

Weaving the Word

Tah-MAY the Leper

Part 50 – November 8, 2015



Leprosy. Such a stigma. Not a lot of words in the Bible carry such weight. **Humiliation. Isolation. Devastation. Like sin.**

The book of Isaiah opens with an incredible prophecy about Jesus; and, **God pictures the sin of rejecting Him as un-healing sores.**



... they have **rebelled against me**. The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand. Ah, sinful nation ... they have **spurned the Holy One of Israel** and **turned their backs on him**. ... **From the sole of your foot to the top of your head** there is no soundness — only **wounds** and **welts** and **open sores** ... – Isaiah 1:2b-6a NIV



The Hebrew word generally translated as “leprosy” (tsara`ath) **also refers to several severe skin disorders**, like: scabies, fungal infections, small pox, syphilis, and chronic psoriasis. So, descriptors are added to identify the specific disorder.

When I was 18, I had scabies (an “itch mite” that burrows into the skin) on my feet and ankles. A mangy farm cat rubbed against me. The itching and oozing and sores, *oh my!* To remove my socks after work, I had to soak my feet in warm water so I could peel ‘em off.



In the entire OT only one man is miraculously healed of leprosy, Naaman, and he's not even a Jew! And, when Elisha's Jewish servant, Gehazi [GAY-ha-ZEE], extorts money from Naaman ...



[Elisha said] “Naaman's leprosy **will cling to you and to your descendants forever.**” Then Gehazi went from Elisha's presence and he was **leprous**, [tsara`ath: skin diseased] **as white as snow.** – 2 Kings 5:27 NIV

We know these snowy white scales as chronic psoriasis. And, they can cover you with dead cells “**from the sole of your foot to the top of your head**”, the same way the curse of the sin of rebellion does. Remember, **sin is never a localized condition; it permeates mind and heart and body and soul.**



This is a photo of Pat Schuerman's arm; a woman who was interviewed on suffering “Gehazi's curse” of chronic psoriasis.

[Pat] has also developed arthritis in her joints, a problem related to her skin condition, making walking painful. ... [Pat said] "I was asked to leave our local library because people complained I was getting flakes on the keyboard ... **I'm treated like a modern-day leper** so now I barely leave the house. ... **I looked like I'd stepped out of a snow storm.** ... The itching drives me crazy. ... I have to peel my clothes away from my skin ... **my body was slowly being swallowed up by a thick covering of scales.**"



As new skin grows, dead skin falls *like ashes*. Many sufferers speed up this process by scraping their skin. Like *Job*, who was afflicted ...

... **from the soles of his feet to the top of his head**. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes. – Job 2:7-8 NIV



Not only would you suffer physically but you're a pariah. A cast out. **You must leave your home, city, friends, and family to live alone.** (Lev 13:46) You must wear **torn clothes, unkempt hair**, and for some a **lower face mask**, and **cry out, "TahMAY! TahMAY!" Unclean! Defiled!** (Lev 13:45) And, **you'd stay outside the towns in lonely places.**



A year into public ministry, Jesus has a showdown in a Synagogue with the religious rulers, regarding His authority. (Mat 12:9-14) He leaves the place-of-meeting for the Sea-of-Galilee, where He displays His authority over disease and demons and deep sea fishing; and then He selects and instructs His Twelve. *Now ...*



When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along [crying out, "TahMAY! tahMAY!" It was TahMAY the Leper!] who was **covered with leprosy**. [lepra: lit. morbid scaliness¹ (the cursed sole-of-his-foot-to-the-top-of-his-head type)] When he saw Jesus, he came to him [the crowd backing away] and fell with his face to the ground and begged him on his knees and said, [Notice now what TahMAY says] "Lord, if **you** are willing, **you** can make me clean." – Matthew 8:1-2; Mark 1:40b; Luke 5:12 NIV



What faith! We miss what a *huge deal* this is. **When Jesus says a prophet can't do much among His own, he reminds 'em of Naaman.**

"And there were **many in Israel with leprosy** in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet **not one of them was cleansed**—only Naaman the Syrian." – Luke 4:27 NIV

And, in the story, when Naaman writes to the king for a cure ...

[The king of Israel] tore his robes and said, "Am **I** God? Can **I** kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to **me** to be cured of his leprosy?" – 2 Kings 5:7b NIV

Throughout Israel's history, **no Jewish man is recorded being healed of leprosy² ... but a woman is.**

[1475 years earlier] **Miriam** and Aaron [Moses' sister and brother] began to talk against Moses ... "**Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?**" they asked. "**Hasn't he also spoken through us?**" ... Then the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud ... he said, "... **Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?**" ... When the cloud lifted ... there stood Miriam — **leprous, like snow**. – Numbers 12:1-12 NIV

¹ Greek physicians used the name "lepra" for the scaly skin disease now called psoriasis. Leprosy does not, until a very late stage, cover all the body, and then it doesn't consist of white scales. – *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*

² The restoration of Job's health is not recorded (Job 42:10); Moses was made leprous and healed in a moment, but didn't suffer from leprosy as an affliction (Ex 4:6-7)

And, *this* was a picture of what was to take place with Jesus.

For Moses said, **[Deut 18:15-19]** “The Lord your God will raise up for you **a prophet like me** from **among your own people**; you must **listen to everything he tells you**. Anyone who does not listen to him **will be completely cut off from among his people.**” – Acts 3:22-23 NIV

What a picture: a Jewish leper kneeling to Jesus in a deserted circle; *even now* completely cut off from among his people. But, **this leper knows the authority of this King!** Imagine the things being said among that crowd. *Until ...*

Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand ... – Mark 1:41a NIV

Silence falls. Jaws open. Eyes frozen. *He wouldn't ...*

... and touched the man. – Mark 1:41b NIV

GASP! He would! How long had it been since TahMAY had felt the touch of acceptance? **Jesus physically demonstrates unconditional love; because, He saw the man beneath the skin as a separated child of God.** Therefore, **He sees us as precious, in spite of our sin.** And, **His reflex is to reconnect.**

“I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” – Mark 1:41c NIV

Notice, **He didn't say, to the leprosy: “Be gone!” Why? His focus is on the sufferer, not the scales. No matter how scaly our sin, Jesus wants in, to embrace us. And comfort us. And heal us. If only we'll bow and allow. You may be consumed with your sin, but He's focused on you. “Be clean!”**

Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured. – Mark 1:42 NIV

His scales fell off like new fallen snow, from the peak of his head to the base of his sole, revealing him cured with a rosy brown glow. And, the word for “cured” is literally “made clean”. He probably had to shake his tunic a bit, leaving a donut shaped drift of his old dead self on the ground around. **It's never a surface issue with sin; because, sin is deeper than skin; because sin always comes from way down within in our heart.**

The heart is **deceitful** above all things and **beyond cure.** – Jeremiah 17:9a NIV

You can't change a leper's spots without a change of heart.

Then Jesus said to him, Then Jesus ordered him, Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: “See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest ...” - Matthew 8:4a; Mark 1:43-44a; Luke 5:14 NIV

What an odd thing to say in the midst of a crowd. But, it isn't that Jesus wants this leper kept under wraps, it's just that **there's a procedure and a person appointed to declare it.**

... the priest shall pronounce the infected person clean; [“tahr” (pronounced tahHARE)] then he will be clean. – Leviticus 13:17b NIV

It's a mere shadow of the true High Priest and Healer. However, **those religious officials who publically denounced Jesus must now publically declare the healing of this Jewish leper!**

“... and **offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing** [22 steps, (Leviticus 14) *rich in prophetic imagery*] as a testimony to them.” – Mark 1:44b NIV

And what a testimony: *Jewish Leper Un-Cursed!* That’s big news. Especially considering the Miriam-Moses parallel to the Pharisees.

[God said] “[Moses] sees the **form** of the Lord. [Jesus] Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” [Like the Pharisees did with the One who came “like Moses”] The anger of the Lord burned against them, [Like Jesus at the showdown] and he left them. [Like Jesus when He went to the Sea of Galilee] When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, [the “Tent of Meeting”, like the Synagogue] there stood **Miriam** [whose name means “rebellion”] — **leprous, like snow**. [Covered head to toe] **Aaron** [whose name means “light bringer”] turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy; and he said to Moses, “Please, **my lord**, [like the leper says to Jesus] do not hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed.” [Which Jesus didn’t; and healed him; and sent him to “bring the light” of Moses’ testimony to the religious leaders] – Numbers 12:8-13 NIV

But, what’s a TahHare ta’do? If he cries out, “TahMAY!” he’ll not only be lying, he’ll be denouncing what the Lord has done. So, **this one Jew spreads the news that God’s rebellious children can now be healed and restored and brought home**. And, if you think *leprosy* spreads ...

Yet the news about him spread all the more, [because] Instead he went out and began to talk [kēryssō: to proclaim after the manner of a herald] freely, [polys: much; a lot] spreading [diaphēmizō: blazing abroad] the news. [logos: the Word] – Mark 1:45a; Luke 5:15a NIV

Seems the leper formerly known as TahMAY, the *only Jewish leper* Jesus is recorded healing, is headin’ home, crying out: “TahHARE!”

I’m sure He healed other Jewish lepers;³ but, **why is only this one documented?**

You’re aware of the *Last Supper*, the night before Jesus was crucified; how about **the night before the-night-before He suffers for us to heal us and bring us home?** The *Leper Supper*, at the home of a man who’d become well-known as *Simon the leper*. (Mat 26:2, 6-7; Mark 14:1-3)

The Leper Supper is where the woman wipes Jesus’ feet and ankles with her hair; reminds me of *that cat*. But then, He took on our infirmities. (Is 53:4) But, **why would people eat at the home of a well-known leper? Unless the news had spread, and he was known for being healed.** Two years earlier, I’m deductin’ it’s *Simon* cryin’ “TahHARE!” So much, that He became well-known “as a testimony to them”.

... so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. [Instead of infection, Simon’s spreadin’ redemption!] As a result, [of this one Jewish leper] Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. – Mark 1:45b; Luke 5:15b NIV

Not only does Jesus touch TahMAY ... He trades places!

As He longs to do with each of us.

³ Jesus heals 10 lepers near Samaria, but only the nationality of a Samaritan is given (Luke 17:11-19); Jesus sends His twelve to “the lost sheep of Israel,” instructing them to “Cleanse the lepers” (Mat 10:5-8); and, after Jesus “cured many of infirmities and afflictions,” He sent word to John that “lepers are cleansed” (Luke 7:20-22; Mat 11:5)