

Leviticus Chapter 13

Verses 1-59

Actually chapters 13 and 14 go together.

They have a threefold division, each introduced by “The LORD spake unto Moses [and Aaron]” (13:1; 14:1, 33), and closed by “This is the law for ...” (13:59; 14:32, 54).

Serious skin disease in men and clothing is dealt with (in 13:1-59).

It details its diagnosis and treatment.

Ritual cleansing after the cure of serious skin disease is described (in 14:1-32).

And (14:33-57), relates to serious skin disease in houses: diagnosis, treatment, and cleansing.

The Hebrew word translated “leprosy” comes from a root meaning “to become diseased in the skin”, and is a generic term for severe skin disorders, including Hansen’s disease, rather than a specific description.

In Old Testament usage, it was extended to include mold or mildew in fabrics, as well as mineral eruptions on the walls of buildings, and possibly dry rot in the fabric of such structures.

The Hebrew is technical in character, and the passing of time has obliterated the original meaning of the terms used.

The individual under consideration was to “be brought unto Aaron the priest”, and if indeed infected he was to be pronounced “unclean”.

A man pronounced unclean by the priest then began a terrible separation, for he would “dwell alone; without the camp” (compare 2 Kings 7:3), which was actually a living death.

He was cut off from spiritual fellowship with the covenant people, and in a real sense would be without hope and without God in the world.

I will tell you right from the beginning, there are 2 kinds of leprosy.

One leprosy (the physical), you can see with your eyes, but there is also a leprosy of the spirit.

Even though you cannot see the leprosy of the spirit, it does not make it any less deadly.

Verses 1-8

The infected person was isolated for as long as two weeks to allow the symptoms time to improve.

Leviticus 13:1 "And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, saying,"

Aaron is addressed again, though left out in the preceding law, because the laws concerning leprosy chiefly concerned the priests, whose business it was to judge of it, and cleanse from it.

And so, Ben Gersom observes, mention is made of Aaron here, because to him and his sons belonged the affair of leprosy.

To pronounce unclean or clean, to shut up or set free.

And, as Aben Ezra says, according to his determination were all the plagues or strokes of a man, who should be declared clean or unclean.

Leviticus 13:2 "When a man shall have in the skin of his flesh a rising, a scab, or bright spot, and it be in the skin of his flesh [like] the plague of leprosy; then he shall be brought unto Aaron the priest, or unto one of his sons the priests:"

“Bright spot”:

This probably refers to inflammation.

“Leprosy”:

This is a term referring to various ancient skin disorders that were sometimes superficial, sometimes serious.

It may have included modern leprosy (Hansen’s disease).

The symptoms described (in verses 2, 6, 10, 18, 30 and 39), are not sufficient for a diagnosis of the clinical condition.

For the protection of the people, observation and isolation were demanded for all suspected cases of what could be a contagious disease.

This biblical leprosy involved some whiteness (verse 3; Exodus 4:6), which disfigured its victim but did not disable him.

Naaman was able to exercise his functions as a general of Syria’s army, although a leper (2 Kings 5:1, 27).

Both Old and New Testament lepers went almost everywhere, indicating that this disease was not the leprosy of today that cripples.

A victim of this scaly disease was unclean as long as the infection was partial.

Once the body was covered with it, he was clean and could enter the place of worship (see verses 12-17).

Apparently, the complete covering meant the contagious period was over.

The allusion to a boil (verses 18-28), with inflamed or raw areas and whitened hairs may refer to a related infection that was contagious.

When lepers were cured by Christ, they were neither lame nor deformed.

They were never brought on beds.

Similar skin conditions are described (in verses 29-37 and verses 38-44), concerning some inflammation from infection.

The aim of these laws was to protect the people from disease, but more importantly, to inculcate into them by vivid object lessons how God desired purity, holiness, and cleanness among His people.

This has great spiritual thoughts in it.

If this illness is just physical, why do they not take the person with it to a physician?

It is very unusual to take a person to the high priest, before you take the patient to a doctor for a physical problem.

The sons of Aaron, as well as Aaron, were to judge the matter of whether the person had leprosy.

It seemed that any raw sore, such as a boil, must be examined to determine whether or not it was leprosy.

Leviticus 13:3 "And the priest shall look on the plague in the skin of the flesh: and [when] the hair in the plague is turned white, and the plague in sight [be] deeper than the skin of his flesh, it [is] a plague of leprosy: and the priest shall look on him, and pronounce him unclean."

Whether it be a swelling, scab, or a bright spot that appears, and judge of it by the following rules, and none but a priest might do this.

"And when the hair in the plague is turned white":

It arising in a place where hair grows, and which hair is not naturally white, but of another color.

But changed through the force of the plague.

And there were to be two hairs at least, which were at first black, but turned white, so Jarchi and Ben Gersom.

And these hairs, according to the Misnah, must be white at bottom; if the root (or bottom) is black, and the head (or top) white, he is clean.

If the root white, and the head black, he is defiled.

For hairs turning white is a sign of a disorder, of weakness, of a decay of nature, as may be observed in ancient persons.

"And the plague in sight be deeper than the skin of his flesh":

Appears plainly to view to be more than skin deep, to have corroded and eat into the flesh below the skin.

"It is a plague of leprosy":

When these two signs were observed, hair turned white, and the plague was more than skin deep, then it was a plain case that it was the leprosy of which see notes on (Matt. 8:2; 8:3; Luke 5:12).

This was an emblem of sin, and the corruption of nature, which is an uncleanness.

And with which every man is defiled, and which renders him infectious, nauseous, and abominable.

And of which he is only to be cured and cleansed by Christ, the great High Priest, through his blood, which cleanses from all sin.

The above signs and marks of leprosy may be observed in this.

The white hair denoting a decay of strength (see Hosea 7:9).

May be seen in sinners, as in the leper, who are without moral and spiritual strength to keep the law of God.

To do anything that is spiritually good, to regenerate, renew, convert, and sanctify themselves, or to bring themselves out of the state of pollution, bondage, and misery, in which they are.

And, like the leprosy, sin lies deep in man.

It is in his flesh, in which dwells no good thing, and in which there is no soundness.

It does not lie merely in outward actions, but it is in the heart, which is desperately wicked.

For the inward part of man is very wicked.

"And the priest shall look on him, and pronounce him unclean":

And so, should be obliged to rend his clothes, make bare his head, put a covering on his upper lip, and cry, unclean, unclean.

He must dwell alone without the camp, and at a proper time bring the offering for his cleansing, and submit to the several rites and ceremonies prescribed (Lev. 13:45).

Notice, that leprosy as well as sin, is a disease of the flesh.

When this sin or disease has gone into the person, the priest declares them unclean.

One of the requests we all make to Jesus, is wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow, or (take my spiritual leprosy).

Leviticus 13:4 "If the bright spot [be] white in the skin of his flesh, and in sight [be] not deeper than the skin, and the hair thereof be not turned white; then the priest shall shut up [him that hath] the plague seven days:"

The Targum of Jonathan is, "white as chalk in the skin of his flesh":

But other Jewish writers make the whiteness of the bright spot to be the greatest of all, like that of snow (see notes on Lev. 13:2).

"And in sight be not deeper than the skin, and the hair thereof be not turned white":

Though it be a bright spot, and be very white, yet these two marks not appearing, it cannot be judged a leprosy, at most it is only suspicious.

Wherefore:

"Then the priest, shall shut up him that hath the plague seven days":

In whom the bright spot is, and of whom there is a suspicion of the plague of leprosy, but it is not certain.

And therefore, in order to take time, and get further knowledge, the person was to be shut up from all company and conversation for the space of seven days.

By which time it might be supposed, as Ben Gersom observes, that the case and state of the leprosy (if it was one), would be altered.

And Aben Ezra remarks, that most diseases change or alter on the seventh day.

We know that 7 means spiritually complete.

It is easy to understand, just as Aaron and his son's had to wait at the door 7 days to be ceremonially clean for work in the sanctuary, these people wait 7 days to be declared physically clean.

This seven days, this person is neither declared to have leprosy nor to be clean.

When Aaron waited at the door 7 days, he was neither high priest, nor released to go into the world.

In both cases, this is a period of waiting to be accepted.

Leviticus 13:5 "And the priest shall look on him the seventh day: and, behold, [if] the plague in his sight be at a stay, [and] the plague spread not in the skin; then the priest shall shut him up seven days more:"

In the day, and not in the night, as Maimonides, but not on the seventh day.

If it happened to be on the Sabbath, then it was put off till after it.

And, according to the Jewish canons, they do not look upon plagues in the morning, nor in the evening, nor in the middle of a house, nor on a cloudy day, nor at noon, but at the fourth, fifth, eighth, and ninth hours.

"And, behold, if the plague in his sight be at a stay":

It appears to the priest, according to the strictest view he can take of it, that it is in the same state and condition it was, neither better nor worse.

"And the plague spread not in the skin":

Is not greater or larger than it was, though not less.

"Then the priest shall shut him up seven days more":

Such abundant care was taken, lest after all it should prove a leprosy.

Leviticus 13:6 "And the priest shall look on him again the seventh day: and, behold, [if] the plague [be] somewhat dark, [and] the plague spread not in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him clean: it [is but] a scab: and he shall wash his clothes, and be clean."

On the second seventh day, at the end of a fortnight from his being first presented to him, and shut up.

"And, behold, if the plague be somewhat dark":

The spot be not so bright, or so white as it was at first.

Though Aben Ezra observes, that indeed many wise men say, that is as signifying dark, and the testimony or proof they bring is (Gen. 27:1).

But according to my opinion, adds he, the word is the reverse of to spread.

And the sense is, if the plague does not spread itself in another place.

And so some translators render it "contracted", or "contracts itself": and this seems best to agree with what follows.

"And the plague spread not in the skin":

But is as it was when first viewed, after waiting fourteen days, and making observations on it.

"The priest shall pronounce him clean":

That is, from leprosy, otherwise there was an impure disorder on him, a scabious one.

"It is but a scab":

Which is the name, Jarchi says, of a clean plague or stroke, that is, in comparison of the leprosy.

Otherwise such cannot be said with any propriety to be clean.

Ben Gersom better explains it, it is a white scab, but not of the kind of leprosy, although it is found as the whiteness of the bright spot.

But there are not seen in it the signs of leprosy, the hair is not turned white, nor has the plague increased.

"And he shall wash his clothes, and be clean":

For seeing he was obliged to be shut up, as Jarchi observes, he is called unclean, and stood in need of dipping.

That is, his body and his clothes into water.

So, the people of God, though they are justified by the righteousness of Christ, and are pronounced clean through it.

Yet since they have their spots and scabs, they have need to have their conversation garments continually washed in the blood of the Lamb.

In some very unusual way, this first 7 days of waiting here, symbolizes the time of the law.

The 14 days; the two periods of 7 days, symbolize the waiting for grace to come.

Notice at the end of this 14 days, he is washed and made whole.

When we are washed in the blood of the Lamb, we are made every whit whole.

Our sin (leprosy), is gone.

Leviticus 13:7 "But if the scab spread much abroad in the skin, after that he hath been seen of the priest for his cleansing, he shall be seen of the priest again:"

Or "in spreading spread".

Spreads, and proceeds to spread more and more.

"After that he hath been seen of the priest for his cleansing":

Even after he had been viewed upon the first presentation of him to him, and after he had been twice seen by him by the end of two weeks, in which he was shut up.

And after he had been pronounced clean, and had washed his clothes for his purification.

"He shall be seen of the priest again":

Either he shall go to him of himself, or be brought to him, to be reviewed and pass under afresh examination.

Leviticus 13:8 "And [if] the priest see that, behold, the scab spreadeth in the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean: it [is] a leprosy."

Is not at a stay, as when he looked at it a second and third time.

"Then the priest shall pronounce him unclean":

A leprous person; to be absolutely so, as Jarchi expresses it.

And so, obliged to the birds (to bring birds for his cleansing), and to shaving, and to the offering spoken of in this section, as the same writer observes.

"It is a leprosy":

It is a clear and plain case that it was one, and no doubt is to be made of it, it is a spreading leprosy.

As sin is; it spreads itself over all the powers and faculties of the soul, and over all the members of the body.

And it spreads more and more in every stage of life, unless and until grace puts a stop to it.

We see in this a hopeless situation.

The priest tried, but there was no change.

Leviticus 13:9 "When the plague of leprosy is in a man, then he shall be brought unto the priest;"

He has all the signs of it, and it is pretty manifest both to himself and others that it is upon him.

"Then he shall be brought unto the priest":

By his friends and neighbors, if he is not willing to come of himself.

A sinner insensible of the leprosy of sin, and of his unclean and miserable state through it, has no will to come to Christ the great High Priest for cleansing.

But one that is sensible of it, and of Christ's ability to help and cleanse him, will come freely and gladly, and importunately seek to him for it.

Though indeed such a one is brought by powerful and efficacious grace to him, yet not against, but with his full will (see John 5:40; compare with Matt. 8:1).

Leviticus 13:10 "And the priest shall see [him]: and, behold, [if] the rising [be] white in the skin, and it have turned the hair white, and [there be] quick raw flesh in the rising;"

Look at him, and closely and narrowly inspect and examine his case.

"And, behold, if the rising be white in the skin; this is another appearance of the leprosy.

The preceding was a bright spot, and the scab of it; but this a rising or white swelling in the skin, as white as pure wool, as the Targum of Jonathan.

"And it have turned the hair white":

To the whiteness of an egg shell, or the film of it, as the same Targum.

That is, hath turned the hair of another color, into white which was before black.

"And there be quick raw flesh in the rising":

Or swelling; or "the quickening" or "quickness of live flesh" either such as we call proud flesh, which looks raw and red.

Or sound flesh, live flesh being opposed to that which is mortified and putrid.

For either the hair turning white, or quick raw flesh, one or the other, and one without the other was a sign of leprosy, so Jarchi observes.

Even this is a sign of uncleanness, the white hair without the quick flesh, and the quick flesh without the white hair.

This may seem strange that quick and sound flesh should be a sign of the leprosy and its uncleanness.

Though it should be observed, it is such as is in the rising or swelling.

And in things spiritual, it is a bad sign when men are proud of themselves and have confidence in the flesh.

When in their own opinion, they are whole and sound and need no physician.

When they trust in themselves that they are righteous, and boast of and have their dependence on their own works.

He appears to be in the best state and frame that cried out as David did, that there is "no soundness in his flesh" (Psalm 38:3).

Leviticus 13:11 "It [is] an old leprosy in the skin of his flesh, and the priest shall pronounce him unclean, and shall not shut him up: for he [is] unclean."

An inveterate one, of long standing and continuance, an obstinate one, not to be cured by medicine.

As this sort of leprosy was, and therefore the person was sent not to a physician, but to the priest.

The leprosy of sin is an old disease, brought by man into the world with him, and continues with him from his youth upwards, and nothing but the grace of God and blood of Christ can remove it.

"And the priest shall pronounce him unclean, and shall not shut him up":

There being no doubt at all of it being a leprosy.

And of his uncleanness, and therefore no need to shut him up for further examination, but to turn him out of the camp till his purification was over.

"For he is unclean":

In a ceremonial sense, and was obliged to the law for cleansing, such as after given.

In diseases, you would call this a chronic disease, which is past the contagious stage.

In the spiritual realm, this would be a habitual sinner.

By this time, the person is so hideous from the disease (sin), that no one will come near them anyway.

There is no need to lock them up.

I am not saying in this that leprosy is caused by sin.

I do not know.

I am saying that leprosy in the flesh is symbolic of leprosy of sin in the inner man, in his spirit.

Leviticus 13:12 "And if a leprosy break out abroad in the skin, and the leprosy cover all the skin of [him that hath] the plague from his head even to his foot, wheresoever the priest looketh;"

Or, if flowering it flowers.

The man that has it on him looks like a plant or tree covered with white flowers, being spread all over him in white swellings, bright spots or scabs, as it follows.

"And the leprosy cover all the skin of him that hath the plague, from his head even to his foot":

Such a one as the leper was that came to Christ for healing, said to be full of leprosy (Luke 5:12).

And such in a mystical sense is every sinner, whether sensible of it or not.

Even from the Crown of the head to the sole of the foot, full of the wounds, bruises, and putrefying sores of sin (Isa. 1:6).

"Wheresoever the priest looketh":

That is, he cannot look anywhere upon any part of him but he sees the signs of the leprosy on him.

And from whence the Jewish writers gather, that a priest that inspects leprous persons ought to have a clear sight, and to have both his eyes, and that the inspection should not be made in a dark house.

Leviticus 13:13 "Then the priest shall consider: and, behold, [if] the leprosy have covered all his flesh, he shall pronounce [him] clean [that hath] the plague: it is all turned white: he [is] clean."

Look upon it, and well weigh the matter in his own mind, that he may make a true judgment and pronounce a right sentence.

"And, behold, if the leprosy have covered all his flesh": From head to foot, so that no quick, raw, or sound flesh appear in him.

"He shall pronounce him clean that hath the plague":

Not clean from a leprosy he is covered with; but that he is free from pollution by it, and under no obligation to bring his offering, or to perform, or have performed on him any of the rites and ceremonies used in cleansing of the leper.

"It is all turned white": His skin and flesh with white bright spots, scabs and swellings, and no raw and red flesh appears.

"He is clean":

In a ceremonial sense.

This may seem strange, that one that had a bright spot, or a white swelling, or a scab that spreads, a single one of these, or here and there one, should be unclean.

And yet, if covered over with them, should be clean.

The reason in nature is, because this shows a good healthful inward constitution, which throws out all its ill humors externally, whereby health is preserved.

As we see in persons that have the measles or smallpox, or such like distempers, if they stick in the skin, and only here and there one rises up in a tumor, and to a head, it is a bad sign.

But if they come out kindly and well, though they cover the whole body, things are very promising.

The mystical or spiritual meaning of this is, that when a man sees himself to be a sinful creature, all over covered with sin, and no part free.

And disclaims all righteousness of his own to justify him before God, but wholly trusts to, and depends upon the grace of God for salvation.

And the righteousness of Christ for his acceptance with God.

He becomes clean through the grace of God and the blood and righteousness of Christ.

The only way to explain this, is with a statement from the New Testament.

Luke 5:12-13 "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."

I believe the statement (full of leprosy), is the connection between the two.

The only help for someone full of sin, or leprosy, is for Jesus to wash them and make them whole.

Leviticus 13:14 "But when raw flesh appeareth in him, he shall be unclean."

Between the white spots, scabs, or swellings, or in the midst of them.

"He shall be unclean":

Be pronounced unclean, and be subject to all the prescriptions of the law concerning lepers.

Leprosy is not a very contagious disease, but is contagious when the sore is open and running.

Leviticus 13:15 "And the priest shall see the raw flesh, and pronounce him to be unclean: [for] the raw flesh [is] unclean: it [is] a leprosy."

Or when he sees it, the person being brought to him to be viewed.

"And pronounce him to be unclean":

Or shall pronounce him to be unclean.

"For the raw flesh is unclean":

Made a man so in a ceremonial sense (see notes on Lev. 13:10).

"It is a leprosy":

Wherever any quick raw flesh appears in a swelling.

It is a horrible task, but it is the duty of the leader of the church to point out sin to their members.

Just as the leprosy here, sin must be dealt with.

Leviticus 13:16 "Or if the raw flesh turn again, and be changed unto white, he shall come unto the priest;"

Changes its color, from redness, which is in raw flesh.

"And be changed unto white":

And does not look ruddy as flesh in common does, nor red and fiery, as raw and proud flesh, but is white, of the same color with the swelling or scab.

"He shall come unto the priest":

Again, and show himself, even though he was before by him pronounced clean.

Leviticus 13:17 "And the priest shall see him: and, behold, [if] the plague be turned into white; then the priest shall pronounce [him] clean [that hath] the plague: he [is] clean."

Review him, and examine him thoroughly.

"And, behold, if the plague be turned into white":

The raw flesh in the swelling, which looked red, is become white.

"Then the priest shall pronounce him clean that hath the plague":

That was supposed to have the plague of leprosy; but upon a review, and on this change of things, has not, he shall declare him free from it.

"He is clean":

And under no obligation to the laws and rites concerning it.

This reminds me so much of what Paul did in the books of Corinthians.

There was a terrible sin in the church, and Paul told them to remove the person who had sinned so badly.

Then (in 2 Corinthians), after the person repented, Paul told the church to take him back into the fold.

Leviticus 13:18 "The flesh also, in which, [even] in the skin thereof, was a boil, and is healed,"

Or hot ulcer, by which, says Maimonides you may understand any stroke by a stone, stick, or iron, or any other thing.

And in the Misnah, it is asked, what is an ulcer (or boil)?

A stroke by wood, stone, pitch, or hot water.

All that is from the force of fire is an ulcer.

"And is healed":

By the use of medicine, and the part, in all appearance, as well and as sound as ever.

Leviticus 13:19 "And in the place of the boil there be a white rising, or a bright spot, white, and somewhat reddish, and it be showed to the priest;"

In the place where the boil was, a white swelling appears.

"Or a bright spot, white, and somewhat reddish":

White and red mixed, as the Targum of Jonathan.

And so Aben Ezra interprets the word "reddish", of the bright spot being mixed of two colors, or part of it so.

And such a mixed color of white and red, Gersom observes, is usual in a swelling.

And adds, we are taught how to judge of these appearances, according to a tradition from Moses.

Which is this: take a cup full of milk, and put in it two drops of blood, and the color of it will be as the color of the bright spot, white and reddish.

And if you put into it four drops, its color will be as the color of the rising (or swelling) reddish.

And if you put into it eight drops, its color will be as the color of the scab of the bright spot, more reddish.

And if you put into it sixteen drops, its color will be as the color of the scab of the swelling, very red.

Hence it appears, says he, that the bright spot is whitest with its redness, and after that the swelling.

And next the scab of the bright spot, and then the scab of the swelling.

But Bochart is of opinion that the word is wrongly rendered "reddish".

Which, he thinks, contradicts the account of the bright spot being white.

And especially as the word for "reddish" has its radicals doubled, which always increase the signification.

And therefore, if the word bears the sense of redness, it should be rendered "exceeding red".

Which would be quite contrary to the spot being white at all.

Wherefore from the use of the word in the Arabic language, which signifies white, bright, and glittering (see notes on Lam. 4:7).

He chooses to read the words, "or a bright spot, white and exceeding glittering".

But this word we render reddish and white, being read disjunctively (Lev. 13:24).

Seems to contradict this observation of his.

"And it be shewed to the priest":

To look upon and pass his judgment on it.

Leviticus Chapter 13 Questions

1. What 2 kinds of leprosy does this lesson deal with?
2. Explain the difference in the 2.
3. Who did the Lord give these instructions to?
4. What do the Scriptures describe as being like leprosy?
5. Who should a person suspected of leprosy be brought to?
6. If this is just speaking of physical leprosy, why do they not take the patient to a _____?
7. For what reason was the new raw sore examined?
8. Who pronounced the person clean or unclean?
9. Leprosy is a disease of the _____.
10. How many days was the person to be shut up, before determining whether he is clean or not?
11. What does the number 7 mean?
12. Why did Aaron and his sons have to wait 7 days at the door of the sanctuary?
13. Explain the similarity of the time Aaron waited, and the time the person suspected of leprosy waited.
14. In what way does the 14 day wait resemble Christianity?
15. What makes the person whole?
16. Leviticus 13:7 describes what?

17. How can you compare chronic disease to sin?
18. What does chronic leprosy, or habitual sin, do to the face?
19. The only help for someone full of sin, or leprosy, is what?
20. When is leprosy contagious?
21. What is a task of the leader of the church, that none of them enjoy?
22. Who in the New Testament, dealt with the same sin 2 different ways?
23. How did this happen?