July 5, 2026 at FBC

Introduction

I want to talk about a strange topic for the Lord's Table service: a plant that is called in the Bible **hyssop**.

It is identified by various sources as *Origanum Syriacum*, a hybrid of it, *Origanum Maru*, or marjoram aka *Origanum majorana*. It is not the European Hyssopus, since that does not grow in Israel. The *Syriacum* variant is "a small bush w. blue flowers and highly aromatic leaves; used in purificatory sacrifices" (BDAG).

Interestingly, it is a variety of the plant that produces what we know as the spice called oregano.

The plant was useful for dipping and sprinkling.

I. All the Old Testament Verses That Use Hyssop

A. In the instructions for the Passover, Moses told the elders of Israel that the families were to pick out a lamb, kill it, and...

Exod 12:22 And you shall take a bunch of **hyssop**, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning.

B. When a leper was healed (naturally or miraculously did not matter), there were certain regulations including...

Lev 14:4 then the priest shall command to take for him who is to be cleansed two living and clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and **hyssop**.

One of the birds was killed, and...

Lev 14:6 As for the living bird, he shall take it, the cedar wood and the scarlet and the **hyssop**, and dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water.

Leprosy was very likely a wider classification than we use today for Hansen's disease. Even houses could have some leprosy in them. If so, there was a cleansing routine for that as well. They were to clean the house out, remove the stones that were infected, and see if the "disease" returns. If so, the house was to be destroyed and rebuilt. But if it was good, then the priest...

Lev 14:49 And he shall take, to cleanse the house, two birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and **hyssop**.

And do similarly with the bird as he did for the leprous person.

Lev 14:51 and he shall take the cedar wood, the **hyssop**, 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.

Lev 14:52 And he shall cleanse the house with the blood of the bird and the running water and the living bird, with the cedar wood, the **hyssop**, and the scarlet.

- C. In the third portion of Scripture that refers to hyssop, the law concerns a red heifer without blemish being sacrificed and burned. Cedar, hyssop, and scarlet (perhaps a scarlet thread to tie a bundle of wood and hyssop) were placed into the fire as well.

Num 19:6 And the priest shall take cedar wood and **hyssop** and scarlet, and cast them into the midst of the fire burning the heifer.

The ashes were then stored and used for purification rituals. For example, any clean person could take some of the ashes of the heifer burnt for purification, with running water, place those into a vessel, and...

Num 19:18 A clean person shall take **hyssop** and dip it in the water, sprinkle it on the tent, on all the vessels, on the persons who were there, or on the one who touched a bone, the slain, the dead, or a grave.

- D. The fourth mention of hyssop has to do with Solomon's great wisdom in 1 Kings 4:29-34.

1 Kings 4:33 Also he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree of Lebanon even to the **hyssop** that springs out of the wall; he spoke also of animals, of birds, of creeping things, and of fish.

E. The fifth and final mention of hyssop on the Old Testament is a well-known one, and like the Passover, often associated with the Lord's Table service. King David wrote:

Ps 51:7 Purge me with **hyssop**, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Why hyssop? He draws the idea from the passages we looked at just a moment ago. Hyssop was used in the ceremony of cleansing a leper or someone who had touched a dead body. Sin creates the same kind of uncleanness, and hyssop is an appropriate physical item that can sprinkle blood and clean water upon a person in a ritual symbolic of God's cleansing. When you confess your sins, as David did here, God cleanses you from that and washes it clean. He actually takes it away so that the sin and the guilt of it do not cling to you anymore.

F. In the passages we have examined, which are all of the ones that use *hyssop*, that plant is associated with either blood or with a burnt offering, and always with purification.

II. The New Testament Verses that Use Hyssop

A. Hebrews reflects these connections when it says:

Heb 9:19 For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and **hyssop**, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people.

In Exodus 24:5-6, Moses had written the words of the Lord, built an altar, made burnt offerings and peace offerings, and took some of the blood in basins and sprinkled the altar and the people. It does not mention that he sprinkled the book, but the author of Hebrews somehow knew¹ that the book was included. He also knew that *hyssop* was the plant used to do the sprinkling. This is no surprise based on what we have just learned. It appears that the hyssop was a very common way that such sprinkling was

¹ From direct revelation or knowledge passed down to orally or in other writings.

accomplished and it was used more often than it is explicitly mentioned in the Old Testament.

B. There is only one other mention of hyssop in the Bible. Do you know where it is found?

John 19:29 Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on **hyssop**, and put it to His mouth.

The hyssop was used to reach a wine-filled sponge up to Jesus's mouth so he could drink it. Perhaps it even touched His lips, sort of "sanctifying" the hyssop and reminding us of the Old Testament significance of it. It was used in purification, but it was touching the lips of the pure one who was taking away the sin of the world.

Remember hyssop was used in the cleansing ritual of the leper? Jesus instructed lepers to go and show themselves to the priests and to offer what the Law of Moses commanded so that they could not only obey the Law, but also be a testimony of God's mercy grace to them (Luke 17:14). But the actual cleansing happened with the touch or word of Jesus. In Matt 8:3 (Mark 1:41 and Luke 5:13) Jesus put out His hand and touched the man. Instead of uncleanness transferring, as it always did before, Jesus's cleansing power was transmitted in the other direction.

He took all that uncleanness and dealt with it at the cross.

Conclusion

Let us gratefully partake of the Table of our Lord today, remembering His death for us so that we too could be clean in the sight of our Heavenly Father, purged as it were by the sprinkling of a hyssop branch, dipped in the blood of our Savior, Who was given for us.

MAP

Appendix: Images

Origanum Maru, similar to *Origanum Syriacum*.



Origanum Majorana

