

## Parashah Eighty-Four

Leviticus 13:29–59; 2Kings 5:1–19; Luke 5:12–15

notes by Tim Hegg

### *Sickness as an Analogy of Spiritual Death*

We continue this Shabbat with the section *Tazria* in which is contained the Laws of *Tzara'at* or skin disorders and corresponding apparent growths on garments and leather items. As noted in the previous *parashah*, this may or may not refer specifically to what is commonly known as “leprosy” (Hansen’s disease) and, in fact, leading scholars contend that this disease did not exist in the Ancient Near East until Alexander’s troops brought it there from India. Regardless of the exact diagnosis of the diseases outlined here, there are a number of obvious lessons we can learn from this passage, if we are allowed to make spiritual application relative to *tzara'at* as illustrative of how sin infects the soul.

#### **1. Disease is usually contagious and therefore for the good of the whole, the infected person is quarantined.**

The Scriptures have much to say about the affect of sin, and that it is contagious in nature. The Psalmist warns in the opening Psalm of the Psalter that the person who is blessed of God keeps himself from close association with those who are evil, i.e., those who willingly live outside of the righteous standards of God. They are characterized as “ungodly” (רְשָׁעִים), as “sinners” (חַטָּאִים), and as “scornful” (לְצַיִם). The reason that the person blessed of God keeps himself from entangled relationships with these kinds of people is because he knows that such relationships with them will have its affect in drawing him away from God and toward their sin. In contrast, the blessed one delights in God’s word (Torah) and makes it his focus of life (meditates in it day and night).

Throughout the Wisdom literature of the Tanach, we are warned that the company we keep will indeed have an affect upon us, whether for good or evil. Paul makes this explicit when he writes (1 Co 15:33): “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals.’” Surely this is what James is speaking of when he writes that: “This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (James 1:27). We understand what it is to visit orphans and widows in their distress, but why does James use the language “keep oneself unstained by the world?” The Greek term ἀσπιλος (*aspilos*) translated “unstained” can also mean “without spot” (cf. Eph 5:27). One becomes stained through close contact with the staining agent. Keeping oneself unstained from the world can only be done by keeping one’s heart from becoming entangled with the things of the world. John teaches us, “Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). Loving the world means becoming infected with the disease of its pleasures—becoming entrapped by that which feeds the evil inclinations of our flesh. Loving the world means spending our time, resources, and energies on things that are contrary to God and His kingdom. So the first lesson we might learn from considering this passage today is that sin, like contagious diseases, spreads through contact. In the spiritual realm, it spreads through the knitting together of lives. Remember: those we spend the most time with will inevitably affect us.

## 2. The priest is the one who judges whether or not we are sick.

It is interesting, I think, that the person to whom an infected individual comes is not the elder or statesman, not the king or prophet, but the priest. Why? Why would HaShem give us this picture unless He intended for us to derive something in terms of a spiritual lesson? It seems to me quite obvious that if the disease and the way it is handled within the community is to be a picture of spiritual disease and its cure, then the fact that the priest is the one who examines and makes a determination is significant.

It is significant because often we are sick and don't realize it or refuse to accept what we know to be true. The priest, who stands with back to the people and face to God, is the one who effects restored relationship between the sinner and HaShem. He does this through ceremonies of sacrifice, making atonement for sin and reconciling the sinner to God. The sickness, representing a form of death and therefore of that which is absolutely contrary to the God of the living, separates the individual from his God, and renders him unable to worship corporately. The only remedy to this separation is the cure of the disease, and a *mikvah* (washing) to symbolize the removal of the disease. From a spiritual standpoint, such a cure can come only through the office of the priest—the work he does in the realm of atonement and reconciliation.

Let us never be fooled into thinking that somehow we are able to cure ourselves of the sickness of sin. The sickness of soul that we carry is a sickness unto death, and the only remedy for it is the atoning work of the Messiah. Apart from His high priestly work of atonement and intercession, we have no path of reconciliation to HaShem. We may pretend that we can make ourselves well, and even come to convince ourselves that our own cure is effective, but when we stand one day before the High Priest and He looks at the spots upon us, if we have not been made whole by His work, He will pronounce us contaminated and we will be cast out of His presence as one who is unclean.

We may also venture to make a practical application in terms of how we deal with sin here and now. Once again, the principle that someone else must examine us in regard to our sickness may be a fitting illustration of the necessity of community. The deceitfulness of sin is such that the one affected by it does not recognize its symptoms. This is why we must listen to each other and be willing to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, allowing our lives to be scrutinized by His word. As we lovingly apply the word to our lives and exhort each other to conform to the standards given by the Lord, we are able to make an accurate diagnosis of our soul sickness and find the way for cleansing.

## 3. Not only must we admit that we have the sickness, we must accept the only cure available—God's miraculous healing.

The Haftarah passage, the story of Naaman, is full of lessons for us to learn. One which is obvious is simply that sickness is no respecter of persons, nor is God's cure. Naaman is an important individual, as the text makes clear, but he had been struck with *tzara'at*. Whether this was leprosy as we have come to know it, or some other skin disease, its attachment to him was no doubt bothersome but also the cause of defilement, rendering him unfit for the duties he was privileged to do. The disease attacks pauper and king alike—it knows no difference.

In the same way, the cure is alike for all. Here we find that faith and humility go hand in hand, for faith, in one sense, is a full admission on the part of the sinner that he or she is unable to ef-

fect his or her own healing. This is humbling, especially to someone with the power and authority of Naaman. The prophet's prescription is not some magical ceremony, but rather an exercise in humility. Naaman could think of a number of better suited prescriptions, but the prophet will not hear of it! Naaman must humble himself and submit himself to God's ways in order to receive the healing that God alone offers.

The same is true of us: we must humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God if we are to receive His forgiveness. How difficult this is for the prideful and stubborn heart of man! But this is the very essence of faith—coming to the end of oneself and recognizing that it is all up to God. Here is the point at which the soul is willing to rest in God, and apart from this rest, there is no healing.

#### **4. Healing produces a heart of thanksgiving.**

In our Apostolic section Yeshua heals a man with *tzara'at*. He touches him (which would normally make Him unclean) and reverses the normal "flow" of uncleanness by making the man clean with His touch. Here we have, once again, the symbolic reality of the picture of sickness—the touch of the Savior is the cure! But note what Yeshua commands the man to do: he must follow the Torah and give an offering for his cleansing. Nothing is more sure in the realm of cause and effect than that the heart truly made free from the disease of sin will gladly bring an offering to the God who delivered!

Here we have the reversal of the man-centered gospel so much in vogue in our day, a gospel which teaches that salvation is primarily for us rather than for God's glory. We have not been healed (primarily) so that we can be free from the pain of the disease. Oh, most certainly, our healing brings great joy and peace to our souls, and freedom from the pain of the sickness which dominating sin brings. But we have rather been healed so that we might be and do what God intended for us from the beginning. We are to be His chosen people, and do His will, thus shining as lights of His glory and sanctifying His name upon the earth as it is in heaven. We have been saved for the glory of His grace primarily, and the heart that has been so affected will inevitably offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. This, in fact, will be one of the many proofs of a life made clean—set free from the bondage of sin.