

*STUDIES IN THE*  
**ATONEMENT**

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*the* **RED HEIFER**

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*the* **BRONZE  
SERPENT**

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**LEPROSY**

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*"We joy in God through Christ Jesus our Lord through  
whom we have received the atonement." (Rom . 5:11)*

# the RED HEIFER

## Introduction

Of all the sacrifices offered under the Law of Moses, there was none quite like the Red Heifer. In its limitations and parallels, the Red Heifer provides valuable insights into the redemption which God has provided in Christ Jesus. A study of the Red Heifer inevitably leads to a greater appreciation of the words of the Apostle Paul:

"The law is holy and the commandment holy, and just, and good...  
the law is spiritual." (Rom.7:12,14).

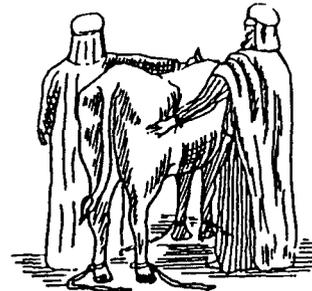
It may at first be thought that since the Law was only a 'custodian until Christ should come', that the Bible student could spend his precious study time on the N.T., not the Mosaic Law. A legion of older Christadelphians, however, could testify to the wealth of information gleaned from a study of the Mosaic Law, and the way in which the N.T. exposition and exhortation bristle with new meaning once a 'feel' is acquired for the Law of Moses.

All is not explained in the N.T. For the novice student perhaps, the tendency is to become overly wise - manufacturing types and parallels which are so subjective as to carry little weight in open discussion or in private reflection. The Red Heifer for all its uniqueness, contains much content for which the explanations are well-worn. Certain explanations, those provided in other Scripture, must be differentiated from those which are probable or possible.

**It was God Himself who chose to portray aspects of His great work of redemption through the Red Heifer.** It remains for the student of His Word to humbly and respectfully attempt to understand this instruction. Such an undertaking is seldom without its exhortational import. The writer to the Hebrews made this apparent:

"For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God."  
(Heb.9:13,14. R.S.V.)

It is the intention of these notes to assist the student in his analysis of the Red Heifer. May the result be deeper appreciation of the great doctrine of reconciliation. For indeed "we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." (Rom.5:11).



Rod Ghent and Ron Abel  
Toronto, Canada, 1973.

## Attitude and the Atonement

1. [REDACTED]

(This unbiblical view also distorts the worth of regenerate man when such problems are considered as those who perish without the knowledge of the Gospel. Attitudes to abortion and capital punishment are likewise formulated in part by religionists on a faulty view of man's relationship to God.)

2. If Jesus is believed to have come into the world under no condemnation whatever, then his death did not declare the righteousness of God. The innocent had died for the guilty. Nor would such a view give due importance to the virgin birth. The virgin birth enabled God to provide a man "strong for himself", who could condemn sin in the flesh. But if the Son of Man did not labour under all the infirmities of human nature, then there was no need for the virgin birth to give him the needed capabilities to overcome.

## THE RED HEIFER

### Background: The Law of Uncleaness

There were three conditions, each of which required a man to leave the camp of Israel (about 9 miles across when they camped), and live separated from his relations and the Tabernacle rituals. They were:

1. Leprosy,
2. Issues - discharges from the body - i.e. an hæmorrhage or running sore - related basically to the reproductive organs,
3. Contact with a dead body.

(The three forms of uncleanness are listed together in Num.5:1-4.)

The instructions regarding these forms of defilement were very explicit:

"Command the children of Israel, that they put out of the camp every leper, and every one that hath an issue, and whosoever is defiled by the dead: Both male and female shall ye put out, without the camp shall ye put them; that they defile not their camps, in the midst whereof I dwell." (Num.5:2-3).

These laws would be very disruptive of family, social and religious life. The ritual of washing clothes and bathing would seem endless in the case of the herdsman who accidentally and purposefully touched a dead animal in the slaughtering process. Yet even in the wilderness wanderings, when often water could not easily be obtained, the ritual was mandatory. Failure to comply resulted in ostracism from the congregation and death. Note the instruction:

"But the man that shall be unclean, and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation, because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the LORD: the water of separation hath not been sprinkled upon him; he is unclean." (Num.19:20).

There was no allowance made for the forgetful or arrogant Israelites who did not comply with the demands of the Law. It is in this very point that the Law illustrated the weakness of the nature of man - it taught him his exceeding sinfulness.

The leper with leprosy in his forehead was required to cover his upper lip and cry out, "Unclean, unclean", as a warning to all who approached. The reason for the severity with which God regarded these three kinds of defilement was not simply medical, i.e., the fear of others contracting disease. So rigid were the laws regarding death, that even an open vessel in a tent where a man died was unclean, defiled. The reason for the severity of the regulations is seen in the fact that leprosy, issues and death all taught the divine abhorrence of sin, and its effect, death. It was for this reason that a man with any of these defilements was ostracised from the camp of Israel in which the holiness and righteousness of Yahweh were manifested in the sanctuary.

There are incidents in the life of the Master which blossom with meaning once the Laws of Uncleaness are understood. Consider the following:

1. Matt.18:1-4 - **The leper** - Jesus "put forth his hand and touched him". Why do you think that it is recorded specifically that Jesus touched the leper? In what position did such an act place Jesus in relation to the Mosaic Law? Imagine the astonishment of the priest when presented with a cleansed leper? There is obviously great point to the words of Jesus: "Go...shew thyself to the priest...for a testimony unto them." (Matt.8:4).

2. Matt.9:20-22 - **The woman with an issue of blood** - For twelve years the woman had suffered discomfort and separation from the Temple worship because of this issue. Matthew carefully recorded that the woman "touched the hem of his garment". What position did this place Jesus in regard to the Mosaic Law?

3. Matt.9:23-25 - **The dead maid** - Again the inspired narrative recounts "he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose." Ceremonial defilement was technically contracted by Jesus through his deliberate contact with the dead.

### The Significance of the Red Heifer

**The significance of the sacrifice** - The red heifer was a sacrifice designed to remove defilement through contact with human death. It is significant that the children of Israel had suffered the death of 14,700 rebellious Israelites by a plague (Num.16:49). Under hot desert conditions, the bodies would require immediate burial in graves. It was at this time that God gave the instructions to Moses and Aaron regarding the red heifer. The significance of the red heifer to cleanse from the defilement of death, came at a most impressive time. The connection between sin and death could hardly be more apparent.

**The uniqueness of the sacrifice** - In all of the sacrifices prescribed by the Mosaic Law, there was none quite like the red heifer. Note the following:

1. It is not listed with the other offerings in Leviticus or Exodus, but in the book of Numbers.

2. It was a special sin offering. A sin offering was for a sin - i.e., a transgression had been committed. It was offered for contact with the dead whether purposeful or accidental.

3. It was a sin offering,\* but it was not offered in the same way as the other sin offerings. The animal was slaughtered outside the camp, and the blood and the skin and the dung were all burned outside the camp. In the other sin offerings (e.g., Lev.4), the animal was slain inside the camp, the blood poured out at the base of the altar, and then the carcass was removed and burned outside the camp.

4. It was the only sacrifice which could be used more than once, its ashes were used repeatedly until depleted.

5. It is the only offering in which the ashes were used.

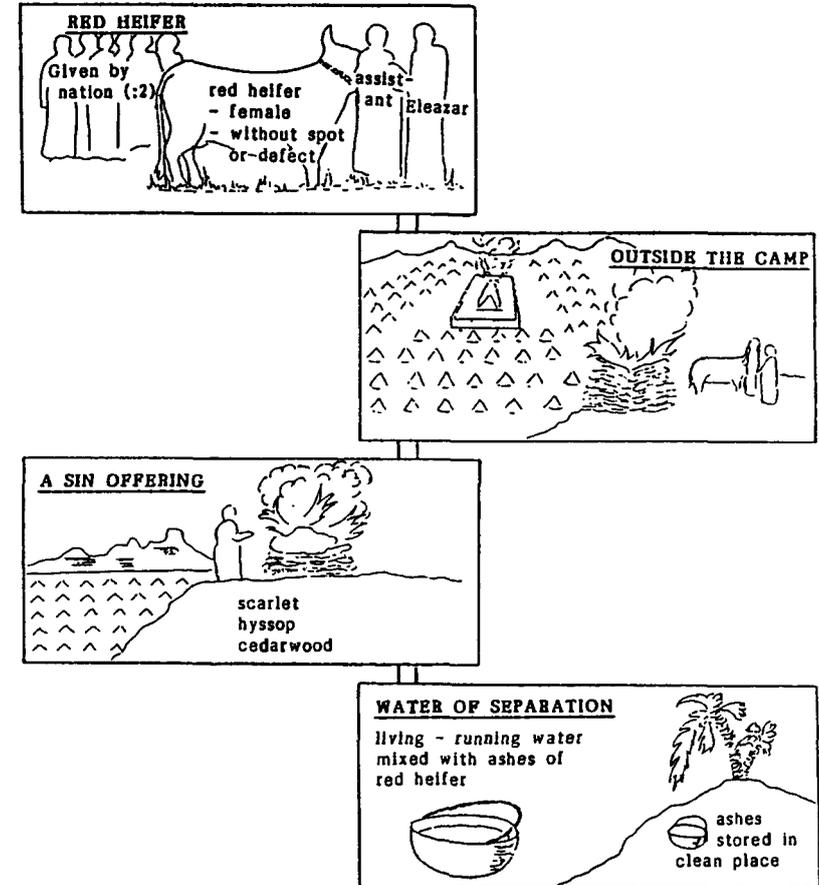
6. The offering was performed either by Eleazar, the high priest elect, or under his supervision. The instructions were given to Moses and Aaron, (19:1), but it was not offered by them.

7. It was the only offering which could remove defilement caused by death.

What an intriguing study is the Red Heifer!

\* This is proven by: a) The blood of the heifer was sprinkled towards the door of the tent (19:4, R.S.V.). Although other hebrew words for 'sprinkle' could have been used, the hebrew word which is used here is the word used exclusively for the sin offering. b) The hebrew word 'saraph' is the word used for the total destruction of the sin offering. It is not the hebrew word 'qatar' used for the sweet smell of the burnt offering. c) It is called a 'sin offering', Num.19:17, R.S.V.

### THE RED HEIFER (Num.19)



### CLEANSING FROM DEFILEMENT BY DEATH

#### Details of the Offering

The above diagram is intended to help you to remember the sequence of the chapter. By way of review the following points are listed:

1. The instructions regarding the red heifer were given immediately after the plague in which 14,700 Israelites died. The association between sin and death was apparent.
2. The ritual order was given by God to Moses and Aaron (it was not unique in this feature, but this fact adds to the importance of the instruction), but neither Moses nor Aaron had anything to do with the offering (19:1).
3. The nation was to bring the heifer, therefore it was a national offering (19:2).
4. The animal was to be a female - a heifer (19:2).

5. The heifer was to be red (ruddy), without defect or blemish (19:2).
  6. The animal must never have been yoked - i.e., to work for man (19:2).
  7. The heifer was given to Eleazar the priest.
  8. The heifer was taken outside the encampment of Israel and slaughtered (its throat was slit) either by Eleazar or his assistant. (19:3).
- (It cannot be determined conclusively from the Hebrew whether Eleazar or his assistant actually performed the slaughtering. The R.S.V. implies the latter in its translation.)
9. Eleazar took some of the blood and with his finger sprinkled (Heb. 'nazah' used exclusively for the sin offering) some of the blood toward the door of the Tabernacle.
- (Can you deduce from this instruction, the direction from the Tabernacle in which the heifer was taken to be slaughtered?)
10. The blood was sprinkled seven times (19:4).
  11. Under Eleazar's watchful eye, the animal was totally burned - the skin, flesh, blood and dung (19:5).
  12. While the heifer was burning, Eleazar threw into the midst of the burning heifer, three things: cedarwood, hyssop and scarlet (19:6).
  13. The priest - Eleazar - was defiled, and therefore was required to:
    - i. wash his clothes, ii. bathe his body in water.
 After performing these rituals, he was declared clean at evening (the beginning of the next day), and could return to the camp (19:7).
  14. The priestly assistant to Eleazar was defiled (19:8).
  15. A third person, ceremonially clean, was to gather up the ashes of the heifer, and deposit them in a clean place outside the camp. (i.e., not a place where human refuse, dead animals, etc. were deposited or where lepers or persons with issues lived.)
  16. The ashes were to be stored until required by those defiled by death. The ashes were then mixed with the "water of impurity" when required.
  17. The ashes when mixed with the water of impurity were for the "removal of sin" (19:9, R.S.V.).
  18. The third man was ceremonially defiled in handling the ashes, and was required to wash his clothes. He was regarded as unclean until the evening (19:10).
  19. The instructions were a "perpetual statute" (R.S.V.) both for the native born Israelite, and for the strangers who dwelt among them (19:10).

### The Purification Procedure

There was a progression in the extent of defilement. The defilement was more extensive if the contact with the dead was made on purpose, rather than accidentally. [The laws regarding dead animals occur in Lev.11, and the same principle is illustrated. If a man touched a dead animal, he was unclean until the evening. If his contact was purposeful, i.e., if he carried the animal, he was required to wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening (Lev.11:24-25). The ritual to remove the defilement was more extensive if the contact with the dead was purposeful.]

Note the extent of defilement and the purification procedure:

1. If a dead body was touched:
  - unclean seven days,
  - cleanse himself with the water of impurity (or separation) on the 3rd day,

he was clean the 7th day (19:11-12).

[A priest was forbidden to defile himself for the dead (by touching or coming close to a body) except for a very close relative (Lev.21:1-4). The high priest, however, was forbidden to go in to any dead body, "nor defile himself even for his father or mother" (Lev.21:11).]

2. If a tent was entered in which there was a dead body:
  - unclean seven days,
  - every open vessel (i.e., uncovered) was unclean (19:14-15).
3. If a body, bone or grave be touched in the open field (e.g., in battle):
  - unclean seven days,
  - a clean person would take ashes of the red heifer and running water in a vessel,
  - hyssop (used as a sponge) would be used to sprinkle it on the tent, its furnishings and the person who contacted the dead, on both the 3rd and the 7th days,
  - on the 7th day, the defiled person must wash his clothes and bathe, at evening, he was regarded as clean (19:16-19).
4. The person who sprinkled the 'water of impurity':
  - wash his clothes, be unclean until evening (19:21).
5. The person who touched the 'water of impurity':
  - unclean until evening (19:21).
6. Anything the unclean person touched, or anyone who touched the 'water of impurity':
  - unclean until evening (19:22).

### Numbers ch.19

#### Chapter breakdown

- v.1-10 Instructions regarding the red heifer offering,
- v.11-13 Cleansing ritual for the defiled - no exceptions allowed,
- v.14-19 The water of separation - a 3rd and 7th day cleansing,
- v.20-22 The extensive nature of the defilement.

**Verse 1** "And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying," - Although the instructions were given to Moses and Aaron, the ritual of the red heifer was not performed by them. The high priest, Aaron, was forbidden to have any contact with the dead (Lev.21:11). The fact that the instruction was given to them both suggests the importance of what was to follow. [The two were given instructions by God, however, in other places beside this, e.g., Num.2:1.]

**Verse 2** "This [is] the ordinance of the law" - 'Ordinance', Heb. 'chuqqah' meaning 'statute' or 'decree' (Yg).

"Speak unto the children of Israel," - 'Speak', Heb. 'dabar' is 'tell' (R.S.V.). The instructions were public, since they related to the whole nation - native born Israelites as well as sojourning strangers (v.10). Any who had touched the dead or came near a dead body, were required to follow the ritual of the red heifer.

"that they bring thee a red heifer" - The offering was a national one. The animal was to be taken by representatives of the people and given to the priest (cf. v.3). Death was universal, therefore all the nation was required to understand the principles operating through the rituals of the red heifer, which related to the removal of the defilement of death. The whole nation was potentially related to death.

'Red', heb. 'adom', 'red' or 'ruddy' (Yg). There is difficulty in knowing for certain as to whether 'adom' means red as a colour, or ruddy as wholesome or healthy. The following evidence supports the view that a healthy animal rather than a red coloured animal is intended:

a) The hebrew word for 'reddish, very red' is 'adamdam' (Lev.13:19). 'Adam' is the usual hebrew word for 'red'.

[Against this point, note that 'adom' is used for 'red' horses in Zech., where the colour is clearly the distinction from horses speckled and white (1:8), and black, white and dappled grey (6:2).]

b) The scarlet - a crimson coloured dye unquestionably signified sin (Isa.1:18, "though your sins be as scarlet...red like crimson..."). Therefore, this aspect of the offering was signified by the ingredient scarlet, which was thrown into the midst of the burning heifer (v.8).

"**heifer**" - The stress is on the fact that it was a female offering. Nearly all the offerings were males. Female offerings were only used in the sin offering for a commoner's sin of ignorance (Lev.4:27-28), and for an unsolved murder (Deut.21:3). It was fitting that a female heifer and not a male bullock portray the transmission of death-stricken humans, through the woman in her child-bearing. Christ was "made of a woman" (Gal.4:4). This fact is a point of stress in the N.T. epistles. [The female offerings were all associated with sins of ignorance and inadvertence (e.g., the trespass offering, Lev.4:27-28). Similarly, Christ was the subject of 'passive defilement' - he did no sin - 'the prince of this world' had nothing in him.]

"**without spot,**" - Heb. 'tamim', 'perfect, whole, complete, plain' (Yg); 'without defect', R.S.V.

"**blemish**" - The physical perfection of the offering did not depict a physically perfect Saviour. As an offering, Christ's "appearance was so marred" that it was "beyond human semblance" (Isa.52:14, R.S.V.). He possessed a nature that could experience tiredness, hunger and the pull of desires which could have led him to sin (cf. Matt.26:41-42; Heb.2:18). Rather the physically unblemished offering depicted the moral perfection of the Saviour. In this respect, he was a "lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet.1:19).

"**[and] upon which never came yoke:**" - 'Yoke', heb. 'ol', 'a yoke, a curved piece of wood fastened to the pole or beam, laid upon the neck of beasts for drawing, Num.19:2; Deut.21:3. Mostly used figuratively of servitude, 1 Sam.8:7; 1 Ki.12:11; Isa.9:4; of calamity, Lam.3:27." (Ges). The yoke was an enforced discipline, e.g., Gen.27:40; Lev.26:13, used by man to harness the power of a beast to perform useful work. The offering could not be a heifer 'broken in' by man, chafed or in any way spoiled. (Similar instructions were given regarding the heifer sacrificed for an unsolved murder, Deut.21:3). Many different interpretations have been given in an attempt to see the way in which the clause "upon which never came yoke" could apply to the work of Christ. Among the interpretations are the following:

a) There was no yoke of transgression upon Christ. Yoke is used in this sense in Lam.1:14. (See C.C.Walker, The Water of Separation, 'Witness for Christ' p.190, The Christadelphian, Birmingham).

b) Christ did not require a 'yoke' to perform his Father's work. He was totally dedicated to what, even at twelve years he termed "my father's business". (R.Roberts, 'The Law of Moses', p.267, 2nd ed., The Christadelphian).

**Verse 3** "And ye shall give her unto Eleazar the priest," - 'Eleazar', 'God is helper' (Yg). He was appointed chief over the Levites (Num.3:32, 4:16). His dress was different from the High Priest as the diagrams on the next two pages indicate. Why was the ritual regarding the red heifer performed by Eleazar rather than by Aaron the high priest? The high priest would then have been contaminated by the offering of the red heifer, as was Eleazar (v.7), and unable to perform his daily work in the Tabernacle.

"**that he may bring her forth without the camp,**" - When the Tabernacle was erected at camping locations in the wilderness, the children of Israel would pitch their tents 'afar off'. The congregation numbered over 1,000,000 when they left Egypt. Such a large number accompanied by tents and cattle would result in an encampment about 3 miles across. Eleazar and his priestly assistant, and no doubt many onlookers representing the people, would walk to a clear place outside the camp of Israel to perform the offering. There was a set pattern to the encampment as they travelled by tribes and family houses (Num.1:52, 2:2). The encampment was always foursquare and probably looked something like the plan on page 10. The expression "without the camp" has particular significance in the epistle to the Hebrews.

"For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned without the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp, bearing abuse for him. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come." (Heb.13:11-14, R.S.V.)

The allusion in this passage is to the sin offering burnt outside the camp on the Day of Atonement (Lev.16:27). Likewise Christ suffered and died without the camp - Jerusalem. In the epistle to the Hebrews, "outside the camp" means not only outside the walls of Jerusalem (where Christ was crucified), but outside the scope of the Law of Moses. A Christian Jew could no longer find fellowship within Judaism. Fellowship rested with God through the atoning work of Christ outside Judaism and the Law of Moses. [See John Carter, 'The Letter to the Hebrews', p.282-286, The Christadelphian. Also John Martin, 'Hebrews' p.144-146, C.S.S.S., South Australia.]

This very point was illustrated in the sin offering. Consider the following:

1. The priests who offered the sin offering could not eat of the sacrifice.
2. Since the animal was not burned on the altar, it was foreshadowing the death of the One represented, who would likewise be outside the Mosaic ceremonial system, outside the camp. Identification with Jesus as the sin offering meant leaving Judaism (for 1st century believers) and following him outside the camp - sharing the Jewish reproach which Jesus suffered.

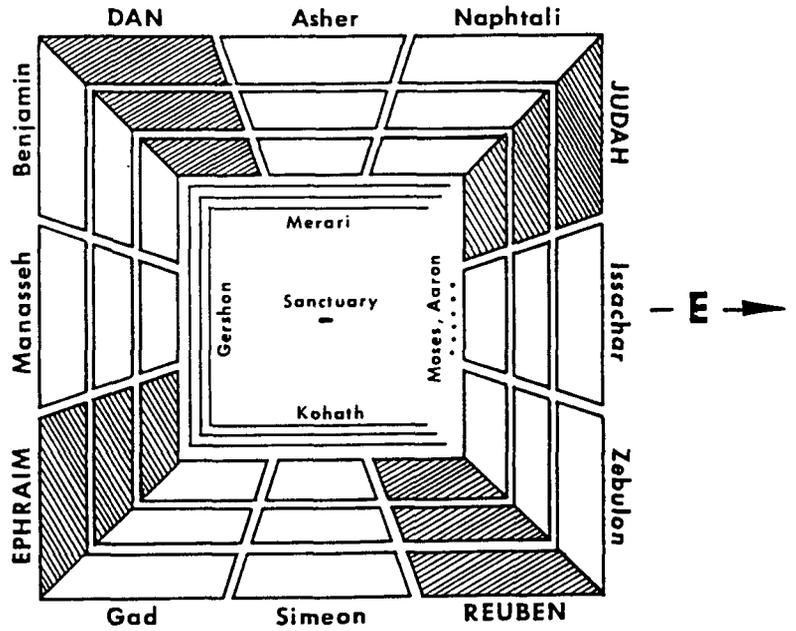
"**and [one] shall slay her before before his face:**" - The word 'one' is inserted by the translators. It cannot be definitely understood from the hebrew construction of this verse, whether it was Eleazar who slaughtered the animal or an assistant. The R.S.V. translates this verse "and she shall be taken outside the camp and slaughtered before him." (Some have seen a parallel between the assistant and the Roman crucifixion of Christ. Christ was slain by the 'Romans as the instruments of the Jews.' See R.Roberts, 'The Law of Moses', p.267). It was a pattern in the Law, that animals, whose blood was connected with the inner sanctuary, could not be eaten. Their bodies were to be destroyed outside the camp (Lev.6:30). To eat the flesh would indicate fellowship (cf. 1 Cor.9:13, 10:18) with that which must be destroyed.

(continued on P.13)



**THE PRIESTLY GARMENTS**

(Eleazar's robes before he became high priest)



**PLAN of the  
FOURSQUARE  
ENCAMPMENT**

**Exodus chs. 28 & 29**

- 
1. Turban of fine linen - 28:39
  2. Holy crown of pure gold, and inscribed with the words, "Holiness to Yahweh" - 28:36. It was fastened to the turban by a lace of blue - 29:6
  3. Two shoulder pieces on which were fastened the gold settings for the two onyx stones - 28:7,9-12
  4. Opening for head in the robe of the ephod made with a woven band so that it could not be torn - 28:32
  5. Two chains of gold shaped like twisted cords - 28:14
  6. Lace of blue bound breast-needle-work of gold, blue, plate to girdle - 28:28
  7. Ephod girdle made of same materials as the ephod - 28:8
  8. The robe of the ephod - 28:31
  9. The skirt of the robe - 28:33
  10. Pomegranates of purple, blue and gold - 28:33, alternating bells of gold - 28:34
  11. Inner robe of pure linen
  12. Two onyx stones on which were engraven the names of the twelve tribes - six on each stone in order of birth. The stones were set in gold - 28:10-12
  13. Golden chains suspended breastplate from buckles - fastened to rings of gold on buckles and breastplate - 28:14
  14. Ephod - a vest-like garment made of gold, blue, purple and scarlet material carefully worked into linen - 28:6
  15. Breastplate of Judgment - square-shaped when doubled with fine needlework of gold, blue, purple and scarlet on linen. It contained gold settings for twelve precious stones on which were engraven the names of the twelve tribes - 28:17-21

**The GARMENTS of the HIGH PRIEST**

"For Glory and for Beauty", Exo.28:2

The work of Eleazar foreshadowed the work of Christ. Note the suggested parallels below:

ELEAZAR	CHRIST
1. From 'El' = power, 'eazar' = succourer, helper.	God manifested in the flesh, hence power, the El-gibbor, the mighty God (Isa.9:6); the man "whom thou madest strong for thyself." (Psa.80:17). He is a helper: "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." (Heb.2:18). "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb.4:15-16. R.S.V.)
2. "Chief over the chief of the Levites" (Num.3:32).	Christ - 'anointed above his fellows' (Heb.1:9) - he is "the head of the ecclesia...that in all things he might have the preeminence." (Col.1:18). "God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow." (Phil.2:9-10).
3. "Oversight of them that keep the charge of the sanctuary" (Num.3:32).	Christ - "he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks [i.e., the ecclesias]" (Rev.2:1). "I know thy works" (Rev.2:1). "Lord of both the dead and the living" (Rom.14:9).
4. Performed the ritual of the red heifer although he was not the high priest.	Christ performed his redemptive work in the days of his flesh, and not when he was made High Priest.
5. Eleazar cared for the following: a) the oil for the light, b) the sweet incense (Num.4:16), c) the daily cereal (meal) offering, d) the anointing oil, e) the vessels and utensils of the sanctuary.	- Christ, the light of the world (Jn.8:12) - He offered up prayers, Heb.5:7 (cf. Rev.5:8, for association of prayers and incense). "I am the bread of life" (Jn.6:48). "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 10:38).

**Verse 4** "And Eleazar the priest shall take of her blood with his finger, and sprinkle of her blood" - 'Sprinkle', heb. 'nazah', is used exclusively for the sin offering (e.g., Lev.4:3,6). This proves that the red heifer was a sin offering.

"directly before the tabernacle of the congregation" - 'Tabernacle', heb. 'chel', tent (Yg); 'the tent of meeting', R.S.V. The fact that the blood was sprinkled toward the door of the Tabernacle implies that the red heifer was slaughtered on the east side of the Tabernacle, since this was the direction in which the door faced (cf. Exo.27:13-16).

The blood was sprinkled toward the sanctuary indicating that the offering was related to the Most Holy Place, although slain outside the camp. This ritual had a parallel in the death of Christ. Although he was slain outside the camp, he nevertheless was related to the Most Holy Place, since "he entered once for all into the Holy Place" (Heb.9:12, R.S.V.). He "entered...into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God [for us]." (Heb.9:24). This fact therefore, was foreshadowed by the blood of the red heifer being sprinkled toward the door of the tent.

There were only two other sacrifices whose blood was related to the inner sanctuary:

1. the goat on the Day of Atonement (Lev.16:15).
2. the bullock of the sin offering on the Day of Atonement (Lev.4:6, 16:14).

"seven times" - Seven in Scripture is associated with perfection, completion (e.g., Gen.2:2). The blood sprinkled seven times indicated that the red heifer sacrifice, the sin offering of God's beloved Son, would offer "one sacrifice for sins for ever" (Heb.10:12). It is for this reason that "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." (Heb.10:26-27).

**Verse 5** "And [one] shall burn the heifer in his sight;" - 'Burn', heb. 'saraph', 'to burn, heat' (Yg). The word 'saraph' is used for the destruction of the sin offering (Lev.4:21, 8:17). The word for the burnt offering is 'qatar', 'to cause to burn as incense' (Yg), (e.g., Lev.6:12).

"her skin, and her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall he burn:" - The blood and dung were also burned - further emphasis that the sacrifice was a sin offering. The ritual regarding the sin offering required the skin of the animal to be given to the priest, the carcass washed inside and out, and the blood poured out at the base of the altar (Lev.4:7-12). Such however, was not the case with the red heifer. Why? The reason becomes obvious once it is remembered that the red heifer was slaughtered outside the camp. The body of the heifer, therefore, must represent the body of sin. Note the following N.T. references which show parallels between Christ's 'body of sin' and the burning of the red heifer:

- Jn.6:63 - "The flesh profiteth nothing."
- Rom.6:6 - "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him (Christ), that the body of sin might be destroyed..."
- Gal.5:24 - "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."
- 2 Cor.5:21 - "...[God] hath made him [to be] sin for us, who knew no sin."

('Sin' in this passage = sin-prone nature. God made him 'sin' when, born of a woman, he partook of the full effects of Adam's transgression. by a figure of speech, metonymy, the effect 'sin' is placed for the cause, 'sin-prone

nature'. For an elaboration of this point see '2 Corinthians', p.75-81, R.Abel, C.S.S.S.)

**Verse 6** "And the priest shall take cedar wood," - 'Cedar wood', heb. 'erez', "cedar (so called from its firmness)", (Yg). The cedar wood was closely grained. It contained a sap which was resistant to borers and termites. It is a very stable timber which warps very little and therefore is a fitting symbol for freedom from corruption. (Cedar wood has also been interpreted to refer to "the sweet smelling savour or righteousness." R.Roberts, 'The Law of Moses', p.268,)

"and hyssop," - A small plant which could even grow out of a wall (1 Ki.4:33). It was refreshing when chewed by weary travellers. Since it grew in wilderness terrain, it could sustain life for a short time. (It had absorbent hairs which made it useful as a sponge, e.g., Num.19:18; Exo.12:22). When it is used symbolically in Scripture, it is associated with utter humility or cleansing (cf. Psa.51:7).

"and scarlet," - Heb. 'shani' '(cochineal), crimson', (Yg). The greek word 'kokkinos' (Heb.9:19), relates to the shape of a berry. The dye was extracted from the seed bodies of a female grub, the coccus worm. It is the same hebrew word translated 'worm' in Psa.22:6. Although used symbolically of sin (Isa.1:18), it is also associated with healing in the cleansing of the leper (Lev.14:6-7).

Why were these three ingredients thrown into the midst of the burning heifer? These substances were all used in the purification of the leper (Lev.14:6). Perhaps they were suggestive of the health imparting character of the red heifer sacrifice - it restored life to the dead when mixed with the water of purification. Since the 'body of sin' must be destroyed, the animal was totally consumed in the fire. This was the 'negative' aspect of the sacrifice. The positive aspect is indicated in the cedarwood, hyssop and scarlet, and the running water. The cedarwood (incorruptible word of God), the hyssop (humility), and the scarlet (healing), were all evident in the sacrifice of Christ, which enabled his sacrificial death to be an atonement for sin.

**Verse 7** "Then the priest shall wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp, and the priest shall be unclean until even." - All who had contact with the red heifer sacrifice and its ashes, were ceremonially defiled. Even the priest who supervised the sacrifice was unclean, and was put out of the camp until the evening.

**Verse 8** "And he that burneth her shall wash his clothes in water, and bathe his flesh in water, and shall be unclean until the even." - Similarly, the assistant to the priest was also ceremonially defiled.

**Verse 9** "And a man [that is] clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer," - The 'clean' man was a man regarded as ceremonially clean. He had done nothing to make him unclean in regard to the Mosaic Law.

[R.Roberts saw in this ritual Christ raised, transformed and taken away and preserved in the testimony of the ecclesia (outside the Mosaic Law), for the purification from death of all who believe. The believers are made clean through the Word (Jn.15:3). 'The Law of Moses', p.268].  
"and lay [them] up without the camp in a clean place," - The ashes would be preserved for use by the Israelites in a place which was 'clean', i.e., a place apart from the lepers' houses, or where those defiled by death, or

issues from the body, lived.

"and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel" - 'Congregation', heb. 'edah', 'an appointed meeting' (Yg). The ashes were to be used by those contaminated by death. They would be used many times before being depleted. The Law was no doubt showing that the sacrifice of Christ would do "what the law could not do" - provide "one sacrifice for sins for ever" (Heb.10:12).

"for a water of separation:" - 'Separation', heb. 'middah', 'separation, impurity', (Yg), 'water of impurity', R.S.V., R.V.(mg). It was 'water of impurity' since the ritual was intended to remove the impurity of death when the ashes were mixed with running water.

"it [is] a purification for sin." - 'Purification', heb. 'middah', 'separation, impurity' (Yg), 'removal of sin', R.S.V.

Why was the defilement termed 'sin' when the defilement may have arisen by merely being in a tent in which a man died of a heart attack? The answer is simple, because death is the result of sin. The obvious connection between sin and death would be realised by the perceptive Israelite. Death came into the world by sin. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin..." (Rom.5:12). The repugnance with which the Almighty viewed sin and death was being forcefully taught by the ritual.

The red heifer indicated by shadow that death would be removed by death - i.e., the Son of God would take away death through his death - "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." (Heb.9:26).

The offering of Christ was required because "by one man sin entered into the world...and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Rom.5:12). The transgression of Adam rendered all men inevitable sinners. The only exception to this generalisation is, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ. He came under the dominion of death (Rom.6:9) to provide the 'ashes of the heifer' and the water of impurity to remove sin and death.

**Verse 10** "And he that gathered the ashes of the heifer" - This must have been a difficult undertaking. How would the ashes of the heifer be separated from the huge pile of wood required to reduce the heifer to ashes? Perhaps a stone altar was constructed with a pan under a grate.

"shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even:" - The man who gathered the ashes is regarded as 'less' defiled than those who touched the heifer before it was rendered to ashes. Eleazar and his assistant were both required to wash their bodies in addition to washing their clothes and being unclean until the evening.

It is a paradox that the 'clean man' gathering the ashes which would ceremonially serve, when mixed with water, to purify the defiled was himself defiled in the process. To put it in other words, the clean man bearing the ashes to make the unclean clean, was made unclean in the process! This fact testified to the temporary arrangement of the Law. The sacrifice of Christ was able to cleanse from all sin (1 Jn.1:7).

**The Extent of Defilement**

	Unclean till even	Wash clothes	Wash body	Unclean 7 days	Must dwell outside camp
1. The man who touched: a) water of separation b) unclean person	///////// ///////// ///////// ///////// /////////				
2. The man who sprinkled water of separation on an unclean person	///////// ///////// ///////// /////////	///////// ///////// ///////// /////////			
3. Clean man who gathered the ashes	///////// /////////	///////// /////////			
4. The priestly assistant to Eleazar	///////// /////////	///////// /////////	///////// /////////		
5. Eleazar	/////////	/////////	/////////		
6. A man who contracted ceremonial defilement through contact with the dead	///////// ///////// ///////// ///////// /////////	///////// ///////// ///////// ///////// /////////	///////// ///////// ///////// /////////	///////// ///////// ///////// /////////	///////// ///////// ///////// ///////// ///////// ///////// ///////// /////////

"and it shall be unto the children of Israel, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among them," - Since all inherited death from their common father, Adam, and all were rendered inevitable sinners by the nature received from him, no-one was exempt from the provisions of the red heifer.

"for a statute for ever." - Heb. 'olam', 'age, age-lasting' (Yg). The perpetual character of the law was proof of the extent of the defilement of death. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, for that [ 'in whom' mg.] all have sinned." (Rom.5:12).

**Verse 11** "He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days." - There was a greater defilement for contact with a dead human than with a dead animal. If a carcass of an animal were touched, the defilement lasted only until the evening (Lev.11:24). The length of the defilement for humans was 7 days. The reason for this is probably that the animal is amoral, whereas a man is defiled by sin. In the case of a Nazarite (under vow to God), he was forbidden to go near a dead body, because he was separated and holy to God. This law was to be observed even if father, mother, brother or sister died. If someone died suddenly beside him, the vow

was terminated and a trespass offering was to be offered and the vow recommenced (Num.6:6). In the case of the priests, the sons of Aaron, they were forbidden to defile themselves for the dead, except for the nearest of kin - mother, father, son, daughter, brother or virgin sister (Lev.21:1-3). 'Body'. heb. 'nephesh' is the usual word in the O.T. for 'soul'. This passage proves that the hebrew word 'nephesh' does not mean something which is immaterial and immortal, as taught by most of Christendom, but rather is it something which can die and be touched!

**Verse 12** "He shall purify himself with it on the third day," - Why the third day? Was this suggesting that a moral cleansing must precede the physical cleansing? The heart must be sprinkled from an evil conscience because of the believer's contact with dead works. The believer is now walking in newness of life because of his moral cleansing at baptism (the 3rd day). But he must wait until the 7th day to be raised physically from this body of humiliation.

There is also the suggestion of Christ's triumph over sin and death on the third day, by his resurrection to glory. The believer is baptised into his death - 'raised' in 'newness of life' (Rom.6:3-4) at baptism. This water of separation effects the washing of sins in his own blood (Rev.1:5), but it is not the end of the purification - there must be the physical purification on the 7th day - a declaration of 'clean' by the Judge, and a change from this body of humiliation to incorruption.

"and on the seventh day he shall be clean:" - This was what took place in Christ's death: "through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Heb.2:14-15). In effect this was a "curing of death by death" (R.Roberts, 'Law of Moses', p.265). He continued: "How could he do this if he had not in himself the power of death to destroy by dying? He has destroyed death. But in whom? In himself alone as yet. Believers will obtain the benefit by incorporation with him at the resurrection: but, at the present time, the victory is his alone. The fact is plain to everyone. Some who admire Christ are horror-struck at the idea of his having been a partaker of the Adamic condemned nature - a nature defiled by death because of sin. Their horror is due wholly to too great a confinement of view. They fix their attention on the idea of 'defilement' without remembering that the defilement was undertaken with a view to removal." Baptism does not alter the physical nature of a believer. In this respect he is still in Adam. The 'body of death' (Rom.7:24) is still with him. He must wait until the 7th day (the millennium) for his liberation.

"but if he purify not himself the third day, then the seventh day he shall not be clean." - Under no circumstances could the prescribed ritual be shortened by laziness or because a man was too busy. Any irregularity invalidated the rest of the ritual. (Cp. Mk.16:16).

**Verse 13** "Whosoever toucheth the dead body [heb. 'nephesh', 'soul!'] of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of the LORD;" - No provision was made for the uninstructed man, the ignorant, the negligent, the forgetful or the man who wilfully disregarded the instruction. All who were not 'cleansed' by the living water were defiled, and defiled the Tabernacle of God by continuing in the Tabernacle services.

"and that soul shall be cut off from Israel: because the water of separation was not sprinkled upon him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness [is] yet

upon him." - 'Sprinkled', heb. 'zaraq', 'to be sprinkled' (Yg); 'Scatter, strew', (Stg), is different from the heb. 'nazah' translated 'sprinkle' in v.4 & 18. Hence the R.S.V. translation 'thrown'.

How would a man be 'cut off'? Since a man could stumble over a human bone while tending sheep, the fact that defilement had been contracted may have been known only to the person concerned. How then could he be punished when no witnesses were present to bring forth a charge? Divine providence must have operated through disease, plague or sudden death. God did intervene in this way; e.g., Num.16:45-49, 21:4-6, cf. 1 Cor.11:27-32. If such were the case, it affords a powerful illustration of the words of Heb.4:12-13, "The word of God...[is] a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things [are] naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

**Verse 14** "This [is] the law, when a man dieth in a tent: all that come into the tent, and all that [is] in the tent, shall be unclean seven days." - The extensive defilement of death could hardly be missed by the perceptive Israelite. In respect to this the following quotation is to the point:

"There is significance in all these details that ought to be fatal to the loose ideas entertained...as to the death of Christ, to the effect that it was not necessary and not required, except as the mere act of martyrdom or crowning act of a life of obedience. For we must never forget that all these ceremonies of the law were allegorical of the work of Christ...Let us ponder the general fact that the ashes of a slain heifer are provided as an indispensable purification from the taint acquired by contact with death in any shape or form, or in however indirect or distant a manner: the neglect of which ensured that 'cutting off from the people' which the law so stringently provided in so many cases." (R.Roberts, 'Law of Moses', p.263)

**Verse 15** "And every open vessel, which hath no covering bound upon it, [is] unclean." - The extensive defilement of death was once again emphasised.

**Verse 16** "And whosoever toucheth one that is slain with a sword in the open fields, or a dead body, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days." - 'Dead body', heb. 'bemeth' = one dead. There is no word in this verse for 'body' as in v.11.

**Verse 17** "And for an unclean [person] they shall take of the ashes of the burnt heifer of purification for sin," - 'Purification for sin' is rendered 'the burnt sin-offering' in the R.S.V.

"and running water shall be put thereto in a vessel:" - The running water, heb. 'chai', 'living' (Yg), implied that stagnant water from a pond could not be used. Since the ritual was teaching the restoration of life from the dead, stagnant water would have been inappropriate for the symbol. What did the running water indicate? The positive counterpart to the negative destruction of the body of sin. Christ came by 'water and blood' (1 Jn.5:6), i.e., by his baptism and followed by his sacrificial death.

**Verse 18** "And a clean person" - A person who was not ceremonially defiled.

"shall take hyssop," - The hyssop would be used as a sponge to absorb the water.

"and dip [it] in the water, and sprinkle [it] upon the tent, and upon all the vessels, and upon the persons that were there, and upon him that touched a bone, or one slain, or one dead, or a grave:" - 'Sprinkle', heb. 'nazah', is the word used for the sprinkling of the blood of the sin offering (e.g., Lev.16:14-15). Once again the extensive defilement of death was illustrated by the instructions regarding the ritual.

**Verse 19** "And a clean [person] shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day, and on the seventh day:" - This is a repetition of the instructions referred to in v.12.

"and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, and wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at even."

**Verse 20** "But the man that shall be unclean, and shall not purify himself," - God's law made no provision for the rebellious and the forgetful.

"that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation," - Death would result from ignoring the instructions regarding the red heifer.

"because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the LORD: the water of separation hath not been sprinkled upon him; he [is] unclean." - Such an act of disrespect was a violation of the holiness that belonged to the camp of Israel.

**Verse 21** "And it shall be a perpetual statute unto them," - See comment regarding v.10.

"and he that sprinkleth the water of separation shall wash his clothes; and he that toucheth the water of separation shall be unclean until even." - Although defilement was still contracted, the defilement was not so great once the red heifer was rendered to ashes.

**Verse 22** "And whosoever the unclean [person] toucheth shall be unclean; and the soul that toucheth [it] shall be unclean until even."

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# the BRONZE SERPENT

## Numbers 21

The notes that follow were originally prepared for the study leaders at the Feb.1971 Winter Pinecrest Camp, Torrance, Ontario. They are reproduced here in question and answer form.

### John 3:14-21

#### 1. Why did Jesus refer to the serpent which Moses lifted up?

There are at least four reasons for this:

i. The serpent was lifted up and fastened to a pole, "so must the Son of man be lifted up", i.e., die by crucifixion - by being impaled on a cross.

ii. Urgency was evident in the provision of the bronze serpent. Israelites were dying in great numbers from the venomous bites. Likewise all men are mortal and dying from the bite of sin - a sting which produced death (1 Cor.15:55-56). The Son of Man must (an urgent necessity) be 'lifted up', i.e., die by crucifixion, in order to save a perishing world.

iii. Faith was necessary - Israelites who ignored God's provision in the bronze serpent, perished in their unbelief. Likewise, Nicodemus, his fellow-rulers, and countrymen in Israel, must believe on God's provision in the Son of Man. Those who ignored his claims or disbelieved that he was the Son of God, could not be rescued. Again the urgency is apparent. An Israelite bitten by a venomous serpent would die in a matter of minutes as the venom moved from the punctured skin into the veins and to the heart muscles which it paralysed.

iv. The bronze serpent was a provision by God outside the scope of the Mosaic Law. In this respect it was a type of Christ, who was provided by God outside the scope of the Mosaic Law.

#### 2. What is meant by 'lifted up'? What parallel is there between the lifting up of the serpent (Jn.3:14) and Jesus?

The Greek word for 'lifted up' is 'hupsōo', and means 'to exalt, elevate, set on high', (Yg). This word refers to Christ's crucifixion. This is proven by Jn.12:32-33: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die." Since Christ died by crucifixion, to be 'lifted up' must mean death by crucifixion.

It should be noted that the Hebrew word 'nes' for 'pole' in Num.21:8 means a 'sign, banner' (Yg), 'standard', Rotherham. The serpent was not hidden in Moses' tent to be secretly viewed by only a few, but rather publicly exhibited. Likewise in the crucifixion of Christ, the Divine principles were demonstrated publicly (cf. Gal.3:1).

#### 3. Are there any other passages in which Jesus referred to the way in which he was to die?

Yes. Jn.18:32 - when Pilate delivered Jesus into the hands of the Jews, "That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spoke, signifying what death he should die." See Jn.8:28, also Matt.20:19, cf. Lk.24:7.

## Numbers 21:1-9

#### 4. Why did the children of Israel become 'much discouraged because of the way'? Was it merely because of the food?"

No. They were journeying south to skirt the southern end of Edom. This direction, no doubt, discouraged the Israelites since they were journeying back toward the wilderness and Mt. Sinai, rather than in the direction of the Promised Land. This conclusion may be inferred from Num.21:4, (R.S.V.) "From mount Hor they set out by way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient on the way." The prospect of further wanderings in the wilderness would not have been pleasant as the following passage indicates, "Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, and where there was no water..." (Deut.8:15, 32:24).

#### 5. What is meant by a 'fiery serpent' (Num.21:6)?

There are two words for 'serpent' in Num.21. One word is 'saraph' (v.8) and means 'a burning, stinging, fiery serpent' (Yg). The other word is 'nachash' and simply means a 'serpent' (Yg).

#### 6. How long do you think it would take an Israelite to die once bitten by a serpent?

Only a few minutes! Venom from a serpent kills a victim by paralysing the heart muscles. It would not take a very long time from the time that the venom was injected into the foot or leg veins to reach the heart. The deadly character of the bites is indicated by the fact that "much people died" (v.6). They were "destroyed of serpents". (1 Cor.10:9).

#### 7. Had the Israelites any experience with poisonous serpents prior to this?

Probably they did, since the wilderness contained 'fiery serpents and scorpions' (Deut.8:15). "Serpents are very common in Palestine and the wilderness to the south, thirty species being known...several kinds are most deadly, fatal snake bites being by no means uncommon." (J.Hastings, 'Dictionary of the Bible', p.897). "Furthermore the serpent was held in much veneration in Egypt." (ibid, p.898). This fact may account for why the Israelites regarded the serpent as an idol until the time of Hezekiah (2 Ki.18:4).

#### 8. "And much people of Israel died" - How large do you estimate the size of the congregation at this time?

625,730 males - 20 years and over. (The women and children would be in addition to this number, probably bringing the total to well over one million). This figure is based on the census taken in the Plains of Moab before entry into the Promised Land (Num.26). Added to this figure are 24,000 who died in the plague at Shittim (Num.25:9), but assumed to be living when the serpents destroyed the people.

#### 9. Why did God allow "much people of Israel" to die before providing an antidote?

Consider these possibilities -

a. To show the nation their ungrateful attitude and exceeding sinfulness. The punishment had the desired effect, "Therefore the people came to Moses and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us." (v.7)

b. To eradicate complainers who were not only complainers, but faithless.

(Do you think that the serpents were directed by God's providence to bite only Israelites who were unfaithful?)

C. There would be no deterrent to wrongdoing until the nation had seen the effect of their sin. It required the death of 'much people' for the nation to remember the abhorrence with which God regards sin. Until something drastic occurred, there was no immediate connection between the sin of complaining and its punishment.

10. "The people came to Moses and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD." What requirement did the Law stipulate should be done when the nation sinned?

The Law of Moses stipulated that a young bull should be offered for the national sin (Lev.3:13-14).

11. Why did God instruct Moses to save the people from the serpents by a provision outside the Law?

The Law of Moses made provision for the sin of the nation in a sin offering, but it was powerless to save Israelites from the venomous bites. The serpent of bronze was a merciful act of God outside the Law. No doubt it was part of God's arrangement to portray His later work through His Son, a provision outside the Law. What the Law could not do - God did! "Sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." (Rom.8:3).

12. God did not instruct Moses to kill one of the fiery serpents and impale it on a pole. Why? Why fashion a bronze serpent, time-consuming as this would be, while people were dying?

The serpent in Gen.3, while literal, has a figurative progeny - a seed - sin (Gen.3:15). The allusions to the serpent elsewhere in Scripture, clearly indicate this (Matt.23:33; Rev.12:9, 20:2). A fiery serpent killed and fastened to a pole would signify SIN, but it would not foreshadow the work of Christ. A bronze serpent was venomless. This provided a fitting parallel with Christ, who never yielded to sin. Rather the 'prince of this world' (Jn.12:31) was cast out in the life and death of the Son of God. Jesus possessed human nature, with its proneness to sin, and mortal constitution. This nature is sinful in its tendencies, and is therefore appropriately depicted by a serpent, but a venomless one, since Jesus overcame the impulses to sin.

13. The A.V. renders v.9, "Moses made a serpent of brass," but the R.S.V. gives 'bronze'. What is the difference between these two metals? Which is the correct rendering?

The hebrew word 'nechosheth' means 'brass, copper' (Yg). Brass was used to describe an alloy of copper with tin, zinc or other base metal, but in current usage describes a yellow alloy consisting of  $\frac{2}{3}$  copper and  $\frac{1}{3}$  zinc. (The Concise Oxford Dictionary). Bronze was a brown alloy consisting chiefly of copper and tin (about 8:1). Because of its current usage it is more accurate to refer to the serpent as a bronze one.

14. Is there any significance in the metal chosen? What is the symbolic significance of bronze as it occurs in the Scriptures?

Bronze is associated with man in his weakness, frailty and sinfulness. Note the following examples -

a. Num.16:38-40 - The bronze censers of the rebels, Korah, Dathan and Abiram, were made into plates to cover the altar, "To be a memorial unto

the children of Israel, that no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the LORD..."

b. Eze.16:36 - The hebrew word 'nechosheth' is translated 'filthiness', A.V., and 'shame', R.S.V.

15. What attitude of mind were the circumstances of the serpents designed to produce in Israelites?

Repentance (implied in v.7), faith (v.9) implied in the words "when he beheld". The serpents would no doubt remind the Israelites of the role of the serpent in Eden. A reflection on Gen.3 would provide considerable instruction regarding the Almighty's glorious provision of a seed, which would ultimately fatally bruise the serpent's head.

16. What parallel attitude of mind do you think Jesus was encouraging in Nicodemus?

The urgency of faith, "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish" (Jn.3:16). The necessity of unwavering belief. There was no other alternative to God's provision, "He that believeth not is condemned already" (Jn.3:18).

17. What finally happened to the serpent of bronze?

The serpent was worshipped by idolatrous Israelites. It was finally broken in pieces and destroyed by Hezekiah. "And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had burned incense to it; it was called Nehushtan." (2 Ki.18:4, R.S.V.).

18 Now that you have reviewed some of the major points regarding the serpent of bronze, draw two columns and list the parallels between the 'serpent' and Christ.

SERPENT	CHRIST
	publicly placarded as crucified (Gal.3:1)
lifted up	the flesh - rightly related to death
bronze serpent - the flesh	sin dethroned - in a sinless bearer of human nature
venomless	outside the law
outside the law	"whoso believeth might not perish"
belief required	

"SO MUST THE SON OF MAN BE LIFTED UP"

# LEPROSY

## Introduction

Until recently, leprosy was regarded with the same dread as is cancer today. As late as 1903, lepers living in Jerusalem were described in these words:

"They held up towards me their handless arms, unearthly sounds gurgled through throats without palates. Leprosy...comes on by degrees in different parts of the body; the hair falls from the head and eyebrows; the nails loosen, decay and drop off, joint after joint of the fingers and toes shrink up, and slowly fall away. The gums are absorbed and the teeth disappear. The nose, the eyes, the tongue, and the palate are consumed, and finally the wretched victim sinks into the earth and disappears..."

It is estimated that there are 15 million sufferers from leprosy throughout the world. However, few Christadelphians in Canada and the U.S.A. have ever even seen a leper, because most lepers live in tropical countries.

Under the Law of Moses, leprosy was categorised with issues from the body, and contact with the dead, as a defilement which put a man outside the encampment of Israel. There he dwelt alone, separated from his family, friends, and the Tabernacle worship of his God. Although the Law provided for the cleansing of lepers, there are no recorded examples in Scripture of any lepers being healed naturally. Leprosy, it seems, was regarded rather as humanly incurable. For this reason, the healing of lepers by Jesus is set out as proof of his Messiahship (Matt.11:5).

To the student of God's Word, leprosy is more than a terrible disease. It is a divinely intended parable of sin. A stark reminder of the condition of sin and mortality under which we groan and travail until the glorious liberation of the sons of God. Many events in Scripture which pass as mere 'history' to the casual reader - Miriam, Naaman, Uzziah, etc., - take on added significance once the parable of leprosy is understood. It is the purpose of these notes to attempt an examination of this parable, especially as it relates to God's great work of redemption in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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## THE LEPER - A MOURNER AT HIS OWN FUNERAL

LEPROSY	SIN
1. Unique to man	"By one man" (Rom.5:12)
2. Imperceptible beginning	Deceitful (Heb.3:13; Rom.7:13)
3. Insidious growth	Dominates as a king (Rom.5:21)
4. Deep-seated	From within (Matt.15:18-19)
5. Dulling of sensibilities	Sears conscience (1 Tim.4:2)
6. Progressive, eyes, nose, etc.	Eats like a canker (2 Tim.2:17)
7. Contagious	Spreads like leaven (1 Cor.5:6)
8. Deforming	Bondage to decay (Rom.8:21)
9. Humanly incurable	Victory only through God (Jer.30:12-13; 1 Cor.15:57)
10. Ends in death	Wages = death (Rom.6:23)

The above draft suggests some of the parallels between leprosy and sin. Extracts from contemporary writers will now be cited to show how impressive the parallel is between leprosy and sin. Consider the following:

### LEPROSY: The Divine Parable of Sin

#### 1. Unique to man

"As far as we know 'Myco. leprae' is found only in man."<sup>1</sup> A leprosy bacillus is found in rats, but it is not transferable to man. Researchers have found it almost impossible to grow the bacillus outside the human host.

#### 2. Imperceptible beginnings

Usually the period between the exposure to infection and appearance of the disease is from 3 to 20 years. This is a 'long, silent period', the latent or incubation period. During this time the person may infect others through nasal discharges, without the victim being aware of it. When the first "patches appear in the skin, they are...so little different from the surrounding skin that...unless the skin is examined in oblique sunlight, even the specialist cannot detect these patches; the doctor who rarely deals with leprosy would fail to see them, or recognise them if he did."<sup>2</sup> Yet after the first few weeks of their appearance, these patches are usually teeming with leprosy germs. Often, too, the infected person does not know how or from whom he acquired it.

#### 3. Insidious growth

"Lepromatous leprosy begins insidiously and may smoulder for years as symptomless patches in the skin."<sup>4</sup> It produces weakness, paralysis and

wasting of the limbs and ulceration due to interference with the nutrition of the overlying skin, especially on the sole of the foot, where there is also pressure.

#### 4. Deep-seated

Leprosy may not only disfigure the face, but often leaves marks on the skeleton which are caused by no other disease. "A small bone in the nose (called the nasal spine) is eaten away by leprosy, and another small bone (the alveolar process of the maxilla) may be eroded."<sup>5</sup> The leprosy germs damage the nerves, which results in local pain and tenderness of the nerve trunk itself. Loss of feeling is then experienced in the area served by the nerve trunk, resulting in paralysis of the muscles, deformity and mutilation. "We know that live leprosy bacilli may lurk for years apparently unchanged in between nerve fibres and in deep organs such as the liver and bone marrow."<sup>6</sup>

#### 5. Dulling of sensibilities

Leprosy is a destroyer of the peripheral nerves. "Interruption of sensory and motor pathways leads to loss of feeling, ulcerations, contractures and painless deformities of hands, feet and face."<sup>7</sup>

#### 6. Progressive

"From small beginnings, by covertly entering the body at some initial spot, it germinates and secretly, slowly but surely, spreads over the whole frame. The hair falls from the head and eyebrows, nails decay and drop off," and the disease at last "breaks out openly and manifests itself in tuberculous ulcers and swollen joints, causing increased deformity and loathsomeness and terrible suffering, so that death is welcomed as a happy release from the ruin."<sup>8</sup> "When the serious kinds of leprosy make their appearance, the progress of the disease seems to be inexorable, and nothing could, in the past, halt it."<sup>9</sup>

#### 7. Contagious

Adults living in good health, when exposed to the disease, appear to be more susceptible to infection than persons resident in the affected area. Children living under poor conditions of nutrition are very susceptible to the disease.<sup>10</sup> Leprosy bacilli are spread from the upper respiratory mucosa, ulcerations of affected skin, hair follicles, sweat glands and milk ducts. There are currently about 15 million sufferers from leprosy and new cases are occurring at the rate of 100,000 per year.

#### 8. Deforming

Disfigurement is the result of a long struggle between the germ and its host - the body. Ulcerated skin, paralysed hands and faces, and damaged eyes occur. The absorption of bony and other tissues makes it appear as if the hand or arm has been amputated. The leprosy bacilli may invade the throat and destroy the hard and soft palates, and then extend downwards to the larynx.

#### 9. Humanly incurable

No examples of leprosy healing spontaneously occur in Scripture. Even today, when spontaneous cures are thought to have taken place, the leprosy may break out again. Although hundreds of so-called remedies have been tried over the past 4,000 years,<sup>11</sup> some quite fantastic, and others even more harmful than the leprosy, it was not until around 1953 that the sulphone

group of synthetic drugs made it possible to offer the sufferer any real chance of cure or arrest.

#### 10. Ends in death

Leprosy is a wasting disease in which the body consumes away before the victim's eyes. As the limbs decay, it foretells a certain death, which is often accompanied by secondary infections from the ulcerated flesh.

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Browne, (Director of the Leprosy Study Centre, London), 'Memorandum on Leprosy Control', (London: Oxfam, Lepra and the Leprosy Mission, 1971) p.12.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Browne, 'Leprosy: New Hope and Continuing Challenge', (London: The Leprosy Mission, 1970) p.44.

<sup>3</sup> See W.C.Fowler, 'Leprosy', Christadelphian Magazine, March 1960, p.128.

<sup>4</sup> Stanley Browne, 'Memorandum on Leprosy Control', p.7.

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Browne, 'Leprosy: New Hope and Continuing Challenge', p.16.

<sup>6</sup> Stanley Browne, 'Leprosy: New Hope and Continuing Challenge', p.51.

<sup>7</sup> Stanley Browne, 'Memorandum on Leprosy Control', p.9.

<sup>8</sup> Rattray, 'Divine Hygiene', quoted by E.G.Speakman, 'Leprosy', Testimony Magazine, Sept.1972, p.346.

<sup>9</sup> Stanley Browne, 'Leprosy: New Hope and Continuing Challenge', p.28.

<sup>10</sup> See A. Rendle Short, 'The Bible and Modern Medicine', (The Paternoster Press), p.74.

<sup>11</sup> According to Edersheim, the same was true at the time of Christ: "Whatever remedies, medical, magical or sympathetic, Rabbinic writings may indicate for various kinds of diseases, leprosy is not included in the catalogue ...Rabbinism confessed itself powerless in the presence of this living death." Alfred Edersheim, 'The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah', p.381-382.

### LEPROSY: Biblical and Modern

The hebrew word, 'tsara'ath', translated 'leprosy', was not simply restricted to what is known as leprosy today. 'Tsara'ath' was used of leprosy in houses, clothes etc., in Lev.13. Leprosy today is known to live only within the human host. Note the following contrasts and comparisons:

#### BIBLICAL

#### MODERN

1. 'Tsara'ath' translated 'leprosy' is a disease of clothing and walls.
2. Sometimes the whole body can be pure white.
3. Not described since the Law of Moses was concerned with the diagnosis of the early stages of the disease.

Unique to man. The leprosy bacillus cannot live in clothing or walls. Does not result in the whole body becoming white. Numbness and deformity of the limbs occurs.

Recognising these differences, some modern translators have substituted alternatives to 'leprosy' for the hebrew 'tsara'ath'. The N.E.B. uses the expression 'malignant skin diseases'. Nevertheless, Biblical descriptions of leprosy in its advanced stages approximate modern descriptions. Aaron spoke of Miriam as having been afflicted such that she was "as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of hls mother's womb." (Num.12:12). The reference is to a still-born infant partly decomposed. Leprosy, ancient and modern, was a deforming, wasting disease.

The disease was regarded with dread and viewed as incurable. This is indicated by the words of the king of Israel in reply to Naaman's request that he be healed of his leprosy, "[Am] I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?" (2 Ki.5:7). As a result of the healing, the skin became "like unto the flesh of a little child." (2 Ki.5:14).

Closer attention must now be given to leprosy as it affected humans in Lev.13. A glance at this rather long chapter with its many details, indicates that a good deal of study is required to sort out the details. To make this easier, the chapter is structured according to the following breakdown:

#### The Diagnosis of Leprosy - Lev.13:1-46

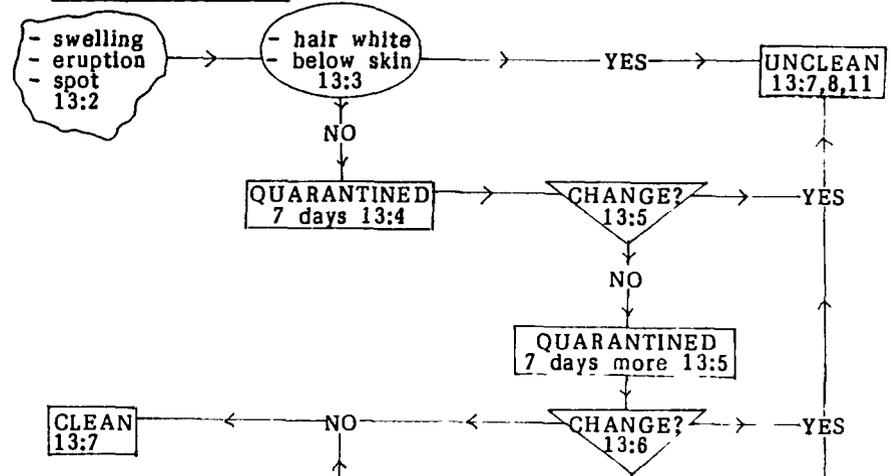
- 13: 1 - 8 1) A new outbreak of leprosy  
 9 - 11 2) Recurrent leprosy - and old outbreak  
 12 - 17 3) White leprosy  
 18 - 23 4) Leprous boil  
 24 - 28 5) Leprous burn  
 29 - 37 6) Leprosy in the head or beard  
 38 - 39 (Leprosy not to be confused with spotted skin)  
 40 - 46 7) Leprosy in the forehead (the worst place to have leprosy).

Since the priest was to serve in a medical capacity, i.e., to determine whether or not leprosy was evident when suspicious symptoms were found, the law clearly set out in detail the courses of action that were to be taken. In general, whenever 'raw flesh' (an ulcerated sore below the skin) was found to be spreading, accompanied by white patches, the person was regarded as unclean.

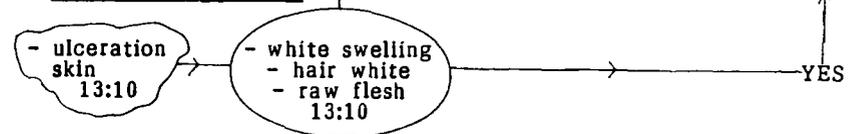
In order to assist the Bible student to see the choices and courses of action open to the priest, the instructions of Lev.13 have been set out in flow-chart style (on the next page). The irregular-shaped boxes indicate the suspicious symptoms. The triangular ones indicate a choice to be made by the priest on the basis of the symptoms described in the oval-shaped boxes.

### THE DIAGNOSIS OF LEPROSY - Lev.13:1-11

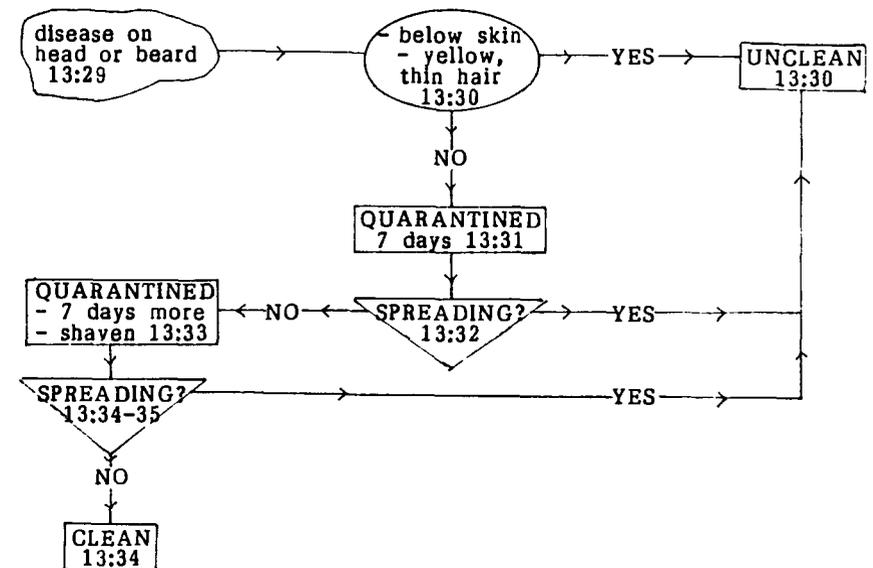
#### 1) A NEW OUTBREAK - 13:1-8



#### 2) AN OLD OUTBREAK - 13:9-11



### LEPROSY IN THE HEAD OR BEARD - Lev.13:29-37



**THE CLEANSING OF THE LEPER**

**The High Priest: A Contrast and Comparison with the Leper**

Anyone reading through Lev.14 cannot help but be impressed by the involved and elaborate ritual for the cleansing of the leper. The amount of space in the Law given to this disease and its cleansing, is indicative of the Divine importance with which it is regarded. The contrasts between the High Priest and the leper are so remarkable as to be beyond mere coincidence.

Note the following:

<b><u>The High Priest</u></b> (the ideal Israelite)	<b><u>The Leper</u></b> (the actual state of the Israelite)*
1. Hair forbidden to hang dishevelled (Lev.10:6-7, R.S.V.)	Hair commanded to appear dishevelled (Lev.13:45, R.S.V.)
2. On forehead was worn a plate of gold, "Holiness to Yahweh" (Exo.28:36)	Forehead - the place of the leprous outbreak (Lev.13:42)
3. Forbidden to cover upper lip (cf.Eze.24:17)	Commanded to cover upper lip (Lev.13:45)
4. Holiness of office indicated in turban inscribed with the words "Holiness to Yahweh" (Exo.28:36)	Required to cry, "Unclean, unclean" to warn passers-by of his defiled condition (Lev.13:45)
5. Forbidden to wear torn clothes. His apparel was designed for glory and beauty (cf.Lev.10:6, Exo.28:2)	Commanded to wear torn clothes (Lev.13:45)
6. Forbidden to mourn the dead (Lev.21:10-11)	He was, in fact, mourning the dead - he was a mourner at his own funeral
7. Life centred in the Tabernacle (Exo.29:44)	Dwelt outside the camp - excluded from Tabernacle worship (Lev.13:46)

The High Priest typed the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Leper was typical of all humanity - under the corrupting influence of mortality and sin. He was a living parable of sin. His condition was mortality 'speeded-up'. It is a stark contrast indeed!

It needs underlining that the Mosaic Law was identifying the leper with sin. It is for this reason that the precise instructions governing his manner of dress and conduct are given in the Law. All the features of his apparel are associated with mourning.

\* In-so-far as all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God, in actual fact, the Israelite was a spiritual leper stricken by the effects of sin and mortality.

**The Appearance and Conduct of the Leper - token of the mourner**

<b><u>The Leper (Lev.13:45-46)</u></b>	<b><u>The mourner for the dead</u></b>
1. Wear torn clothes	Lev.10:6-7, 21:10 - Priests were forbidden to wear torn clothes or hair dishevelled as a sign of mourning for the deaths of Nadab and Abihu.
2. Wear hair dishevelled	
3. Cover upper lip	Eze.24:16-17 - Ezekiel forbidden to mourn, weep, "neither shall thy tears run down... and cover not [thy] lips" (mg. 'upper lip')

**LEPROSY: The Divine Parable of Sin**

The association of leprosy with sin is made on the basis of the following reasons:

1. Leprosy was miraculously inflicted as a punishment for sin in three instances:

- i) Miriam was punished with leprosy for her complaint against Moses (Num.12:10-13).
- ii) Gehazi was smitten with white leprosy for lying to Elisha (2 Ki.5:27).
- iii) King Uzziah (Azariah) was smitten with leprosy in the forehead when he attempted to offer incense, which was forbidden by the Mosaic Law. (2 Chron.26:19-20).

2. The cleansing of the leper was elaborate, unusual and required a sin offering (Lev.14:19), thereby associating leprosy with sin.

3. Leprosy in the forehead resulted in the victim being put outside the fellowship of the camp of Israel, where he dwelt alone. This in itself suggests that leprosy was a type of sin. Apart from its spiritual significance, such ostracism (separated from family, relatives and forbidden access to Tabernacle worship) could only be regarded as cruel and harsh, imposing on the sufferer added affliction.

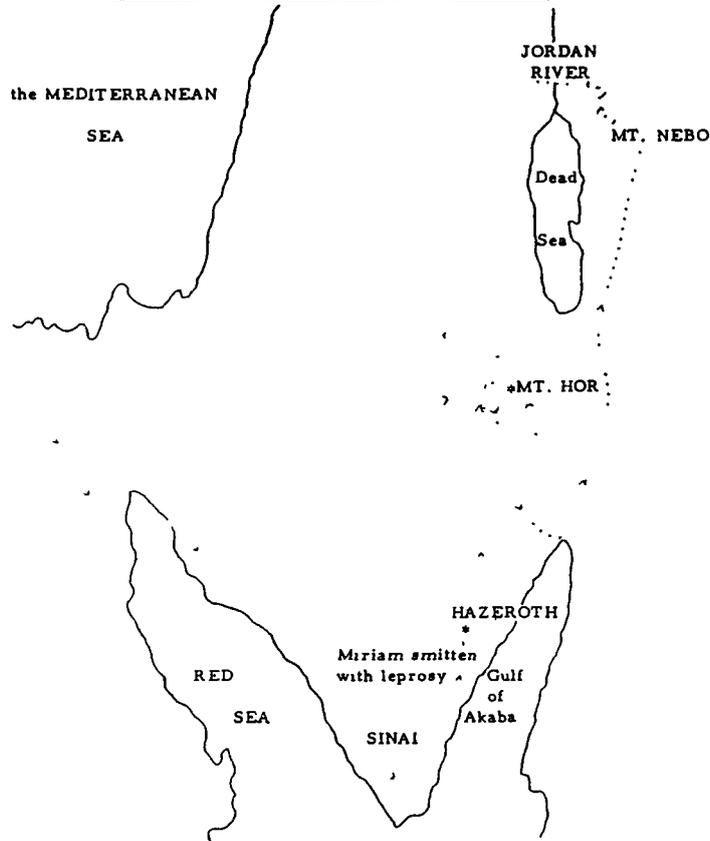
**LESSONS FROM THE LEPROUS**

**MIRIAM: the leprous leader among women (Num.12)**

Nearly everyone remembers Miriam, Moses' sister, who cared for him in the house of Pharaoh, but this was only the beginning of her work. In the camp of Israel, she had a position of elevation. Two sections of Scripture illustrate this point: "For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron and Miriam." (Mic.6:4). "And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." (Exo.15:20-21).

When Moses married an Ethiopian woman, Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses saying, "Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us?" (Num.12:2). Whether the marriage was the real cause or merely the occasion for the envy to be expressed, is not certain, but the challenge to the leadership of Moses, the man of God's appointing, was a

MIRIAM: 'LEPROUS LEADER AMONG WOMEN'



grave sin. The following section of Num.12 indicates the course of events:  
 "And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and he departed. And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam [became] leprous, [white] as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, [she was] leprous. And Aaron said unto Moses, Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned. Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed, when he cometh out of his mother's womb. And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee. And the LORD said unto Moses, If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? let her be shut out from the camp seven days, and after that let her be received in [again]. And Miriam was shut out from the camp seven days: and the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in [again]." (Num.12:9-15).

Why was Miriam punished and not Aaron? The evidence points to Miriam as the instigator of the rebellion. Note the following:

i) Miriam's name occurs before that of Aaron in 12:1.

ii) The verb 'spake' in 12:1 is in the feminine gender, suggesting that she was the offender and that Aaron yielded to her demands, as he did to those of the Israelites in the sin of the golden calf.

The gravity of the sin was shown in its public exposure. Note the following:

i) "The cloud departed from off the tabernacle" (v.10). This was a visible sign to the whole congregation of the Divine displeasure. When the children of Israel were to break camp and continue their journey, the cloud was 'lifted up' (as in 9:17), not withdrawn. [The hebrew word 'sar', translated 'departed' (12:10), is different from the word for 'lifted up' - heb. 'alah' as in 9:17]. This event would be witnessed by all Israel since the Tabernacle was pitched in the midst of the encampment.

ii) Miriam was "shut out from the camp seven days" (v.14), and the "people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in [again]" (v.15). Again public attention was drawn both to the sin and its punishment.

**The sin and leprosy**

The Divine displeasure was indicated in an arresting way, not only by the withdrawal of the cloud, but by the character of Miriam's punishment. Miriam did not merely contract a patch or spot of leprosy, but rather she became leprous as snow, i.e., her whole body became leprous.

Leprosy is a slow and insidious disease often requiring several years for the symptoms to become manifest. The miraculous character of Miriam's infliction was evident by the fact that she became leprous immediately. This fact is further indicated by the abruptness of the hebrew when it records Aaron's reaction, "and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, [she was] leprous" (v.10). [Rotherham comments: "'Aaron seeing, stood aghast.' Note the abruptness of the record." 'The Emphasised Bible', p.170].

**Sin - leprosy - death**

Aaron's reaction to the infliction of leprosy on Miriam provides a fitting rejoinder to many of the modern commentaries which regard Miriam's leprosy as merely a flaking skin disorder. [See Stanley Browne, 'Leprosy: New Hope and Continuing Challenge', p.21]. Aaron's words, "Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb." (v.12) infer that Miriam was as good as dead. Leprosy was a decomposing of the body. It was an acceleration of the process of mortality. Rotherham has an interesting comment on 12:12:

"The text originally was 'Let her not, I pray, be as the dead-born child, which when proceeding from our mother's ['immēnu] womb the half of our flesh [b<sup>s</sup>arēnu] is consumed.' This was regarded as derogatory to the mother of the great law-giver by depicting her as having given birth to a partially decomposed body. The simile was therefore altered from the first person plural into the impersonal." ('The Emphasised Bible', p.170-171).

Apart from Divine intervention, leprosy was regarded as incurable, presaging a certain death. Could any doubt the association of leprosy with sin in Num.12?

**NAAMAN: the leprous army commander (2 Kl.5)**

Since the Syrians viewed leprosy differently from the Mosaic Law, Naaman continued to serve his king despite his condition. The attitudes required by Divine etiquette for Naaman's curing are the same for all Gentiles seeking liberation from the leprous-like condition of mortality. Naaman, a 'great man' in Syria, required humility and obedience. These characteristics were not easily evoked in Naaman, not are they in unregenerate Gentiles. Note how the sequence of events was intended to cultivate these characteristics:

a) Naaman arrived at the door of Elisha's home with horses and chariots, an impressive retinue befitting his position of second in command in Syria (5:1). Elisha, however, did not even so much as go out to meet him, but rather sent a messenger. The indignant response of Naaman is recorded, "But Naaman was wrath, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call upon the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." (v.11).

b) Naaman was instructed to wash seven times in the River Jordan. His attitude was once again revealed, "[Are] not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage." (v.12).

**A Parable of Gentile Salvation**

Jesus referred to Naaman's cleansing as prophetic of Gentile response to the Gospel, "And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." (Lk.4:27, R.S.V.)

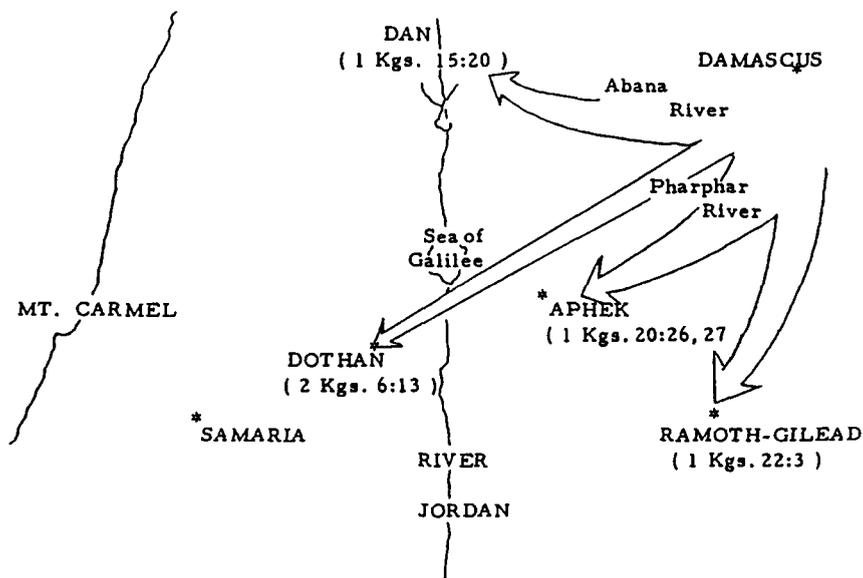
Once a point of comparison is seen between the leprous condition of Naaman (and other lepers) and the leprous-like condition of mortality, an interesting parallel emerges. Note the following:

Naaman	Gentiles
1. Smitten with leprosy - speeded-up mortality (5:1).	Mortality is their common lot - it is a leprous-like condition.
2. In natural state - hopeless - "Am I God, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?" (5:7,R.S.V.).	In natural state without hope (Eph.2:12).
3. Cure effected only through Israel's God (5:3-4).	Escape from corruption of the world only through the hope of Israel (Eph.2:12).
4. Humility required (5:12-14).	Humility required - like a little child (Matt.18:4).
5. Obedience required (5:12-14).	Obedience required (Heb.5:8-9; Jm.2:24).
6. Cure appropriated through baptism (in the LXX the word translated 'dip' in the A.V., 5:14, is translated 'baptise').	Salvation from mortality only for those baptised (1 Pet.3:20-21; cf. Gal.3:27).
7. Made clean (5:14),	Made clean morally (Eph.5:26).
8. Flesh restored like a little child (5:14).	Fashioned like unto his glorious body (Phil.3:21). Unending vigour of youth (cf. Isa.40:31).
9. From the human point of view Naaman went to Elisha. From the Divine point of view, Elisha was sent to Naaman (cf. Lk.4:27).	From the human point of view the Gentile seeks God. From the Divine point of view, God is "calling out a people for his name" (Acts 15:14).

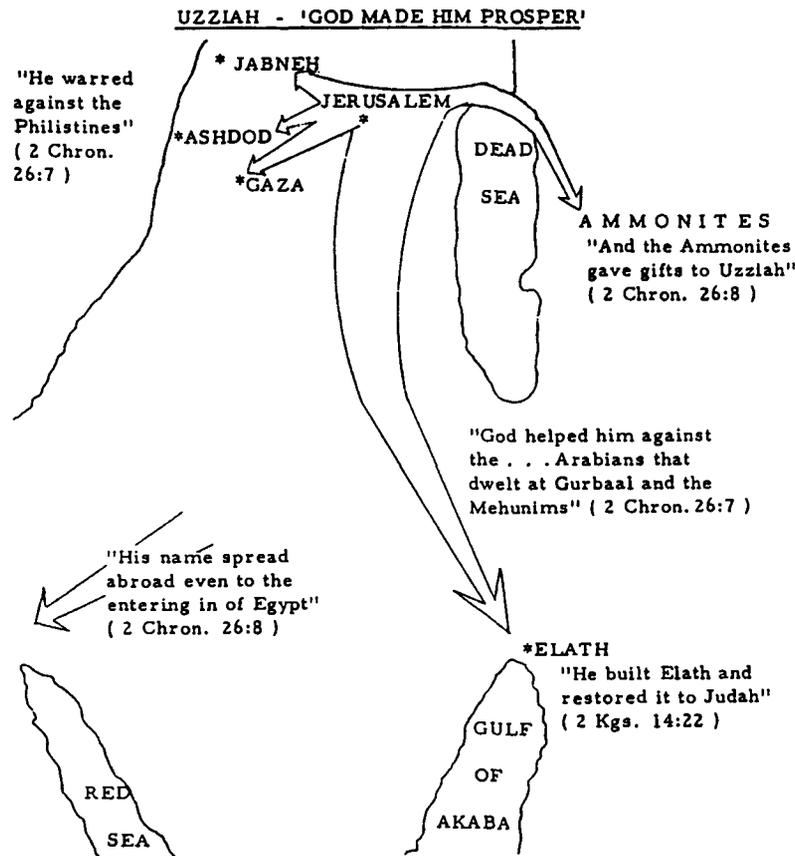
The connection between leprosy and sin is apparent once the prophetic character of Naaman's healing is realised. Naaman represents leprous Gentiles, stricken with sin. His response to the cleansing work of Israel's God was prophetic of Gentile response to the Gospel through the ministry of Christ and the apostles.

The connection between leprosy and sin is further documented by the fact that the deceit of Gehazi was rewarded by the infliction of Naaman's leprosy, "Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cleave to you, and to your descendants for ever. So he went out from his presence a leper, as white as snow." (2 Kl.5:27, R.S.V.). The fact that "he went out...as white as snow" is indicative of the miraculous nature of the infliction. Leprosy usually is a very slow disease, smouldering for years before the symptoms show.

**NAAMAN: THE LEPROUS GENTILE**



**UZZIAH: the leprous usurper of the priesthood (2 Chron.26)**



Uzziah was one of Israel's illustrious kings. "As long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper." (v.5). He successfully smashed all opposition from the surrounding Gentile powers, the Philistines, Ammonites and Arabians, until his name was "spread abroad [even] to the entering in of Egypt; for he strengthened [himself] exceedingly." (v.8). On the home front, he made provisions for his cattle and crops, and maintained an army of over 300,000 men, ingeniously equipped for war, so that he was "marvellously helped, till he was strong." (v.15). His disastrous end is recorded as follows:

"But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to [his] destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense. And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the LORD, [that were] valiant men: And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said

unto him, [It appertaineth] not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests of the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither [shall it be] for thine honour from the LORD God. Then Uzziah was wroth, and [had] a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, from beside the incense altar. And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he [was] leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hastened to go out, because the LORD had smitten him. And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, [being] a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the LORD: and Jotham his son [was] over the king's house, judging the people of the land." (26:16-21).

Leprosy in the forehead was the worst kind of leprosy. The instructions of the Law were explicit: "He is a leprous man, he [is] unclean: the priest shall pronounce him utterly unclean; his plague [is] in his head. And the leper in whom the plague [is], his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean. All the days wherein the plague [shall be] in him he shall be defiled; he [is] unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp [shall] his habitation [be]." (Lev.13:44-46).

As with Miriam, the disease suddenly appeared and was Divinely inflicted. A man who had enjoyed great fame and power, spent the rest of his life as a leper, outside the camp of his people, and debarred from the Tabernacle privileges afforded the lowliest Israelite. His tragic life is a practical illustration of the proverb: "Better...is he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city." (Prov.16:32, R.S.V.). Can the association of leprosy with sin be missed in the life of king Uzziah?

**LEPROSY AS IT RELATES TO THE WORK OF CHRIST**

**The Suffering Servant: An Esteemed Leper** Isa.52:13 - 53:12.

The Suffering Servant Prophecies have their primary fulfilment in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is proven by the many N.T. commentaries. Consider the following:

- |        |     |           |                        |
|--------|-----|-----------|------------------------|
| Isa.53 | :1  | quoted in | Jn.12:38; Rom.10:16;   |
|        | :4  | " "       | Matt.8:17; 1 Pet.2:24; |
|        | :7  | " "       | Acts 8:32;             |
|        | :9  | " "       | 1 Pet.2:22.            |
|        | :12 | " "       | Mk.15:28; Lk.22:37.    |

Students of prophecy will, in addition, see many allusions to the life of Hezekiah throughout this section of Isaiah. This is a common feature of many of the O.T. prophecies relating to the work of the Messiah. There are primary and secondary fulfilments.

It is not often realised, however, that the image of the leper runs throughout the Suffering Saviour prophecy. This feature of the prophecy is somewhat veiled by the A.V. translation. [One commentator, realising this fact, has written as follows: "The English translations have masked the leprous figure, that stands out so clearly in the original hebrew." G.A.Smith, 'The Book of Isaiah', 'The Expositor's Bible', Vol.2, P.368].

Consider the following:

1. The hebrew word 'naga', translated 'stricken' in the following two passages is the same hebrew word used for the leprous plague in over 50 occurrences in Lev.13.

"...we did esteem him stricken...of God" (v.4)

"...for the transgression of my people was he stricken" (v.8)

2. The hebrew word 'rapha', translated 'healed' in v.5, "...with his stripes we are healed", is the word used for the healing of the leper in Lev.13:18,37; 14:3.

3. The Suffering Servant is depicted as a leprous outcast. Although the leper was required to cover his upper lip (or beard), cf. Lev.13:45, the Servant's leprosy was so repulsive that the viewers hid their faces: "and we hid as it were [our] faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not." (v.3).

4. The corruption of leprosy is implied in 52:14 in the use of the hebrew word 'mischath', translated 'marred', but which also means 'corruption' (Yg). "His visage was so marred, more than any man..." (52:14).

5. Further allusions to sickness occur in 53:3, where the hebrew word 'choli' translated 'grief', means 'sickness, weakness, pain' (Yg). Similarly, the hebrew word 'chalah' translated 'grief' in 53:10 means 'to make sick' (Yg). When placed together, the allusions to leprosy are impressive indeed! Why is leprosy associated with the Servant to whom God invites the attention: "Behold the man"? Four explanations have been offered:

i. The reference to leprosy refers to Hezekiah's boil, elephantiasis (a type of leprosy), and not to the Messiah himself.

ii. Jesus was an actual leper.

iii. That the Messiah did not actually have leprosy, but was esteemed as if he were a leper, i.e., he was regarded as a social outcast (born of fornication, cf. Jn.8:48).

iv. That Messiah is depicted as possessing leprosy because he was born of a woman, inheriting the full effects of Adam's transgression - mortality, with its attendant weaknesses and proneness to sin.

Each of these positions must now be considered:

i. **The leprosy allusions apply only to Hezekiah.**

This interpretation does not account for the fact that Isa.52 & 53 are either quoted or alluded to many times in the N.T. not in connection with Hezekiah, but with the Lord Jesus Christ. The allusions to leprosy cannot be confined to Hezekiah. Hezekiah had a boil (heb. 'shechin', 'burning, inflammation' Yg). There is no evidence that the boil was leprous.

ii. **That Jesus was an actual leper.**

At the time of the early writers of the Apostacy, e.g., Origen, Tertullian, it was held by Christendom that Jesus was an actual leper. [The Jewish Rabbinical writers share this position. One of the titles given to the Messiah is 'The Leprous', "the King Messiah being represented as seated in the entrance to Rome, surrounded by and relieving all misery and disease in fulfilment of Isa.53:4." Edersheim, 'The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah', p.382.] This fact is reflected in the art of the period in which the Saviour is depicted as repulsive and hideous in appearance. The following quotations are noteworthy: "His body...was small, and ill-shapen and ignoble." (Origen, quoted in F.Farrar, 'The Life of Christ', p.79.) "His body...had no human handsomeness, much less any celestial splendour." (Tertullian, *ibid.*,

p.79). Jerome's translation, the 'Vulgate' (approx. 400 A.D.), rendered the word for 'stricken' in the A.V. of Isa.53:4 as 'leprous'.

A change of view, however, occurred with the passing of time. Augustine, a venerated 'saint' by Romanists, regarded Christ as 'fairer than the children of men'. The artists Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci followed this trend and depicted Christ as a long-haired person (which he certainly was not), 'beautiful' in appearance.

Jesus could not have been an actual leper, otherwise the mothers would not have brought their little children to him to be blessed (Mk.10:13-16). One has only to recollect how abhorrent leprosy was regarded by the Law and Jewry at the time of Christ, to dismiss this interpretation. It was probable that Jesus was a muscular carpenter's son, not very different from any other man, since he had to be pointed out by Judas to enable others to recognise him (Matt.26:48). Undue importance can be given to his appearance.



#### CHRIST'S HEALING OF LEPERS

"And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth [his] hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them."

(Matt.8:2-4)

### **A sign of the Messiah**

A study of leprosy, its diagnosis in Lev.13 and its cleansing in Lev.14, provides valuable information for an appreciation of the great work of the Messiah. It is important to note that the cleansing of leprosy was an evident sign of the Messiah (cf. Lk.17:14; Matt.11:5). Once again this fact implies that leprosy was regarded as humanly incurable. There would be little point in a 'sign' in which there was a real possibility that the 'cure' could be attributed to natural causes.

"Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?" pondered John the Baptist (Lk.7:20). Jesus replied, "Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed..." (Lk.7:22). Similarly, when the twelve were sent out, it was with the express instructions, "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead..." (Matt.10:8). Such cures would serve to confirm the word (Mk.16:20).

### **Ceremonial defilement not contracted**

Leprosy was the only disease which resulted in the victim being placed outside the encampment and forbidden access to Tabernacle worship (Num.5:2-3). So abhorrent was the disease that a victim with leprosy in his forehead was required to partially cover his face and call, "Unclean, unclean," to warn passers-by of the disease (Lev.13:42-46). There are two recorded occurrences of Jesus healing lepers. These are found in Lk.17:12-19 (ten lepers cleansed), and Matt.8:1-4.

The healing of the leper in Matt.8:1-4, showed the Divine power which was in the Lord Jesus Christ. He healed a man, not only leprous, but "full of leprosy" (Lk.5:12). Rather than contracting ceremonial defilement, the power vested in Jesus effected a cleansing without himself contracting defilement! [The primary reason for the isolation of the leper was not that the disease might be transmitted. Rather there was a spiritual intention in this requirement. For this reason, the defilement is called 'ceremonial'].]

The leper did not have to go to the priest to be cleansed, as the Law of Moses required (Lev.14:2). The leper's faith had secured his cleansing before he got to the priest, "Immediately his leprosy was cleansed" (Matt.8:3).

Imagine the surprise of the priests when confronted by a man healed of his leprosy! The healing effected a total cleansing, the only reason for going to the priest was "for a testimony unto them". As Jesus said, "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father [is] in me, and I in him." (Jn.10:37-38).

### **The cleansing of the leper: and enacted parable**

Christ shared the leprous condition of those he came to save, in-so-far as he had a nature identical to theirs. The Suffering Servant, however, is also a redeemer. He could save the actual leper, the sinner, and restore him "every whit whole".

The cleansing of the leper was really an enacted parable. It showed the Messiah's work of saving the lost. The leper realised only too well, the hopelessness of his plight. He fell on his face and besought the Lord, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." (Matt.8:2). Similarly, the candidate for eternal life must acknowledge his plight as having no hope and "without God in the world" (Eph.2:12). His salvation rests wholly on the grace of God. His cure can only be effected upon obedient faith.