

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
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DHW BIBLE CLASS LESSON 7 LEVITICUS CHAPTERS 13 & 14

INTRODUCTION

Leviticus 13 and 14 deal with diseases that affected the skin, clothing and houses. Any serious condition that rendered an Israelite or his clothing or his house less than that which was considered whole had to be examined by the priests. The priests were told how to distinguish between clean and unclean.

We have observed previously that holiness was symbolised by wholeness. Animals must be without defect to be used in sacrifices. Priests must be without physical deformity (Leviticus 21:5). Any Israelite who was found to have a physical abnormality was removed out of the camp of the community until he was clean. The sanctuary was the most holy place. The Israelites pitched their tents around the sanctuary forming the boundaries of the campsite. The areas beyond the camp boundaries were designated as "without the camp" (13:45).

Our study should help us to understand the importance of purity and holiness, and apply these principles in our lives as members of the body of Christ.

OUTLINE

- I. PART I: SKIN DISEASES.
 - A. The Initial Symptoms of a Skin Disease (13:1-8).
 1. Initial eruptions of the skin to be examined by Aaron or one of his sons (v.1).
 2. Symptoms that clearly established uncleanness (vv.2, 3).
 3. Initial tests might show clean but later relapsed to be unclean (vv.7, 8).
 - B. Case of a Man Suffering From a Skin Disease (13:9-17).
 1. One with a skin disease brought to the priest to be examined (v.9).
 2. Symptoms that clearly showed unclean (vv.10-11, 14-15).
 3. Symptoms that clearly showed clean (vv.12-13, 16-17).
 - C. Diagnosis of Two Specific Cases (13:18-28).
 1. Case one: skin disease in scars to be examined by the priest (vv.18-20a).
 - a. Symptoms that clearly showed unclean (vv.20-22).
 - b. Symptoms that clearly showed clean (v.23).
 2. Case two: skin disease in burns (v.24).
 - a. Symptoms that clearly showed unclean (vv.25-27).
 - b. Symptoms that clearly showed clean (v.28).

D. Skin Diseases on the Scalp or Chin (13:29-37).

1. One who had disease symptoms on head or chin to be brought to the priest (vv.29, 30a, 36).
2. Symptoms that clearly showed unclean (v.30b).
3. Symptoms that clearly showed clean (vv.31-35, 37).

E. Diagnosis of Two More Specific Cases (13:38-44).

1. Case one: false symptoms on the skin (vv.38, 39).
2. Case two: Loss of hair and other symptoms (vv.40-44).
 - a. Loss of hair alone was nothing unclean (vv.40, 41).
 - b. Symptoms on the bald head or forehead that clearly showed unclean (vv.42-44).

F. Treatment of Those Diagnosed Unclean (13:45, 46).

1. His clothes should be rent.
2. His head should be bare.
3. He should cover his upper lip.
4. He should cry "Unclean."
5. He would be like this as long as he suffered from the disease.
6. He should be isolated.

PART II: CLOTHING INFECTED BY DISEASES.

G. Garments of Wool, Linen and Leather Infected with the Plague (13:47-59).

1. The priest would conduct tests to determine the contamination of the garments (vv.47-58).

- a. The contaminated clothes must be taken to the priest (vv.47-49).

- b. The priest would declare the garment unclean when there were clear evidences (vv.50-58).

2. Summary of the law concerning contagious diseases (v.59).

H. Cleansing From Infectious Diseases (14:1-32).

1. The priest should go out of the camp and examine if they were healed (vv.1-3).

2. The priest should proceed to conduct the cleansing in the person's behalf (vv.4-32).

- a. The ceremonial cleansing (vv.4-9).

- Required: two birds alive and clean, cedar wood, scarlet thread, and hyssop.

- b. The offerings of cleansing on the eighth day (vv.10-20).

- The offerings consisted of two male lambs, one ewe lamb of the first year, and three tenth deals of fine flour mixed with oil and one log (1/2 litre) of oil.

3. The provisions for the person who was poor (vv.21- 32).

- a. The offerings consisted of one lamb, one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour mingled with oil, and log of oil and two turtledoves or young pigeons.

PART III: DWELLING PLACES INFECTED BY DISEASE.

- I. Houses That Were Infected with the Diseases (14:33-57).
 1. The priest to be informed that the house was suspected of being infected (vv.33-36).
 2. The priest would carry out the tests (vv.37-53).
 - a. If the house was still unclean, it would be pulled down completely (vv.44, 45).
 - b. The people who went in and out of the house would be unclean until the even and their clothes must be washed (vv.46, 47).
 - c. If the house was declared clean, the priest would perform the prescribed ceremonial cleansing.
 3. Summary of the law: to teach when it was unclean and when it was clean (vv.54-57).

COMMENTARY

And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron (13:1). Aaron and his sons being priests had the duty to differentiate between holy and unholy, between clean and unclean, and to teach the people of Israel the difference (10:10-11). These laws on uncleanness as a result of abnormal conditions of the skin would be the concern of Aaron and his sons as well as Moses.

Tests for Skin Diseases

The tests conducted by the priest to ascertain the seriousness of a skin disease were not complicated. They provided the general principles in distinguishing the seriousness of the

problem. If a person suspected that he had a skin problem, he must go to the priest who would then determine whether it was unclean.

The first thing that the priest looked for was whether the hair in the affected area had turned white and how deep into the skin of the flesh was the affected part. If the hair had turned white and the affected part was deeper than the skin of the flesh, the man would be pronounced unclean.¹ But if there was any doubt, the man would be quarantined for a week. After that the priest would re-examine him, and if the “plague” did not spread, he would be further quarantined for another week. The priest would then look at him at the end of the second week. And if the disease had paled and did not spread on the skin, the priest would pronounce him clean. He should wash his clothes and he would be clean. However, if the scab spread during his two-week quarantine period, the priest would declare him unclean.

If an Israelite developed symptoms of a swelling, the growth of raw flesh (13:10) and the hair had turned white, the priest would straightaway pronounce him unclean. If the symptoms rapidly spread over his whole body and had turned white, the priest would pronounce him clean (13:13). But if the raw flesh appeared on him, he would be

¹ The Hebrew word translated “leprosy” (KJV) here is *tsara’ath*. KJV translators based their translation from the Greek translation of the OT, the Septuagint (LXX), which is *lepra*. This is inappropriate in the case of clothing (13:47) and houses (14:34). The symptoms do not correspond with those of a true leprosy (Hansen’s disease). It seems likely that *tsara’ath* denotes some kind of a scaly skin disease. See Wenham (pp. 194-197), and Noordtjij (p.134) for discussion of the identity of the disease.

unclean (13:14). The precise meaning of *raw* is difficult to determine here. It may refer to the inflammation of the skin making it red or to tiny areas of bleeding in the skin.²

These were the principles and steps taken by the priest to determine whether a person's skin afflictions were serious. The priests applied these principles and steps in ascertaining the wholeness of the person's physical condition. The same steps were taken for any skin disease on the head or the chin (13:29, 30). The man would present himself to be diagnosed. If the priest found "a yellow thin hair", the man was pronounced unclean. But if there was a swelling or a skin eruption on the head or chin, the priest would isolate him for the two-week quarantine period. He should shave. If the swelling did not spread, he would be pronounced clean. He should wash his clothes and he would be clean. But if the swelling spread after the quarantine period, there is no need to look for the yellow hair -- he was pronounced unclean. If the swelling did not spread and black hair had grown thereon, and the swelling had healed, he would be pronounced clean. It was clarified that a person who had become bald because of falling hair was considered clean. Similarly, a person who had a high forehead because of falling hair was clean (13:40, 41).

Treatment of the Unclean

The treatment, clothing and conduct of a person infected with these diseases were prescribed. The renting of the clothes and the baring of his head were signs of mourning (compare 10:6). He must cover his upper lip. Then he should cry out, "Unclean, unclean" to ward off others. He would live alone

² Wenham, 198.

without the camp for as long as he was afflicted with the disease. The layout of the camp put the tabernacle, the most holy place, in the centre. All the tribes pitched their tents around the tabernacle. Beyond this point, a distance away, was the area known as "without the camp."

Unclean Clothing

The description of "the plague of leprosy" (KJV) in the clothing is understandably inappropriate today. The word "leprosy" referred to not only "skin disease" (which includes true leprosy) but also mildew or mould in clothing or leather.³ The Israelites used the term for man as well as things because, in both cases, they were abnormal surface conditions. In clothing they disfigure the outside of the garment. If the clothing were unclean, they would be burnt (13:52, 55, 57).

Cleansing from Skin Diseases

The law provided for the reinstatement of the quarantined person when he was cured. Those who were once declared unclean and were now declared clean could return to life in the community. The priest would take for the Israelite who was to be cleansed, two birds, cedar wood, a scarlet thread and hyssop (14:4). The priest would command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water. The other living bird together with the cedar wood, the scarlet thread and the hyssop would be immersed in the earthen vessel with running water. The priest would sprinkle the man, who was

³ Ibid., 194-195. "True leprosy (Hansen's disease) is a gruesome complaint that affects the skin, and makes other parts of the body become numb and insensitive to pain, while the bones are deformed, and eventually the sufferer dies."

healed from the skin disease, seven times with hyssop and pronounce him clean. Then the bird would be set free. On the seventh day, the man must shave off all his hair, wash his clothes and take a bath that he might be clean and take his place among the people (14:4-9).

Then on the eighth day, the day after he had shaved all his hair, washed his clothes and taken a bath, he must bring two lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish, three tenths of an ephah (about 6.6 litres) of fine flour mixed with oil, and one log of oil (.32 litre). The priest would present the man at the entrance of the tabernacle and offer the lamb as a *trespass offering* and the log of oil for a wave offering. The trespass offering was offered for persons who had committed a specific sin. Why was it required of the cured man who had dwelt by himself alone outside the camp? Three different situations that required a trespass offering were stated in 5:14-6:7. These were (1) trespass against the sacred property, (2) suspected trespass against the commandments of the Lord, and (3) giving false oaths. It was possible that the man's disease was caused by a trespass that he was not aware of -- this explained the requirement for the trespass offering. It could also be a compensation for the loss of all the sacrifices, tithes and firstfruits which the afflicted man had been unable to offer during his period of uncleanness.⁴

The priest would take some of the blood of the trespass offering and smear it on the tip of the right ear, thumb and toe of the cured man. Then the priest would take the oil and also put it on the right ear, thumb, and toe of the man.

⁴Ibid., 210.

This was unusual (compare 8:23) The cured man had a double cleansing. A week ago, outside the camp, a cleansing using the blood of birds was already done. Now the blood of a sacrificial lamb completed the purifying process. The blood of the trespass offering, which was smeared on the altar, was also smeared on the cured man – to indicate that he was once again under the grace of God. Next the oil, which was sprinkled seven times before the LORD (14:16), was put on the right ear, thumb and toe, and over the head of the cured man -- the sprinkling of the oil and the putting of it on the cured man by the priest spoke of union with God, the priest and the cured man.⁵ Once re-admitted into full membership of the covenant, the healed man could offer the standard sacrifices expected of all Israelites -- the sin offering, the burnt offering and the grain offering. The priest then offered a sin offering on behalf of the man (a purification offering). This was followed by the burnt offering, which brought reconciliation with God and a rededication to God. The grain offering was a pledge of thanksgiving and allegiance. Other provisions were made if he could not afford the cost of these offerings (14:21-32).

Unclean House

This section dealt with houses infected with mildew (14:33-53). Tests like the ones applied to clothing and human skin diseases were carried out. If after treatment of the affected area, the plague still remained and had spread to the other parts of the house, the house would be declared unclean and would be destroyed (14:45). If the house were clean, a ritual cleansing would be

⁵Ibid., 211

carried out by the priest similar to the one done for a cured man (14:4ff).

PRACTICAL VALUE

We observe that the purity and integrity of the community of God in the wilderness was of paramount importance. People, clothing and dwelling places that were short of being whole were to be moved away. The principle that can be drawn from these two chapters is -- anything short of the holy standard of God has to be dealt with. To live among God's people and to worship God, a child of God must be holy and must walk in obedience to the laws of God, not so much for his salvation but because he is a child of God.

In Matthew 18:15-17, our Lord Jesus Christ restated the principle -- if any brother sins against another, the matter must be resolved with the purpose of restoring the brother. And if the offending brother refuses the attempt of the other brother to reconcile, then he must bring with him one or two witnesses. And if the offending brother still refuses, then the whole church has to be informed. And if he is still unrepentant, he will be treated as one who is a non-believer. Paul in his exhortation to the Colossian Christians (3:8-12) used the analogy of clothing to encourage them to **put off anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth; lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and to put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him..... Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering.** In his

letter to the Corinthians (6:18-20), Paul mentioned that our body is the house of the Holy Spirit. We must renounce every sin in our life and do the things that honour and glorify God.

Although we cannot be perfect while we are still clothed in our mortal body and sinful nature, we can aspire to be more Christ-like by the transforming power and grace of God. Each passing day, yea moment, we should yearn to be more like Christ. We should put off the old man and put on the new man. As a member of the living church of God, whom He bought with His precious blood, we must guard against the presence of sin in the community. Paul already warns that a little leaven leavens the whole lump. Indeed how beautiful and pleasant for brothers and sisters in Christ to love one another, forgive one another and to live harmoniously with one another!

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: Leviticus 13:1-23; Isaiah 59:2.

Tuesday: Leviticus 13:24-46; Matthew 18:15-17.

Wednesday: Leviticus 13:47-59; Colossians 3:8-17.

Thursday: Leviticus 14:1-32; Isaiah 1:16-20; 1 John 1:9.

Friday: Leviticus 14:33-57; Proverbs 13:13

Discussion Questions

1. Is the "plague of leprosy" mentioned here the same as that which we today call leprosy?

2. What was the symbolic significance of the leprosy in this chapter?

3. What was the state of those who were afflicted with this "plague of leprosy"? How were they treated?

4. In what way could this be used to describe the spiritual condition of man and his relationship with God?

5. What was the radical treatment prescribed for a "diseased" clothing?

6. In what way does this radical treatment of a 'diseased' clothing mirror God's judgment of sin?

7. A person who was healed of his disease had to go through a ritual cleansing. What is the true symbolism of the ritual performed by the priest?

8. What spiritual truth can be drawn from the fact that the basic offerings were made after the cleansing of the cured person?

9. How would you explain that God might put the "plague of leprosy" in the house (14:34)?

10. What would you say is God's intent behind the laws in this chapter?
