

Excerpts regarding “sprinkle” in Isa 52:15 (and related issues) from “A Theological Introduction to the Christian Bible,” by Emilio G. Chávez (pages indicated at the end of each excerpt)

Note that Isa 52:15, normally translated “so shall he startle many nations,” has in the Hebrew “so shall he sprinkle many nations,” using the same verb as in Lev 16:14-16 for the blood-sprinkling which purifies everything on Yom Kippur, the great Day of Atonement. The idea that Jesus’ sacrifice is an eschatological, final and once-for-all atonement is found in Rom 3:25, where the Greek word translated as “sacrifice of atonement, expiation, propitiatory,” is the LXX’s word for the cover of the ark which was sprinkled on Yom Kippur, Heb 9-10, 1 John 2:2 and perhaps elsewhere.¹ The purpose of ritual sacrifice in the Torah is to legitimize the killing of animals for consumption, which was allowed only as a concession, after the Flood, Gen 9:1-7. It can thus be argued that in the eschatological return to God’s original creation intention which Jesus’ Paschal Mystery inaugurates, there is no further need for ritual slaughter. (pp. 32-33)

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A few regulations are of interest to us as Christians. Mary was purified, according to Luke 2:22, following Lev 12:1-4 (actually, Luke joins Jesus in the purification, perhaps to signify that neither of them really to be purified, and also to intimate their partnership in the redemptive suffering of Christ’s self-offering; see Luke 2:34-35). The language in the LXX in Lev 12:7 is repeated in Mark 5:29 (the healing of the woman with the blood flow); this seems to point to the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice, which purifies from all sin, impurity and illness (all of which are closely related). Such a healed woman, who can now have sexual relations with her husband and conceive (thus the quote from Lev 12, when Lev 15:25-30 would have been more on point), would have no

¹ Note also that the Essenes and other pious Jews expected the eschatological cleansing of sins (complete forgiveness, thus possibilitating the end of “Exile”) on the tenth Jubilee (that is, after 490 years [49 x 10], or seventy weeks of years [70 x 7], as in Dan 9). See 11QMelchizedek, with references to Isa 61; Dan 9:25; and Ps 82. Yom Kippur took place on the Jubilee, Lev 25:9. Interestingly, Israel was in exile in Babylon 49 years (587-538), and thus, was due for a Jubilee, when all slaves returned home, but even after returning, and after Jeremiah’s prediction of a seventy year exile had “elapsed,” Israel still waited for the end of Exile; see Jer 25:11; 29:10; Zech 1:12; Dan 9:1-3; 2 Chr 36:17-23. Jesus announces his fulfillment of the eschatological Jubilee in Luke 4:16-21, for he says that he is fulfilling Isa 61:1, which proclaims the “liberty” (technical Hebrew term *d’ror*, used only for the Jubilee emancipation or manumission) of Lev 25:10 as finally taken place.

need to offer pigeons in the Temple (Jesus overturned the tables of those who sold them, Mark 11:16). Neither would a poor leper who had been healed by Jesus see the need to offer such pigeons: why offer the priests anything if they had not been able to heal him, as Jesus had? See Mark 1:40-45.²

In Mark 7:19, Jesus is said to have cleansed or purified (or, if you want, declared clean) all foods. Cf. Acts 10:9-16. What happens to Lev, then? How does Jesus fulfill, not abolish, even the smallest points of the Law? (Matt 5:17-19). Without being able to get into a fascinating but very complex series of topics, let us say that, in the Christian view, Jesus restores the original purity of Eden, before the Fall, before impure spirits invade humanity (see Zech 13:2; thus, Jesus' exorcisms, a final defeat for Satan, Luke 10:18), before women are cursed (Gen 3:16), before humankind feels very distant from God. That is why Jesus heals and exorcises, and forgives sins, and saves; he is God acting again in creation, finally, as he did in the beginning (see, e.g., Isa 51:9-11). Lev, in the Christian view, was a symbol, a preparation, a typological reference point (see Gal 3:19-29). The blood of animals, even on Yom Kippur, could not really cleanse the conscience of the worshipper who would draw near to God; Heb 9. It is Jesus who purifies, with the water that would cleanse that Ezek 36:24-29 prophesied, when a new heart would be given to God's people. And with blood, the blood sprinkled on the cover of the ark on Yom Kippur (Lev 16:15-16), which Isa 52:15 seems to intimate, as 1 Pet 1:13-23 says (quoting the Lev refrain, "be holy as I am holy"). Water and blood, 1 John 5:6, as flowed out of Jesus' side, John 19:34. The water of baptism (John 13:10) and the blood of the Eucharist (John 6:51-58). But before we get too elated, consider what a challenge it is to live up to this "pre-Fall" status. We are left with the words of St. Paul in Rom 7:14-25. (p. 43)

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Rom argues that all have sinned, Jew and Gentile, and have "fallen short of the glory of God," 3:23. The Gentile had God's law written in the heart, the Jew received it in Sinai, but neither had kept it, and both are therefore subject to judgment and condemnation. But in these last days (see 1 Cor 10:11), God has revealed his

² Jesus' command to offer the prescribed sacrifice (in Lev 14) goes unheeded by the healed leper; the translation of Mark 1:44 should be "as a witness against them [the priests]," as in Mark 6:11; 13:9.

righteousness in a strange way: like a rich person who can show how rich she is either by rubbing it in the face of a poor person or by making the poor person rich himself, God has chosen to justify sinners in Christ and thus show his great righteousness, Rom 3:21-26. God in Christ has overlooked the sins committed previously, and by faith in Christ “justifies” or makes us righteous. Recall that this is what the Suffering Servant was supposed to do, Isa 53:11; cf. Mark 14:24. Paul states that the way God did this was by “putting forth” Jesus as *hilastērion*, variously translated “propitiation, sacrifice of atonement, etc.” But this Greek word is the LXX translation for the cover of the Ark of the Covenant which was sprinkled with blood in order to expiate sins on the great Day of Atonement, Lev 16 (the center of the Torah). On this day, all sins were forgiven. Recall that the Servant is said to sprinkle many nations in Isa 52:15, and that eschatological expiation was expected to take place on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) in the tenth Jubilee in Qumran circles (alluded to in Isa 61:1 and Luke 4:18). Jesus’ fulfillment of what Lev 16 prefigured, in the Christian view, is the major topic of the Letter to the Hebrews.³

Paul had been very struck by the fact that Jesus, an innocent man, had died for others on the cross (Rom 5:6-8; Phil 2:5-11). The former Pharisee who had seen a curse in crucifixion now saw that Christ had become this curse, Gal 3:13, even “sin,” 2 Cor 5:21. In Rom 8:3-4, *peri hamartias* should not be translated “for the sake of sin” or “to deal with sin,” but “as a sin- or guilt-offering; *peri hamartias* in the LXX translation of this type of sacrifice in the Old Testament, and is the translation of the Hebrew *asham* — another type of sin- or guilt-offering— in Isa 53:10. For a pious Pharisee concerned with purity and the meticulous keeping of the Torah, the level of Jesus’ self-humiliation would never cease to amaze Paul, Gal 2:19-20. (*p. 130*)

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Mark represents an abrupt break with Judaism, and was written to a Gentile community, probably in Rome. Jesus declares or cleanses all foods in 7:19; all are kosher! Jesus has come as the Suffering Servant-Son of Man “to give his life as a ransom for many,” 10:45. I have understood “ransom” as referring to, among other things, the

³ In the Epistle of Barnabas, an early writing of the “apostolic fathers,” ch.7, Jesus is likened to the scapegoat of Lev 16.

ransom (*kopher*, from the Hebrew atonement-expiation verb, as in Yom Kippur) of Exod 30:12, which every Israelite had to pay as the price for his entry into the Promised Land (we could understand here “salvation”). This had to be paid in “sanctuary sheqels,” and so was the principal reason for the money-changers’ tables in the Temple area during Passover time. Since Jesus pays this figurative ransom, there is no need for such tables anymore; thus, the so-called “cleansing of the Temple,” Mark 11:15-17. Jesus has also healed lepers and women with blood-flows, so that these persons, if poor, would have no need to buy pigeons either (Jesus overturned their tables as well). And, unique to Mark, Jesus’ prohibition that any (sacred) vessels be carried through the Temple signifies that the blood-flow of animal sacrifice in the Temple has been stopped; Jesus has given the Temple and its cult an infarct (a heart attack), since the eschatological name of the Temple is “house of prayer,” as in Isa 56:7. Jesus’ further citation of Jer 7:11 in Mark 11:17 additionally alludes to the destruction of the Temple he predicts in Mark 13:2 (Jer 7 is about the destruction of the first Temple by the Babylonians). This destruction (or infarct) had already been symbolized by the “cursing of the fig tree” episode (the fig tree completely withers), which, divided into two, surrounds the “Temple-cleansing” verses.⁴

⁴ In my doctoral dissertation published as *The Theological Significance of Jesus’ Temple Action in Mark’s Gospel* (106-108), I show how a real cleansing, as depicted in 1 Macc 4 and 2 Macc 10 contain some seven elements which Mark has *in an opposite sense*. By the way, Mark 1:44, the command to the healed leper to offer a sacrifice, has to be understood (and translated) “as a witness *against* them,” in line with Mark 6:11 and 13:9. The leper, of course, does not go to the Temple but preaches Jesus instead.