

What Is Hyssop and Why Is It so Significant in the Bible?

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Hyssop, an herb that is native to the Mediterranean region, is mentioned several times in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. Interestingly, it is brought up most often in relation to the process of being cleansed.

God desires His people to be clean, pure and holy. Because of our sin nature, though, we continually fall short of that standard. But in His mercy, The Lord steps in and provides. The Bible reveals many promises that God has made about renewing us in heart and spirit and mind.

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you..." ([Ezekiel 36:25-26](#)).

In Scripture, hyssop is connected to this truth in both a literal and symbolic way.

What Is Hyssop?

Hyssop is an evergreen plant that originally grew in southern Europe, the Middle East and central Asia. It's classified as a garden herb, and is part of the mint family.

The hyssop plant is a perennial, which means it can survive for several years, with at least some new growth on it each season. It grows to about 1 1/2 feet in height, and in summer its flowers bloom in different colors, such as violet, white and red.

The valuable flavoring and medicinal properties of hyssop have been known for centuries. Its distinctive bitter taste adds a warmth to foods like salads, fish, meat and vegetables. And it has been used as an ingredient in desserts, honey, and even in certain liquors.

The tea made from this plant has been known to help with physical problems in the throat, nose and lungs. It can also be applied externally to bruises on top of the skin as a healing balm.

Some Bible Verses about Hyssop

The first time hyssop is spoken of is when God directed His people to use it as a way to be set apart from their oppressors in Egypt.

[Exodus 12:22](#) - "Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. None of you shall go out of the door of your house until morning."

This command came from the Lord as the Jewish nation waited to be delivered out of Egypt. God had already brought down nine plagues on Egypt to show His power, but Pharaoh continued to refuse to let God's people leave ([Exodus 1-11](#)).

The final plague was the worst –God was going to strike down all the firstborn of Egypt, from royal princes to cattle. But He had a plan to protect His people from the disaster to come. The Israelites were directed to sacrifice a lamb, one for each family, and to cook and eat the meat. Hyssop was to be used as a sort of paintbrush to apply the lamb's blood up the sides and across the top of each home's doorway.

[Leviticus 14:4](#) - "...the priest shall order that two live clean birds and some cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop be brought for the person to be cleansed."

[Leviticus 14:52](#) - "He shall purify the house with the bird's blood, the fresh water, the live bird, the cedar wood, the hyssop and the scarlet yarn.

God wanted the young Israelite nation to live according to His commands. In return for their obedience, He would provide all they needed and bless them. One of the ways He showed His favor was by healing diseases among the people. He expected them to respond by offering an animal sacrifice.

Hyssop, cedar wood, scarlet yarn and a live bird were ingredients a priest used to sprinkle blood over someone who'd been healed of a "defiling" skin disease like leprosy. It was a ceremonial act of cleansing. Similarly, priests were to use hyssop in some purification rites.

[Numbers 19:2-6](#) - “Tell the Israelites to bring you a red heifer without defect or blemish and that has never been under a yoke. Give it to Eleazar the priest; it is to be taken outside the camp and slaughtered in his presence. Then Eleazar the priest is to take some of its blood on his finger and sprinkle it seven times toward the front of the tent of meeting. While he watches, the heifer is to be burned—its hide, flesh, blood and intestines. The priest is to take some cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet wool and throw them onto the burning heifer.”



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Later, King David used the image of hyssop and ritual washing as a basis for a very personal plea to God during a time in his life when he struggled with sin.

[Psalm 51:7](#) - “Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.”

David wrote [Psalm 51](#) after he committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband killed. The prophet Nathan convicted David of sinning against the Lord, and this passage was part of his heartfelt response.

This Psalm includes many elements of prayer: a plea for God’s forgiveness, a confession of wrongs, a request for renewal, and a desire to repent. Hyssop is mentioned in connection to the renewal process that David seeks.

[1 Kings 4:33](#) - “He spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish.”

When asked by God what he wanted most, a young King Solomon replied “wisdom.” God granted him this, and he had more insight than anyone in Israel, and beyond to the East and Egypt. As word spread about him, his fame grew, and many came from near and far to hear him speak.

His songs and [proverbs](#) have taught people how to live according to Godly principles. But Solomon shared knowledge about the natural world as well. While observing the animals and plants around him, Solomon no doubt felt great respect for the God who had created it all.

In the New Testament, hyssop was an instrument of comfort for Jesus as he hung on the cross and shed His blood to cleanse us of our sin.

[John 19:29-30](#) - "A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." The gospel of John records the arrest and murder of Jesus. The Son of God had been tried, beaten and forced to hang on a cross at Golgotha. Amidst the brutality, a final act of kindness was done for Him.

As Jesus was hanging on the cross, near death, His mother, Mary Magdalene and the Apostle John were among those who remained with Him. He said "I am thirsty" and someone lifted up a vinegar-soaked sponge to Him on a stalk of hyssop. John wrote that after Jesus drank, He said, "It is finished," and died.

What Hyssop Symbolizes in the Bible

Passages about hyssop in the Old Testament are connected to the blood of animal sacrifices. It represents God's compassion on His people, how He is willing to reach down to save and heal us. [Psalm 51](#) celebrates this, and shows the impact that this process can have on a person's life.

David knows he needs spiritual renewal, and realizes that this kind of ritual cannot be done by human hands. It is more intimate than an outward washing or sprinkling. Rather, it's a work done within the heart. In verses 2 and 10, David humbly seeks God for this.

"Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin" ([Psalm 51:2](#)).

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" ([Psalm 51:10](#)).

Once David understood how he had sinned against the Lord, he longed for a chance to reconcile. Hyssop was part of an image of hope for David, and a symbol of God's grace.

Why Is This Important for Us Today?

What hyssop represents, especially in [Psalm 51](#), still applies to every believer. We are by nature sinful and cannot fix ourselves. But David's words show us we don't have to stay stuck in that place. If we admit our need for God's touch and humbly ask Him to forgive us, He will bring a deep cleansing.

And in this age, we receive that renewal in a different way. Instead of going to a priest to be sprinkled with the blood of an animal, we put our [faith](#) in Jesus. Christ shed His blood on the cross so that we could be made righteous before God.

The book of Hebrews describes this exchange:

[Hebrews 9:13-14](#) - "The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!"

This process of being purified will result in a more vibrant worship life. Like David, we'll find ourselves lifting up praise and worship, giving testimony, and helping others know God more fully. And our sense of gratitude and joy will grow.

The hyssop plant symbolizes the chance God offers us to be washed clean of sin. It's also a reminder that He uses everything, including our missteps and mistakes, for our good. Priest and author Francis De Sale wrote:

"Truly, by the watering of our Savior's blood, made with the hyssop of the cross, we have been restored to a white incomparably better than that possessed by the snows of innocence."