

Torah Portion Tazria / Metzora

Tazria Leviticus 12:1 – 13:59

This parashah can be divided up as follows:
The Ritual After Childbirth
The Law for Unclean Skin Disease (Tzaraat)
The Law Concerning Garments with Tzaraat

In most English versions of the Bible the Hebrew word, *tzaraat*, is translated as leprosy. However, this is not a correct translation of this skin disease at all. This is a mistranslation of the Hebrew word. The Hebrew word, *tzaraat*, was not translated into leprosy until around the middle ages when it was translated into Arabic as *lepra* and then into Greek as *leprosy*. Actually the Hebrew word does not compare to our modern disease known as leprosy, or Hansen's disease, as we shall see.

Rabbi's have understood and taught for centuries about the origins of *tzaraat*. *Tzaraat* was mysterious because it not only affected a person's skin, but could also infect garments, belongings, and houses. Instead of requiring medical attention from a physician, it required examination from the priest. Interestingly, if the skin plague had COVERED the entire body, the person was declared CLEAN, NOT UNCLEAR.

The disease manifested itself as a swelling, scabs, or white spots. If a person thought that he/she had the beginnings of the disease then he/she was immediately to go to a priest at which time they would be examined. After ONE WEEK they would be checked again by the priest to see if the disease had spread. Hansen's disease spreads much slower than this and you definitely would not be free from Hansen's disease if it covered the entire body.

The treatment for the disease was total social isolation from the rest of the community. They had to live totally separated and cry out, “unclean, unclean” if anyone approached them. Talk about social anxiety!

So what is the mysterious skin affliction? Well, the Rabbi's teach that it is not a physical, medical, problem but a spiritual problem. They teach that the disease is brought upon a person because of sin. It is a warning from Elohim that they need to mend their ways. The Rabbi's teach that the sins most likely to have caused this condition were anti-social sins such as: gossip, murder, sexual immorality, pride, perjury, arrogance, envy. They specifically focused on evil speaking or derogatory speech, against another; in Hebrew this is called *lashon hara*, “evil tongue”.

Examples that correlate with this understanding can be found in the case with Miriam, see Numbers 12. Miriam was afflicted with this skin condition because she spoke against Moses. Though Moses and Aaron pled for her to be healed immediately, she still had to be separated from the community for seven days.

Other Biblical examples can be found in Leviticus 13-14, II Kings 5:1, II Kings 7:3-10, II Kings 15:5, II Chronicles 16:20-23.

Lashon Hara is a very serious offense against another person and God does not take it lightly. See Leviticus 19:16, James 4:11, Matthew 12: 35-36, Proverbs 6:16-19.

In Matthew 15:16-20, Yeshua stated the following:

“And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are *the things* which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.”

It would seem by His statement that He was in agreement with the teaching that these things cause a person to be unclean. In Tabernacle/Temple days would they have caused a person to break out with *tzaraat*? Chances are yes!

Some ancient Jewish writers saw *tzaraat* as a removal of godliness. For example, if a person saw *tzaraat* beginning in his house then they knew that God was removing His presence from their home. They knew that they had done something of which they needed to repent.

How was it that if a person was totally covered in the skin affliction that they were made CLEAN? It is easy for a person to make excuses for a little sin, in this case a little scab perhaps, but only after a person has totally given over to their sinful state and experienced the isolation from God and the community that it brings, do they realize that they need a redeemer. They are now ready to be made clean and whole; with repentance.

Wouldn't it be nice if God gave us such a warning today when we had committed a sin? If He said to us by an affliction that we had sinned and needed to repent? Well, maybe He does!

Metzora
Leviticus 14:1 – 15:33

The word Metzora in Hebrew means “one being diseased”.

This portion can be divided up as follows:

The Ritual for Cleansing those healed of Tzaraat
The Law Concerning Bodily Discharges

In non-leap years this portion is read along with portion “Tazria”. In this short portion Moses continues the discussion of laws of “purity” and “impurity”. As already mentioned in the prior Torah Portion, Tazria, Rabbi's linked Tzaraat, afflictions of the flesh, with a spiritual condition that they call Lashon Hara (evil speaking).

Anyone having Tzaraat/Metzora was unclean and could not approach unto God in His Temple. In addition, they were outcasts of society. They had to be separated from the rest of the congregation so long as they were unclean.

In Jewish writings, the sages say that the Messiah's name is "leper scholar"(Sanhedrin 98). How is this possible? Isaiah 53 explains this thought process. How is it that Yeshua could TOUCH and heal those afflicted with tzaraat (we translate in most Bibles as lepers) and not be unclean Himself? Namely, because He bore the sins of the world. He was able to reach down as "healer" by His own blood and take away our sins (our tzaraat). He became the Red Heifer sacrifice.

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