

Leviticus

Lesson 10

Alas, we transgress a problem that we must quickly settle. What kind of leprosy attacks linen, wool, and leather? The answer resides in the word we call “leprosy.” With all our experience in the Word of God so far, we find many instances where our definitions lead us wrong. So, too, it is the reason that we see here, for what we think about leprosy today, is not the meaning in the pages of Leviticus.

Our definition of the word “leprosy” restricts us to a poor, poor man with rotting oozing sores and open raw decaying flesh right down to the bone. The Hebrew word for “leprosy” is *cara'ath*. Obviously, we did not receive our word from ancient Hebrew. Instead, the Middle English word *leper*, which simply meant *disease*, came from the Latin *lepra*, which encompasses all kinds of illness. Modern English, in the late 1500s, began to separate diseases into classes with different names. At that time, our definition and understanding of leprosy disease began to emerge to define a person with the kind of leprosy we expect and apply to this text in chapters 13 and 14. But we are misguided in a crisis of obsolete definitions.

The Hebrew word *cara'ath* was defined in earlier times in the English language as a *smiting or a stroke*. But these, too, are obsolete definitions for the Hebrew word. Today, we can change the words *smiting or stroke* because they imply a battery with some object to the word *infliction*. As such, we understand that a person can be infected with some disease and, so, too, the garment can be inflicted with an illness. Whether on the human or the garment, the effect is the same; the disease destroys the fabric of a humans' skin just as it does the garment's fabric. The humans' covering is the skin; therefore, we must determine the LORD is speaking of a skin disease for which, we know, there are many besides what we define as leprosy today. Leprosy did the trick when Wycliffe and Tyndale put the word in their translations because, at that time, it meant any kind of skin disease. Today, because we restrict the definition of the word leprosy, most new versions replace the word with the words *skin disease*.

Chapter 13 left us with just the disease diagnosis; chapter 14 directs us to the law concerning the disease. Because our text uses the words *leper and leprosy*, we, too, will continue to do the same.

IX. The Law Concerning the Cleansing of Leprosy (14:1-57)

A. Inspection by the Priest Outside the Camp (14:1-3a)

Now we come to the law concerning the cleansing of leprosy. Week after week, a priest makes his way to inspect the lepers outside the camp. Skin diseases do not heal quickly, and the contagiousness of such diseases is not readily known. As such, great care and caution are needed. But, the condition runs its course at some point, and the day of the cleansing offering will be at hand. We see that in chapter 14, verse 1. *“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing. Now he shall be brought to the priest, and the priest shall go out to the outside of the camp.’”* (14:1-3a).

The leper makes his home outside the camp. From this verse, we ascertain that the priest did not go all the way to the leper's dwelling; rather, the priest departed the camp, and once outside the boundary, the leper came to the priest.

1. Ceremony for the Healed Leper (14:3b)

The ceremony for the healed leper began with an inspection of the infection. Verse 3b. *“Thus the priest shall look, and if the infection of leprosy has been healed in the leper...”* (14:3b).

a) Ingredients (14:4)

Once the priest declares the infection healed, the priest proclaims the cleanliness and orders the healed man to gather the ceremony's ingredients. Verse 4. "... *then the priest shall give orders to take two live clean birds and cedar wood and a scarlet string and hyssop for the one who is to be cleansed.*" (14:4).

Two birds, cedarwood, a scarlet string, and hyssop, are the ingredients for the leper's offering on the day of his cleansing ceremony. The birds can be turtle doves or young pigeons. The amount of the cedar wood, we do not know. The length of the red thread we do not know. The amount of hyssop we do not know. What is hyssop? Hyssop is found in the plants we call grasses. We first see it used in Exodus's book when the hyssop is used to apply the blood on the doorpost of each Jewish home. The Hebrew word for hyssop means a *bunch*. It is merely a bunch of long grass bound together in a bundle and used as a paintbrush.

b) First Bird Slain (14:5)

Two birds are brought to the priest, and the first is slain. Verse 5. "*The priest shall also give orders to slay the one bird in an earthenware vessel over running water.*" (14:5).

The leper takes one bird down to the spring of running water and kills it over a clay pot with the running water. The pot catches the blood of the bird and the water. No doubt, the leper then returns to the priest with the pot of bird blood mixed with water.

c) Second Bird Dipped (14:6)

While still alive, the second bird is dipped in the blood and water mixture with the other ingredients. Verse 6. "*As for the live bird, he shall take it together with the cedarwood and the scarlet string and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was slain over the running water.*" (14:6).

The ingredients dipped in the pot's soupy bloody water, the bird, the cedar, the thread, and the bundle of hyssop.

d) Leper Sprinkled Seven Times (14:7a)

The priest then takes over with the ceremony. Verse 7a. "*He shall then sprinkle seven times the one who is to be cleansed from the leprosy and shall pronounce him clean, ...*" (14:7a).

Seven times the priest sprinkles the leper with the bloody water and declares him clean.

e) Second Bird Freed (14:7b)

And as for the second bird, he flies free. Verse 7b. "... *and shall let the live bird go free over the open field.*" (14:7b).

Forthwith we must notice something. This ceremony is not done at the Tent of Meeting nor around the Brazen Altar. It is performed outside the camp where the priest met the leper. For when the ceremony is over, the live bird is set free in the open field. No open field exists within the camp.

2. Leper Waits Seven Days Outside Camp (14:8-9)

To prove our point that the ceremony occurs outside the camp with the leper, the leper remained outside the camp for seven days to complete the other steps in his ritual cleansing. Verse 8. "*The one to be cleansed shall then wash his clothes and shave off all his hair and bathe in water and be clean. Now afterward, he may enter the camp, but he shall stay outside his tent for seven days. It will be on the seventh day that he shall shave off all his hair: he shall shave his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair. He shall then wash his clothes and bathe his body in water and be clean.*" (14:8-9).

For seven days after the bird ceremony, the leper waits outside the camp. Then, on the seventh day, the leper shaves all his hair. He washes his clothing and bathes himself. Clean as a whistle he would be.

3. Offering on the Eighth Day (14:10-11)

Next, we find the cleansed leper entering the Tent of Meeting on the eighth day with his offering. Verse 10. *“Now on the eighth day he is to take two male lambs without defect, and a yearling ewe lamb without defect, and three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, and one log of oil; and the priest who pronounces him clean shall present the man to be cleansed and the aforesaid before the LORD at the doorway of the tent of meeting.”* (14:10-11).

This cleansed leper does not enter the Tabernacle complex alone. He is ushered in by the priest who declared him clean eight days before. In toe, the cleansed leper brings two spotless male lambs, a ewe lamb, a pint of the most refined seed flour mixed with olive oil, and a “log of oil.” How much was a “log of oil?” It is the smallest of the liquid measurements used by the Jews. It amounts to the volume of about six hen eggs or just short of a pint of liquid.

a) First Male Lamb Guilt Offering (14:12a)

The first male lamb is for a guilt offering. Verse 12a. *“Then the priest shall take the one male lamb and bring it for a guilt offering, ...”* (14:12a).

By now, we know the ceremony of the guilt offering - no need for an order of service here. We see the lamb slain at the proper place; blood sprinkled around the Altar. Entrails washed and the fat placed on the Altar. All the rest of the meat belongs to the priest to be eaten.

b) Oil for Wave Offering (14:12b)

But we find a wave offering included with the log of oil. Verse 12b. *“...with the log of oil, and present them as a wave offering before the LORD.”* (14:12b).

The order of the ceremony is not presented here. With the mention for the log of oil, we already know it is to be waved before the LORD in the smoke of the Altar last, but not placed on the Altar.

(1) Slay the Lamb (14:13)

Be that as it may, the order of worship in this offering has a twist that is more important and needed in the details concerning the slaying of the lamb and its blood that the priest catches. Verse 13. *“Next he shall slaughter the male lamb in the place where they slaughter the sin offering and the burnt offering, at the place of the sanctuary—for the guilt offering, like the sin offering, belongs to the priest; it is most holy.”* (14:13).

The guilt offering is not the sin offering, but it is like the sin offering in its holiness. The sin offering does not belong to the priest. Every part of a sin offering must be burned outside the camp, including the hide. The only part of a sin offering that is not burned outside the camp is the fat portions burned on the Brazen Altar. It is a most holy offering.

The guilt offering is just as holy as the sin offering, except that the parts of the offering that are not placed on the Brazen Altar are given to the priest for food.

(2) Blood on Right Ear Lobe, Thumb and Toe (14:14)

The blood that the priest catches is sprinkled around the Brazen Altar, but here we see another twist in the instruction. Verse 14. *“The priest shall then take some of the blood of the guilt offering, and the priest shall put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot.”* (14:14).

In this deviation from the ordinary person with the regular guilt offering, the leper's right earlobe, thumb, and big toe are anointed. The only other time we see this kind of anointing is for the ordination of the priests. Before we address the reason, let us address the log of oil.

(3) Priest Pours Oil in Left Palm and Sprinkles Seven Times (14:15-16)

After anointing the right ear, thumb, and toe of the leper, the priest pours the log of oil in his left hand. Verse 15. *“The priest shall also take some of the log of oil, and pour it into his left palm; the priest shall then dip his right-hand finger into the oil that is in his left palm, and with his finger sprinkle some of the oil seven times before the LORD.”* (14:15-16).

The last words that say, “*with his finger sprinkle some of the oil seven times before the LORD,*” tells us that the priest enters the Tabernacle and sprinkles the oil seven times in front of the Veil that is in front of the Ark of the Covenant. The LORD’s presence hovers in the Shekinah Glory over the Mercy Seat on top of the Ark of the Covenant. It is the place that defines the phrase “before the LORD.” The same is done with the priests at their ordination.

(4) Oil on Right Ear Lobe, Thumb, Toe and Head (14:17-18).

But oil remains in the left palm of the priest’s hand. Out from the Holy Place, the priest returns to the leper standing in front of the Tent of Meeting door. Verse 17 tells us of the next part of the ceremony. *“Of the remaining oil which is in his palm, the priest shall put some on the right ear lobe of the one to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot, on the blood of the guilt offering; while the rest of the oil that is in the priest’s palm, he shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf before the LORD.”* (14:17-18).

Of the remaining oil, the priest places it, too, on the right ear, thumb, and toe of the leper, and the rest he put on the head of the leper. The blood and the oil sprinkled before the LORD in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle are for the leper’s atonement. As we have already discovered, the word *atonement* means the “reconciliation between God and a person or group of people.”¹⁸ The leper is reconciled before the LORD in the ceremony, and he is also reconciled to his family, his tribe, and his nation. How will that be done? Through a sin offering.

4. Second Male Lamb for Sin Offering (14:19a)

The atonement of the leper is made with the second lamb for a sin offering. Verse 19a. *“The priest shall next offer the sin offering and make atonement for the one to be cleansed from his uncleanness.”* (14:19a).

That is all the instruction for this second male lamb given by the LORD. It is a sin offering with no changes from the original instructions. The lamb slain, the blood rubbed on the Brazen Altar’s four horns, the fat offered on the Brazen Altar, and all the rest is burned outside the camp.

5. One Ewe Lamb for Burnt Offering and the Grain Offering (14:19b-20)

Following the sin offering is the burnt offering with a ewe lamb. The grain offering is included at this point. Verse 19b. *“Then afterward, he shall slaughter the burnt offering. The priest shall offer up the burnt offering and the grain offering on the altar. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he will be clean.”* (14:19b-20).

The two lambs were male, but an ewe is a female lamb. She was a burnt offering. No instructions are needed here. We know the recipe. She was slain, the blood sprinkled around the Brazen Altar. Every part of her was placed on the Brazen Altar except her hide. It was given to the priest.

¹⁸ Brockway, D. (2016). *Atonement*. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

The grain offering was the regular offering of about a pint of flour made from fine (perfect) seeds mixed with oil and incense – raw, fried griddled, pan-cooked, baked, roasted but with no honey or leaven. A handful was placed on the Brazen Altar, and the rest was given to the priest. Nothing new here.

6. Offering Substitute for the Poor (14:21-32)

a) Approved Items for the Substitute Offering (14:21-23)

The LORD, our God, is a gracious LORD Who provides for the needs of those in a relationship with Him. He understands when a person does not have the means to give an offering comparable to the masses. But the offering of the poor is just as important to the LORD as the offering of others. When a person goes through worldly diseases such as leprosy, He allows for a substitute offering for the poor. Verse 21. *“But if he is poor and his means are insufficient, then he is to take one male lamb for a guilt offering as a wave offering to make atonement for him, and one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, and a log of oil, and two turtledoves or two young pigeons which are within his means, the one shall be a sin offering and the other a burnt offering. Then the eighth day he shall bring them for his cleansing to the priest, at the doorway of the tent of meeting, before the LORD.”* (14:21-23).

The original offering for the leper's cleansing requires two male lambs and a female lamb with the grain offering and the log of oil. With this substitute offering, the LORD allows the change to be one male lamb, the grain offering, the log of oil, and two turtle doves or two young pigeons.

b) The Lamb and Oil Substitution (14:24-29)

The lamb, the oil, and the grain of this substitute guilt offering are handled in the same way as the three were handled in the original instructions. Verse 24. *“The priest shall take the lamb of the guilt offering and the log of oil, and the priest shall offer them for a wave offering before the LORD. Next he shall slaughter the lamb of the guilt offering; and the priest is to take some of the blood of the guilt offering and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. The priest shall also pour some of the oil into his left palm; and with his right-hand finger the priest shall sprinkle some of the oil that is in his left palm seven times before the LORD. The priest shall then put some of the oil that is in his palm on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot, on the place of the blood of the guilt offering. Moreover, the rest of the oil that is in the priest's palm he shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed, to make atonement on his behalf before the LORD.”* (14:24-29).

c) The Two Dove and Grain Substitution (14:30-32)

The LORD knows the means of a person to give to Him as an offering. In the Nation of Israel's camp, everyone can give at least one male lamb, a log of oil, a grain offering, and two doves. He says so as much in His instruction for the dove offerings and the grain. Verse 30. *“He shall then offer one of the turtledoves or young pigeons, which are within his means. He shall offer what he can afford, the one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering, together with the grain offering. So the priest shall make atonement before the LORD on behalf of the one to be cleansed. This is the law for him in whom there is an infection of leprosy, whose means are limited for his cleansing.”* (14:30-32).

The LORD said about the doves, *“...which are within his means. He shall offer what he can afford....”* No leper is without excuse. One dove is for a sin offering. One is for the burnt offering. And the grain offering is offered with the two. Nothing new here. A sin-offering as part of a guilt offering with a bird is the same as always. A burnt offering as part of a guilt offering of a bird is the same as always. The grain offering as part of the guilt offering is the same as always. We covered those in detail in chapter 5, verses 7-11. No need to cover those details here.

7. The Leprosy in the Promised Land (14:33-53)

a) In the House – Quarantine Seven Days

Just as the LORD threw a curve with the leprosy of garments, the LORD now addresses leprosy of a house. Just as garments do not possess flesh and blood to feed the leprosy, there is no flesh and blood in a mud-brick wall to feed the walls of a house. But the Israelites are not living in brick houses at the time of the giving of this law; they lived in tents. But the LORD is not giving this law for the time the Israelites are in the wilderness; it is for the time they are living in the Promised Land. Verse 33. *"The LORD further spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying: When you enter the land of Canaan, which I give you for a possession, and I put a mark of leprosy on a house in the land of your possession, then the one who owns the house shall come and tell the priest, saying, 'Something like a mark of leprosy has become visible to me in the house.' The priest shall then command that they empty the house before the priest goes in to look at the mark, so that everything in the house need not become unclean; and afterward the priest shall go in to look at the house. So he shall look at the mark, and if the mark on the walls of the house has greenish or reddish depressions and appears deeper than the surface, then the priest shall come out of the house, to the doorway, and quarantine the house for seven days."* (14:22-38).

The LORD begins with, *"When you enter the land of Canaan, which I give you for a possession...."* This instruction is not for the time in the wilderness; it is for their lives in the land of Canaan. The LORD, perfect in knowledge, looks ahead and prepares His nation for what they will encounter in the Promised Land.

Then the LORD says, *"...and I put a mark of leprosy on a house in the land of your possession...."* The mark of the diseases will be the LORD's doing. How can that be? He knows the ills of the house and its construction. He knows what has taken place in that house in years past. He knows, and He protects His own by placing a mark of disease on the house.

From there, the story is the same as with a disease on a human or a garment. It is time to employ the priest for his opinion. But the priest will not just run over and look. The house must be empty of all its furniture, fixtures, and people before he arrives. When the priest arrives, he looks for two signs, the same signs he looks for on the garment – greenish or reddish color and how deep it seems to be. Well, obviously, the house cannot be exiled out of the city for isolation, so the priest declares that the house must be shut up and quarantined for seven days. The priest's formula is always the same; if it has the signs, it is seven days.

Shutting a house for seven days is the best and the worst thing that can be done for any type of fungus to grow. It is the best thing because if it grows, the dark, damp, closed house will cause the fungus to grow exponentially. It is the worst thing because if you want to kill a fungus, the bright sun's UV lights with fresh air will kill the fungus. The LORD knew about UV lights long before we did. He invented them on the first day of creation. But the point of the LORD instruction here is to grow the disease, not to cure it.

b) Mark of Leprosy Spread House Renovated – Declared Unclean

On the seventh day, if the disease spreads, a renovation is required. Verse 39. *"The priest shall return on the seventh day and make an inspection. If the mark has indeed spread in the house walls, then the priest shall order them to tear out the stones with the mark in them and throw them away at an unclean place outside the city. He shall have the house scraped all around inside, and they shall dump the plaster that they scrape off at an unclean place outside the city. Then they shall take other stones and replace those stones, and he shall take other plaster and replaster the house."* (14:39-42).

No doubt this is a costly renovation for the unclean house. Ancient plasters have been found in Israel and examined. It consists of lime, sand, water, and most often, hair to bind it together. There it is. The hair of a man or beast used in the plaster is the protein source for the fungus' growth. Now

fungus is everywhere. It is in the air, our foods, in the soil, and the water. Not all fungi are detrimental. The things they need to grow are fungi-specific. However, all fungi need protein and nitrogen to grow. If the temperature is right and food is there, the fungus can double its mass every five hours.

The flooding waters of Tropical Storm Allison inundated the Houston area in 2001. The Corman family were members of my church, and their house was flooded. When the waters receded, the mother called to tell me she had fuzzy mold growing on her baseboards. I had teams tearing out sheetrock all over Southeast Houston, and I did not have a team to go to her house that day, so I went to look. Down near the floor was a green mold line ranging from a half-inch to an inch wide. I promised her a team would be out the next day. When the team arrived after lunch the following day, the green mold had grown up the walls, three-foot-high all around the house's inside walls. The simple, minor problem had grown into a major health problem in just twenty-four hours. Just think about what the Canaan Land family was facing after the home had been shut up for seven days. For the Corman's, the old gypsum sheetrock was removed. The paper on the sheetrock was an ample and sufficient source of protein for the fungus mold. The rooms were dried and treated. New sheetrock was hung. All was well until Hurricane Ike came, and the whole problem reoccurred again.

c) Second Breakout in House Tear Down House

That brings us to the next instruction of the LORD. After the renovation occurs, if the fungus breaks out again, the LORD has a new instruction. Tear down the house. Verse 43. *"If, however, the mark breaks out again in the house after he has torn out the stones and scraped the house, and after it has been replastered, then the priest shall come in and make an inspection. If he sees that the mark has indeed spread in the house, it is a malignant mark in the house; it is unclean. He shall therefore tear down the house, its stones, and its timbers, and all the plaster of the house, and he shall take them outside the city to an unclean place. Moreover, whoever goes into the house during the time that he has quarantined it, becomes unclean until evening. Likewise, whoever lies down in the house shall wash his clothes, and whoever eats in the house shall wash his clothes."* (14:43-47).

There are to be no second chances with diseases within the houses in the Promised Land. Tear down the house and dump it outside the city in an unclean place. Every bit of it. But do you also see the problem it is causing the workers laboring to tear down and dispose of it outside the city? They are becoming unclean each day they work on the house. Each day they must bathe in a culture where baths are not taken so often.

8. House with Mark Not Spread after the Renovation – Declare Clean

But suppose that the mark has not spread on the seventh day, the priest will declare the house clean. *"If, on the other hand, the priest comes in and makes an inspection and the mark has not indeed spread in the house after the house has been replastered, then the priest shall pronounce the house clean because the mark has not reappeared."* (14:48).

Because the house has been replastered, we know that the priest required the renovation. Because it seems in this instruction that inspection occurs once a week, every seventh day, and it is reasonable to assume that after the renovation is completed, the house waits for an inspection from the priest before it can be inhabited again - just like the guideline for the leper in quarantine. With no mark on the repair site, the house is declared clean. It is time for a ceremony.

a) Ceremony Two Birds, Cedar Wood, Scarlet String, and Hyssop

Back in verses 3 through 7 of this 14th chapter, we saw the clean leper's ceremony that occurred outside the camp. It involved two birds, cedarwood, scarlet string, and hyssop. Here we have a clean house, and it needs a ceremony too. Let us see how close the two ceremonies are alike. Verse 49. *"To cleanse the house then, he shall take two birds and cedarwood and a scarlet string and hyssop, and he shall*

slaughter the one bird in an earthenware vessel over running water. Then he shall take the cedarwood and the hyssop and the scarlet string, with the live bird, and dip them in the blood of the slain bird as well as in the running water, and sprinkle the house seven times. He shall thus cleanse the house with the blood of the bird and with the running water, along with the live bird and with the cedarwood and with the hyssop and with the scarlet string. However, he shall let the live bird go free outside the city into the open field. So he shall make atonement for the house, and it will be clean." (14:49-53).

The ceremony is the same for the healed leper as it is for the house. Two birds are offered. One slain over a pot with running water. The cedarwood, scarlet string, hyssop, and the second live bird, are dipped in the bloody water. The bloody water is sprinkled seven times in the house, and the live bird is released outside the city in the field. The house is ceremonially clean.

Much has been made about the living bird, cedar, red string, and hyssop. Whether the red string is used to tie them all together for the dipping, we do not know. Some commentators delve into the cedar's antiseptic nature and the symbol of the red, but that is all speculation, and we will not delve into it, for nothing is said about it in the Word of God. We will just leave it as it is, items used in the ceremony of a house's cleanings in the Promised Land.

B. The Law of Leprosy Conclusion (14:54-57)

And in conclusion, the LORD states a summary of the law and its purpose. Verse 54. "*This is the law for any mark of leprosy—even for a scale, and for the leprous garment or house, and for a swelling, and for a scab, and for a bright spot—to teach when they are unclean and when they are clean. This is the law of leprosy.*" (14:54-57).

Whatever the leprous disease is on a human's body, the fabric of a garment, or the walls of a house, all leprous diseases of any kind must be handled by the priest in the orderly prescription of this law for any mark of leprosy.