

# The Stories of Lepers

Ron Roberts

Our battle with the Coronavirus makes me to think about the Bible stories of leprosy. Leprosy was a very contagious disease. People who had it were isolated from the community. Many people died from this contamination. The leper had to identify himself as unclean if he came in the vicinity of those who were not infected. He would cover his face, keep his distance, and not touch anyone or anything in the normal society. Sounds a bit similar doesn't it? Of course, leprosy was a much more serious problem than Covid 19. Most of us will recover from our virus. Most of them died. Our symptoms are coughs and fevers. Theirs were disfigured faces and body parts dropping off. They awaited death. We wait for the reopening of our businesses and church buildings.

Lev 13:44-46 tells us about the treatment of lepers, "*He is a leprous man, he is **unclean**: the priest shall pronounce him utterly unclean; his plague is in his head. And the leper in whom the plague is, his **clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean. All the days wherein the plague shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be.***"

The leper was defiled. He was separated from others and had to distinguish himself from others in his garments and his words. The priest would examine him to determine if he was a leper or not. He would put him out of the community if he was defiled and would admit him back when he was clean.

The priest's role helps us to understand the command of Jesus to the ten lepers. Luke 17:12-14 *And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which*

*stood afar off: And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.*

The ten showed a degree of faith as they called on Jesus to heal them. They were following the Old Law as they stood afar off. Jesus' instruction to "*go shew yourselves unto the priests*" was a command that tested their faith. Why go to the priests unless you believed you would be healed? Their faith was rewarded.

A second story is also found in Luke's Gospel. Luke 5:12-14 *And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man **full of leprosy**: who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And he put forth his hand, and **touched him**, saying, *I will: be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him. And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.**

This man was full of leprosy. His disease was not on his hand or neck only. He was covered with the disorder. When he saw Jesus he knew He had the power to heal him. The question in his mind was, "Does Jesus care?" He said, "If thou wilt..." The question was not in Jesus ability but in His desire. Our loving Savior wanted to save the man. He reached out and touched him. How long had it been since this man had been touched. Jesus did not need to do this to heal him. This was a physical display of compassion. This leper was also instructed to go to the priests and show himself to them.

In the Old Testament we find the story of King Uzziah. This king attempted to offer incense in the temple, an action reserved for the priests alone. When the king ignored their

warnings he became leprous. 2 Chron 26:19 *Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, from beside the incense altar.* He died in that condition.

Leprosy was also imposed upon Miriam, Moses sister. When she elevated herself and Aaron to the position of Moses, God punished her. Numbers 12 has the narrative. Aaron responds to her disorder by saying, Num 12:12 *Let her not be as **one dead**, of whom **the flesh is half consumed** when he cometh out of his mother's womb.* Fortunately, God cleansed her after the lesson was taught.

Syria surrounded Samaria in 2 Kings 6. The city was being starved to death. There were four lepers outside of the gate in chapter 7. They were isolated from the city. They recognized they could starve at the gate, starve inside the city, or go to the Syrians and perhaps be spared. They discovered the Syrians had left in a hurry leaving all sorts of wealth and food behind. The lepers enjoyed their good fortune for a short time, and then their conscience got the better of them. 2 Kings 7:9 says, *“Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace:...”* They shared the good news and saved the city of Samaria.

One final reference is Naaman (2 Kings 5). He was healed by Elisha. Jesus uses him as an example of a faith that surpassed the Israelites. Luke 4:27 *And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.* The lepers in Israel were not cleansed because they lacked the faith to go to Elisha. Naaman went and obeyed the command given him.

May our faith show brightly through the battle with our Covid 19. Remember God has control and can deliver us.