

Leviticus

Chapters 13-14

Sin And Disease

11.09.2005

Today we are looking at some Laws God gave Moses in Leviticus 13-14, which have been depicted as degrading, inhuman, wonderful, life-saving, and awful. You may have strong opinions about the unclean skin disorder laws. The laws forced many Israelites to leave their homes and family, to live in the equivalent of the city dumps.

Because science and medicine fascinate our modern world, we may be tempted to interpret them in medical terms. Countless trees have been pulped to print opinions about whether the disease is leprosy or not. I am told that there are 21 different skin diseases in chapter 13.

The skin diseases described are external and visible. They do not kill, and only affect part of the body. Yet they are persistent, serious and can spread to other people. But the main reason for these laws in Leviticus 13-14 is not medical. They are to maintain holiness.

As you read Leviticus 13 and 14, keep in mind that the Laws from God, not only described how they should treat each other, but primarily they described the conditions by which our holy God could live among his people, who were not automatically holy. In fact they could quite often be very unholy.

This primary principle is stated in Leviticus 11:45 *I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.*

Any person or thing labelled unclean, was not necessarily dirty, rather they were banished from corporate worship. Their presence meant that the people of Israel could not approach our holy God.

So because God promised that He would be found wherever the Ark of the Covenant was, His people could approach God through the system He established. and if God was to remain with His people, any breaches of the Law had to be dealt with seriously.

Leviticus 13 describes the skin diseases that

caused major repercussions for their ability to come near to the Ark in the Tent or temple. The priest is almost a doctor. When anyone has a suspect spot, it must be shown to the priest. He must decide which category of Leviticus 13 it fits into.

There may be a time of quarantine, or there may be immediate banishment. However, it is vital to recognise that the priest is not a witch-doctor, healer nor pharmacist. There is no description of how to cure the disease. All the regulations in chapter 13 deal with diagnosing the disease.

Then chapter 14 declares what should happen in case the person is healed. But no cure, no potion, no remedy is given.

This led to a very clear line of duty. The priest had the responsibility to declare whether a person was clean or unclean. The ramifications were horrendous. The regulations are in Leviticus 13:45-46 *The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out 'Unclean! Unclean!' As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp.*

One of the features of Israelite towns was the leper colony just outside the town wall. Many other communities did not segregate their people, and we know of non-Jewish Generals and others who had leprosy and still could function in society.

One Aramean General who caused a major grievance for Israel was Naaman, described in 2 Kings 5. He had an Israeli slave girl who told him that the prophet in Israel would heal him. So the Aramean King sent Naaman to the Israeli king with much wealth and a letter stating *With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy.*

Israel's king was horrified. He thought it was an excuse to start a war, for he said *Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his*

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leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!

However, the prophet Elisha saw the general and God did heal him.

In the Old Testament, healing from leprosy was very rare. The king equated it with bringing someone back from the dead. Having the priest declare you unclean was like a death sentence. But with Jesus, a new event occurred. Repeatedly we are told that Jesus healed people with leprosy. What the Law could never achieve, Jesus did.

The Law could only declare someone clean or unclean. Jesus had the power to change people. A good example of this is Luke 17:11-19

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, 10 men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" When he saw them, he said, 'Go, show yourselves to the priests.' and as they went, they were cleansed. 1 of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him - and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked 'were not all 10 cleansed? Where are the other 9? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?' Then he said to him, 'Rise and go; your faith has made you well.'"

Jesus had made the point about people not being thankful for the gifts they received, but he had also obeyed the Law in sending them to be examined by the priest. They could be restored to community life, and they could be restored to community worship again.

In Christ, God had come on earth. God was with us, in human flesh. Many miracles show God himself repairing the barriers between an unholy people and himself. Then by believing in the death and resurrection of Christ, God has declared us holy. This is confirmed by the Holy

Spirit being with and in us. God is always with us until we go to be with Him.

So we now do not need the Ark, the Temple, the priesthood or the sacrifices to be a holy people drawing near to our Holy God.

Now, we can look at diseases medically, and not fear that we're unclean in God's eyes, and that we will be banished for theological reasons. Now we are able to look at the world in another way, and discover the mysteries God hid in His creation that can help heal and assist.

Of course, it is wise to daily keep a healthy relationship with God through prayer, Bible reading and living for him. But sickness no longer creates a theological barrier. That was repaired in Christ.

So if you are sick, and especially if you have a skin disorder, what should you do? If you are a Christian, ask God for help and seek medical aid. If you are not a Christian, get right with God, ask him for help and seek medical aid.