

Scaly Skin and Mildewed Walls

Leviticus 13-14

Leviticus series #10

August 14, 2022

PreSermon Comments

- Next week (Aug. 21) will be about body fluids. Not explicitly about sex, but be aware.
- Later, Sep. 11, will be Leviticus 18 that is all about sexual activities
 - Request 1: invite your boss. *You won't believe...*
 - Request 2: bulk up our kids ministry

Introduction

- Some things just can't be hidden | My rough-running car vs a rough-looking car
- In the bible, we deal with two things where appearances can be deceiving
 1. Sin to hide: coveting, lust, hate, even stealing or maybe murder
 2. Suffering to hide: relational trouble, internal disease

(big idea) What do you do when something in your life just can't be hidden?

****For today:** less about sin, and more about the brokenness of the world, because our passage

Leviticus Catch-Up

- God's newly-freed people | Out of slavery in Egypt
- God's powerful holiness comes near | Tent of Meeting (*sacrifices*)
- God's new creation project | New Eden, new priests
- God's new life in a world of death | Ritual purity

Moral purity = right and wrong | Ritual purity = life and death

- Not following the ritual purity laws does become an issue of moral impurity

Scaly Skin Disease

Leviticus 13¹ The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron: ²“When a person has a swelling, scab, or spot on the skin of his body, and it may be a serious disease on the skin of his body,

- “Serious disease” *nega tsara'at*—often translated as leprosy, more in a moment
- Also worth noting that no reasons are given. Likely not about sin, more about brokenness he is to be brought to the priest Aaron or to one of his sons, the priests. ³The priest will examine the sore on the skin of his body. If the hair in the sore has turned white and the sore appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is in fact a serious skin disease. After the priest examines him, he must pronounce him unclean. ⁴But if the spot on the skin of his body is white and does not appear to be deeper than the skin, and the hair in it has not turned white, the priest will quarantine the stricken person for seven days.

- Note the job of the priest: examine and enforce. Not a doctor visit.

⁵The priest will then reexamine him on the seventh day. If he sees that the sore remains unchanged and has not spread on the skin, the priest will quarantine him for another seven days. ⁶The priest will examine him again on the seventh day. If the sore has faded and has not spread on the skin, the priest is to pronounce him clean; it is a scab. The person is to wash his clothes and will become clean. ⁷ But if the scab spreads further on his skin after he has presented himself to the priest for his cleansing, he is to present himself again to the priest. ⁸The priest will examine him, and if the scab has spread on the skin, then the priest must pronounce him unclean; he has a serious skin disease.

*Note: It goes on for another **38 verses** like this. *Is the skin a dull white vs. shiny? How deep does the wound go? Is there white or yellow hair in the broken skin? Dr. Pimple Popper anyone?*

Mr. Clean

Leviticus 13 ⁴⁰“If a man loses the hair of his head, he is bald, but he is clean. ⁴¹Or if he loses the hair at his hairline, he is bald on his forehead, but he is clean.

(big idea) Biblical leprosy is not the same as modern leprosy

- Hansen’s disease: bacterial infection
- Ancient leprosy: *nega tsara’at* refers to a wide variety of afflictions

Jacob Milgrom I invited a respected San Francisco Bay Area dermatologist, Marvin Engel, to address my graduate seminar on this subject. After carefully studying the biblical text and its derivative medical literature, he stated his conclusions without any hesitation: the symptoms described in Leviticus 13 do not correspond to any known skin disease.

- Know why else? Because walls and clothes can get it

Contaminated Fabric

Leviticus 13 ⁴⁷“If a fabric is contaminated with mildew [*nega tsara’at again!*]⁴⁸—in wool or linen fabric, ⁴⁸ in the warp or weft of linen or wool, or in leather or anything made of leather—⁴⁹ and if the contamination is green or red in the fabric, the leather, the warp, the weft, or any leather article, it is a mildew contamination and is to be shown to the priest. ⁵⁰The priest is to examine the contamination and quarantine the contaminated fabric for seven days. ⁵¹The priest is to reexamine the contamination on the seventh day. If it has spread in the fabric, the warp, the weft, or the leather, regardless of how it is used, the contamination is harmful mildew; it is unclean. ⁵²He is to burn the fabric, the warp or weft in wool or linen, or any leather article, which is contaminated. Since it is harmful mildew it must be burned.

Contaminated Walls

Leviticus 14 ³⁴“When you enter the land of Canaan that I am giving you as a possession, and I place a mildew contamination [*nega tsara’at again!*] in a house in the land you possess, ³⁵ the owner of the house is to come and tell the priest: Something like mildew contamination has appeared in my house. ³⁶The priest must order them to clear the house before he enters to examine the

contamination, so that nothing in the house becomes unclean. Afterward the priest will come to examine the house.³⁷ He will examine it, and if the contamination in the walls of the house consists of green or red indentations that appear to be beneath the surface of the wall,³⁸ the priest is to go outside the house to its doorway and quarantine the house for seven days.³⁹ The priest is to return on the seventh day and examine it. If the contamination has spread on the walls of the house,⁴⁰ the priest must order that the stones with the contamination be pulled out and thrown into an unclean place outside the city.⁴¹ He is to have the inside of the house completely scraped, and have the plaster that is scraped off dumped in an unclean place outside the city.⁴² Then they are to take different stones to replace the former ones and take additional plaster to replaster the house.

**Selah: this is why people say that they don't like the book of Leviticus. It's like you're reading a pamphlet at dr. office or cleaning product instructions.*

***Back to the text. The priest doesn't heal, he provides a cleansing ritual once God heals.*

Priestly Cleansing

Leviticus 14 If the skin disease has disappeared from the afflicted person,⁴ the priest will order that two live clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet yarn, and hyssop be brought for the one who is to be cleansed.⁵ Then the priest will order that one of the birds be slaughtered over fresh water in a clay pot.⁶ He is to take the live bird together with the cedar wood, scarlet yarn, and hyssop, and dip them all into the blood of the bird that was slaughtered over the fresh water.⁷ He will then sprinkle the blood seven times on the one who is to be cleansed from the skin disease. He is to pronounce him clean and release the live bird over the open countryside.

- Live/bird: not domesticated, it can't come back. It takes the impurity away.
- Cedar wood and scarlet yarn: two red ingredients, blood as the source of life
- Hyssop: bunchy/spongy plant that was used to smear passover lamb's blood
- Fresh water: water from a stream, "living water" that moves
- Clay pot: vessel of the earth

**Selah. Pause for a moment here. The person has been through a terrible ordeal. Their skin is white and they look like a corpse, they look like death. But now God has provided healing, and the priest to symbolically pronounce them clean. They get to wash, they get to change clothes, they come back to the camp, they get to come back to the tent of meeting and give a burnt and purification and restoration offering. Their ordeal is over! And remember...all along, they couldn't hide it. It was a public thing that couldn't be hidden.*

Now, Jesus comes along over a millennium later. The Jewish people have been reading this for maybe close to 1,500 years. You know that when Jesus shows up, the people had been exiled for not following the Torah, and now that they're back, the Pharisees are hardcore, adding all sorts of extra rules to the Torah to make sure people are doing it right. You have to imagine lepers are even more broken in his day.

Jesus and a Leper

Mark 1 ³⁹ He went into all of Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. ⁴⁰ Then a man with leprosy [**nega tsara'at**] came to him and, on his knees, begged him, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." ⁴¹ Moved with compassion,

- Indignation: brokenness of the world? That Jesus would be unwilling?

Jesus reached out his hand and touched him.

- Typically, the unclean makes the clean also become unclean
- But here, the source of life itself has shown up to push back the force of death

"I am willing," he told him. "Be made clean." ⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

- Jesus tells him to go read Leviticus and do what it says to do

**This man was a sufferer, and Jesus cleansed him in a unique way. What this man experienced in a unique and powerful way, we can all experience because of what Jesus did later.*

Jesus, Our Cleansing

John 19 ²⁸ After this, when Jesus knew that everything was now finished that the Scripture might be fulfilled, he said, "I'm thirsty."

- Jesus in his **clay-pot**-humanity was thirsty

²⁹ A jar full of sour wine was sitting there; so they fixed a sponge full of sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it up to his mouth.

- The branch that once dipped passover lamb's blood now dips wine of a new covenant

³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished." Then bowing his head, he gave up his spirit...

- What animal in the bible is most associated with "spirit"? A bird

³² So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man and of the other one who had been crucified with him. ³³ When they came to Jesus, they did not break his legs since they saw that he was already dead. ³⁴ But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out.

- Living, moving water came out of Jesus' side
- Every element from that cleansing ceremony is present here

(big idea) Jesus was publicly broken that our unhidable brokenness might be healed

Living in Jesus' Healing

- Acknowledge your brokenness
- Look upon Jesus' brokenness
- Find a "priestly" friend
- Be a "priestly" friend