

Leviticus 13-14 • Leprosy as a Picture of Sin

Introduction

Although the underlying Hebrew word translated as “leprosy” is actually describing a variety of skin afflictions which expand beyond the strict modern medical definition of a specific disease, this malady serves in Scripture as a greater spiritual picture of sin. One of the prophetic hallmarks of the Messiah was that He would not just perform miracles, but the healing of lepers was a particular assignment which not only addressed literally the healing of the physical disease, but because Hebrew society had come to view leprosy as something connected to sin, represented spiritually the healing of sin. Leprosy was not simply viewed as a physical disease, but spiritual defilement. Without cleansing, the bearer was restricted not just from normal day-to-day society, but from entering the Temple and therefore participating in its activities. The sufferer was cut off from both God and man.

In the first chapter, we will focus on the attributes of sin as represented by leprosy, and in the following chapter that which was necessary to cleanse the leper/sinner.

²“When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling or a scab or a bright spot, and it becomes an infection of leprosy on the skin of his body, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests. ³The priest shall look at the mark on the skin of the body, and if the hair in the infection has turned white and the infection appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is an infection of leprosy; when the priest has looked at him, he shall pronounce him unclean.

The Attributes of Sin [Read v.13:2-3]

Q: What was a person to do if they thought they might have leprosy?

A: They were to go to a priest for an examination.

Q: Was leprosy merely an eruption on the surface of the skin?

A: No, it was something which went deeper than the skin.

Q: How does Scripture most often explain our vulnerability to sin?

A: It is most often described as our acting in the flesh.

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. — Romans 7:18

For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. — Romans 8:3–4

Q: What does it mean to be pronounced “unclean”?

A: Medically this means that the host could pass the condition on to others around them, but spiritually this carries with it the parallel meaning of “defiled”, “polluted”, or “impure”—in other words, corrupted by sin.

Q: What will it take to treat something which is not simply a “shallow” condition?

A: There are no “shallow” antidotes to sin; the remedy is always a radical change of the heart with a commitment to permanent change going forward.

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me. — Psalm 51:10*

Application: *It is deeper than the skin.*

⁷But if the scab spreads farther on the skin after he has shown himself to the priest for his cleansing, he shall appear again to the priest. ⁸The priest shall look, and if the scab has spread on the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is leprosy.

[Read v.13:7-8]

Q: What is peculiar to leprosy as a disease which is different than, say, a normal injury such as breaking an arm or leg?

A: It is not something isolated to just one part of the body, but spreads. Eventually it will affect one's entire body.

Q: How does sin spread?

1. It begins with a thought. "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone." (James 1:13)
2. The thought follows a desire. "But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust." (James 1:14)
3. It evolves into our acting upon it. "Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin;" (James 1:15a)
4. And ultimately produces the worst results. "...and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." (James 1:15b)

Application: It spreads.

⁴⁴he is a leprous man, he is unclean. The priest shall surely pronounce him unclean; his infection is on his head.

⁴⁵"As for the leper who has the infection, his clothes shall be torn, and the hair of his head shall be uncovered, and he shall cover his mustache and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!' ⁴⁶He shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean.

[Read v.13:44-46a]

Q: What is the keyword repeated 6 times in these verses? What does it mean?

A: "Unclean". It refers to a condition which has the potential to infect others. Just as he must avoid physical contact to avoid passing along the infection, it has an equal application in the sense of spiritually infecting others.

Q: Why were lepers to mark themselves and act in this manner, even to the point of shouting a warning?

A: Because the Law stipulated that anyone who came into contact with a leper was likewise made unclean.

Point: Sin defiles everything it touches.

Q: Are there any biblical examples of how a single sinner defiled a whole household or group?

A: In Joshua 7 we have the example of the sin of Achan, and how a personal sin not only spread to his family, but affected the entire nation.

Application: It defiles or makes unclean.

⁴⁶He shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.

[Read v.13:46]

Q: What would "outside the camp" mean to us?

A: Someone not simply outside the confines of church proper, but cut off from fellowship.

Q: Is this an enforced situation or self-imposed?

A: Where sin is concerned, we see both those who are confronted and removed due to sin as in the process Jesus outlined in Matthew 18:15-20, and those who voluntarily withdraw knowing that their embrace of sin is incompatible with maintaining their right standing.

Q: What is probably the most obvious example of this in the New Testament?

A: When Christ took up the cross to bear our sins, He was taken outside Jerusalem—that is, “*outside the camp*” to be crucified, and when made sin for us cried to the Father, “*Why have you forsaken Me?*” (Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34) in an expression of this separation. It was both literally physical and spiritual.

Application: *It isolates.*

[Read v.13:52]

⁵²So he shall burn the garment, whether the warp or the woof, in wool or in linen, or any article of leather in which the mark occurs, for it is a leprous malignancy; it shall be burned in the fire.

Q: What is “the warp or the woof”?

A: “*Warp*” refers to woven material made by using a loom or possibly by knitting; “*woof*” is thought to be a pattern woven at a right angle. Basically the descriptions in this verse are being used to rule out any exceptions so that no material can be thought to be impervious to infection, and once infected, must be disposed of.

Q: What is the ultimate destination of sin?

A: The fires of judgment.

Application: *It ultimately results in the fire.*

[Read Mark 9:43-48]

⁴³“If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, ⁴⁴where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED. ⁴⁵If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell, ⁴⁶where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED. ⁴⁷If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell, ⁴⁸where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.

Q: What are the three items singled out and highlighted?

A: The hand (v.43), the foot (v.45) and the eye (v.47).

Q: What do each have in common?

A: Each “*causes you to stumble*”—that is, to sin.

Q: How do these three aspects cover the basics of how sin is allowed to not just infect, but spread?

A: The hand represents what we do and the foot in where we go to cover how the infection spreads to everything we become involved in, but the eye covers how the infection corrupts everything internally as well.

Q: How would we apply these dramatic metaphors in actual practice?

A: We would eliminate the source of sin by permanently changing, as necessary, our behavior, practices, and relationships to such a permanent degree that we would not return to them.

Q: What is the ultimate consequences of allowing such to go unaddressed?

A: Eventually the whole will become so corrupted by sin that its only and ultimate destination is inevitably hell.

²This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing. Now he shall be brought to the priest, ³and the priest shall go out to the outside of the camp. Thus the priest shall look, and if the infection of leprosy has been healed in the leper,

Cleansing the Sinner ***[Read v.14:2-3]***

Q: It says “he shall be brought to the priest”, but how is this accomplished since he is prohibited from going into the camp, much less the Tabernacle?

A: The priest must go to the leper.

Q: How is this a picture of how Christ saves sinners?

A: Christ died “*outside of the camp*” that we might be saved...

We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. — Hebrews 13:10–13

...and Christ proactively seeks to save the lost...

*“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”
— Luke 19:10*

Application: *The priest goes to the leper.*

⁴then the priest shall give orders to take two live clean birds and cedar wood and a scarlet string and hyssop for the one who is to be cleansed. ⁵The priest shall also give orders to slay the one bird in an earthenware vessel over running water. ⁶As for the live bird, he shall take it together with the cedar wood and the scarlet string and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was slain over the running water. ⁷He shall then sprinkle seven times the one who is to be cleansed from the leprosy and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the live bird go free over the open field.

[Read v.14:4-7]

Q: How is the bird in the in the earthenware vessel a picture of Christ?

A: Just as birds are not created to live on the earth in jars but for flying up in the heavens, Christ willingly left heaven to assume a body—a fleshly earthen vessel, in order to die for us.

Q: What is the greater symbolism of the role of the “running water”?

A: Liquids in Scripture often typify various aspects of the working of the Holy Spirit, water in particular associated with the washing of the Word.

Q: So what is the parallel of dipping of blood and setting the live bird free?

A: It’s a picture of the resurrection in the way Christ died for our sin, was raised, and therefore atoned for our sin so that we might be cleansed from sin.

Q: And why did the priest also sprinkle the blood on the leper?

And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. — Hebrews 9:22

Application: *The priest offers the sacrifice.*

⁸The one to be cleansed shall then wash his clothes and shave off all his hair and bathe in water and be clean. Now afterward, he may enter the camp, but he shall stay outside his tent for seven days. ⁹It will be on the seventh day that he shall shave off all his hair: he shall shave his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair. He shall then wash his clothes and bathe his body in water and be clean.

[Read v.14:8-9]

Q: Why is this probably not speaking about the act of baptism?

A: Baptism is a one-time, public testimony of a new life in Christ and is not something which is performed after every subsequent act of sin.

Q: What is this more likely to represent?

A: The washing of the water by the Word.

Q: Is that merely reading the Bible?

A: No, it is putting God's Word into practice so as to engage in out permanently changed behavior going forward so as to both avoid and not revisit sin.

*Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.
— 2 Corinthians 7:1*

Q: What is significant about having to wait seven days before being fully restored?

A: Re-entering on the eighth day is a parallel to the biblical pattern of eight representing new beginnings, in this case corresponding to resurrection.

Application: *The leper washes and waits.*

¹⁰Now on the eighth day he is to take two male lambs without defect, and a yearling ewe lamb without defect, and three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, and one log of oil; ¹¹and the priest who pronounces him clean shall present the man to be cleansed and the aforesaid before the Lord at the doorway of the tent of meeting. ¹²Then the priest shall take the one male lamb and bring it for a guilt offering, with the log of oil, and present them as a wave offering before the LORD. ¹³Next he shall slaughter the male lamb in the place where they slaughter the sin offering and the burnt offering, at the place of the sanctuary—for the guilt offering, like the sin offering, belongs to the priest; it is most holy.

[Read v.14:10-13]

Q: According to the Law, what are the three types of sacrifices presented?

A: A trespass offering, a sin offering, and a burnt offering.

Q: What is their greater spiritual function of the sin offering and burnt offering?

A: The sin offering is to address the issue of defilement, the burnt offering establishes a renewed dedication to the Lord.

Q: Why is a trespass offering necessary?

A: The trespass offering addresses the gap in time when he could not serve the Lord because of one's condition. The trespass sacrifice may be thought of as paying a debt owed for the time away from the Master's service, the only appropriate remedy to repair the consequences of that corrupted time separated from worship, service, and fellowship with God.

Point: *The consequences of sin involve more than merely repenting or being sorry, and the process of restoration is more than a rededication.*

Application: *The leper offers sacrifices.*

¹⁴The priest shall then take some of the blood of the guilt offering, and the priest shall put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. ¹⁵The priest shall also take some of the log of oil, and pour it into his left palm; ¹⁶the priest shall then dip his right-hand finger into the oil that is in his left palm, and with his finger sprinkle some of the oil seven times before the LORD. ¹⁷Of the remaining oil which is in his palm, the priest shall put some on the right ear lobe of the one to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot, on the blood of the guilt offering; ¹⁸while the rest of the oil that is in the priest's palm, he shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf before the LORD. ¹⁹The priest shall next offer the sin offering and make atonement for the one to be cleansed from his uncleanness. Then afterward, he shall slaughter the burnt offering. ²⁰The priest shall offer up the burnt offering and the grain offering on the altar. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he will be clean.

⁴⁰And a leper came to Jesus, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying, "If You are willing, You can make me clean."

⁴¹Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." ⁴²Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. ⁴³And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away, ⁴⁴and He said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

⁴⁵But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.

[Read v.14:14-20]

Q: What is the purpose of applying some of the blood to the right ear, the right thumb, and the big toe on the right foot?

A: It represents that the whole body has been purchased, purified, and belongs to the Lord.

- The ear means he listens to God's Word.
- The hand means he works for God's glory.
- The foot means he walks in God's ways.

Q: Why is the oil applied to the blood? Why does the oil have to be applied after the blood?

A: The oil represents the Holy Spirit working for the purpose of accomplishing God's will. The Holy Spirit can only work where the blood of Christ has first cleansed and restored.

Q: What is the meaning of the rest of the oil poured on the head?

A: It represents the anointing of the Spirit for new life.

Q: What is the final condition both physically and spiritually?

A: "...and he will be clean". (v.20)

Application: *The priest applies the blood and oil.*

Overall Application [Read Mark 1:40-45]

Q: It is specified that the leper "came to Jesus". Where was Jesus, exactly?

A: In the previous verses it indicates that Jesus was going "throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out demons". In other words, like the priest who must go outside the camp so that the leper can go to the priest, Christ was likewise accessible to the leper.

Q: How would a practicing Jew normally react if they saw Jesus touching a leper?

A: According to the strict interpretation of the Law, they would say that He has become unclean.

Point: *Jesus was not just fulfilling the letter of the Law by having the healed leper go to the priests to fulfill the Mosaic law, but "as a testimony to them" it would have been confirmation of His divinity as the Messiah.*

Q: When it comes to addressing sin, what is Christ's desire?

A: "I am willing; be cleansed".

Point: *Notice that momentum increased dramatically at the testimony of a man healed from leprosy, a malady recognized even in Jesus' day as a greater representation of sin. Likewise all authentic spiritual revivals escalate not on the basis of a sign or miracle, but on the evidence of repentant lives cleansed of sin.*

Leviticus 13-14 • Leprosy as a Picture of Sin, Page 6 of 6