

AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Leviticus 13–14; Luke
5:12–16; 17:11–19

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Then one of them,
when he saw that
he was healed,
turned back, prais-
ing God with a loud
voice.

(Luke 17:15)

Daily Bible Readings

M	Jun. 28	Isa. 56:1–8	God Welcomes
T	Jun. 29	Ruth 4:3–6, 13–15	Naomi's Sorrow
W	Jun. 30	Lev. 13:1–8	Symptoms and Leprosy
Th	Jul. 1	2 Kgs. 7:3–11	Lepers Share Th
F	Jul. 2	John 4:39–42	Many Samarita Savior
Sa	Jul. 3	Luke 17:1–10	Doing What Ne

STEPPING INTO THE WORD

Leviticus is a difficult book to read and interpret in relation to the two stories of the healing in Luke's Gospel. Filled as it is with religious rituals about personal and corporate ethical conduct, regulations about animal sacrifice, it is hard to find guidance in it for readers in the twenty-first century to understand leprosy in scientific terms.

Nevertheless, even though Leviticus is not on the best-seller list, it is not wise to dismiss it as a work of no value. Noth observes in his classic commentary, *Leviticus*, important information about the living variety of the development of the system of worship in Israel. Like other Old Testament writings, it must be read with discretion to be understood, especially in relation to the New Testament and the Christian faith. For example, says nothing about the prohibition of consulting mediums and wizards enumerated in Leviticus 19:31, but he does cite the commandment in Leviticus 19:34 about loving our neighbors as ourselves (clear that even though he may have ignored the rules about making sacrifices, the teachings about loving aliens and strangers were critically important in Leviticus 19:33–34).

1. Martin Noth, *Leviticus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 7.

In Luke's accounts of the lepers, for example, Jesus refers to the established process of verifying a healing when he orders one who is made clean to go and show himself to the priest, make offerings, and provide proof of healing to those who are watching (Luke 5:14; Lev. 14:1ff.). As we shall see, other texts in Leviticus are also critical to understanding various New Testament texts and contemporary theological and ethical debates today.

Dear Lord, help us truly treat others as we would be treated. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

Leviticus 13:45–46; Luke 17:11–19

13:45 The person who has the leprous disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be disheveled; and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, "Unclean, unclean." ⁴⁶He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.

Luke 17:11 On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" ¹⁴When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? ¹⁸Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

HE TOUCHED THEM

Luke includes two accounts of Jesus healing lepers through physical contact. The first miracle in Luke's Gospel, in Luke 5:12–16, follows the call of the disciples, but it appears in Mark 1:40–45 and Matthew 8:1–4 in a different order. The second narrative about the healing of ten lepers (17:11–19) is only found in Luke's Gospel and may come from his special source (called "L"), one which also contains other unique stories like the parables of the Good Samaritan (10:25–37), the Prodigal Son (15:11–32), the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19–31), and several other texts.

Most biblical scholars think that the Leviticus 13–14 and various New Testament accounts were previously believed, what is known as Hansen's disease or *Mycobacterium leprae*, one of the skin diseases. *Mycobacterium leprae* is a bacterium that attacks the skin and mucous membranes, causing large, painless lumps and deformities. Today it can be caught in an early stage before it results in the loss of nerves of fingers, toes, and other parts of the body. In the twenty-first century it is only found in Africa and Asia, it still affects thousands of people.

Regardless of the exact diagnosis of the disease, the Gospel accounts make clear that it was a serious condition. In Leviticus 13 and 14, it could cause chronic inflammation of the body, and symptoms could include sores and boils. People suffering from these diseases had to be examined in detail by the priest to determine their presence. If it was determined that a patient was indeed suffering from the disease, the medical and social proscriptions were enforced. The person who has the leprous disease shall wear a torn garment, let the hair of his head be disheveled; and he shall cry out, 'Unclean, unclean,' on his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean,' whenever he goes out. He shall be unclean as long as he has the disease; he is to live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. The Israelites believed that these diseases were extremely contagious. If someone else touched the leper or his or her clothing, he had to undergo a strict decontamination process. This is why the lepers in Luke 17:12 are described as crying out, 'Have mercy on us, Lord. We know you are far from distance.'

One important aside about the first healing in Luke 5:12–16, Jesus chooses to touch the leper, not just to keep a distance as he does in some other narratives. In Luke 5:13, Jesus says, "He touched his hand" and "touched him" (v. 13). Apparently, Jesus was concerned about catching the disease himself. This raises an interesting question: In order to keep others from becoming infected, did Jesus go to the priest to be decontaminated?

? Imagine how physically and emotionally difficult it would be for lepers to survive in Jesus' day. How did they survive? What lessons can we learn from the pandemic coronavirus in 2020?

NEXPECTED GRATITUDE AND ATTITUDE

In the second healing story about the ten lepers there is an interesting incident where one of the healed men comes back to praise God and to fall prostrate before Jesus' feet. He also makes the effort to thank Jesus, but more than that, he is able to see that God is at work in him. All ten of the men had the courage and the faith to approach Jesus in the first place, even though they had to do it somewhat surreptitiously, remaining outside the main crowd for fear of being ostracized or being driven away. Their cry "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" indicates that they hoped for more than physical recuperation. They want to be restored to society and to God. When the single man comes back, he is the only one who shows gratitude, and like the story of the healing of the hemorrhaging woman in Matthew 9:18-26, a connection is made between faith and healing (see lesson 3).

More to the point, however, is the fact that the one healed man who worshipped him was a Samaritan. As Jesus puts it, considering the other nine, "Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" His comment indicates the deep rift between Jews and Samaritans. Referring to themselves as "the keepers of the law," Samaritans placed their temple on Mount Gerazim rather than Jerusalem. The story of the Samaritan woman in John 4 shows how great the animosity was when the author inserts an editorial comment, "Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans" (John 4:8). The account of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 also verifies the impression given in 17:11-19: although most Jews did not expect God to honor those outside of the Jewish faith, the good Samaritan and the healed leper both showed that their faith was stronger than would be expected. When Jesus marvels that the good Samaritan had more faith than a Levite or a priest, he asks his listener which one of them (Luke 10:36-37) was truly a neighbor to the man accosted by robbers. The answer: "The one who showed him mercy."

The depiction of Samaritans in both accounts in Luke draw us back to the teachings in Leviticus 19 about loving neighbors, and loving aliens as ourselves (19:17, 33-34). Neither of the texts in Leviticus or the teachings of Jesus allow us to stereotype those who differ from us in health, religion, or ethnic origin. Leviticus 19:33-34 strictly forbids categorizing others as outsiders or unworthy of God's care: "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with

you shall be to you as the citizen among you, not alien as yourself."



Do we ever fail to thank God for the mercy of Christ? Do we ever reject others because of our prejudices?

STEPPING INTO THE WORLD


In his commentary on Luke, Joel Green makes connections between our lives and those of the ancients. Luke lays a clever trap for Jews (or Christians) who see themselves as being in privileged positions. The story that the man who returned to Jesus in 17:11–18 and still received healing and commendation demonstrates that our physical conditions and relationships do not determine our relationship to God. God's love is much deeper than the condition or color of our skin. A holistic approach to the whole person helps us see that Jesus' healing presence is a gift to all of God's people. The story reminds us that Jesus, as Green says, is a healer of healing in the midst of the long-standing divisions that divide us today.

Consider the ongoing debate in the United States about immigration. Instead of calling for compassion, fleeing from tyranny and political oppression, and helping "drug dealers," perhaps Christians should reconsider their privileged position as Americans and think of the needs of the foreigners or the way Leviticus defines aliens and foreigners. Perhaps we should reconsider the words of Jesus in Luke's version of the parable of the faithful servants: "From everyone to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded" (Luke 12:48).

Consider the damage that name-calling does, socially and spiritually. In Matthew's version of the parable of the Mount, for example, Jesus implies that if someone calls a brother or sister (or a neighbor?) a name like "fool," they are liable to judgment and to hell fire (Matt. 5:22). Name-calling is a form of character assassination that is dehumanizing. No other person appear worthless and less than human. When Jesus calls the leper a "foreigner," he

1. Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke: The New International Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 618–27.

prejudices of society and the heartless ways in which people different from us are often treated. How are we to be regarded by Jesus if we negatively label people from other countries, who have physical or mental difficulties, have a faith that is different from our own, are LGBTQ, or have a contrary political philosophy? As Ephesians 2:13–22 states, Jesus truly is the one who unites us through his presence and breaks down the walls that divide us. Jesus changes religious and social barriers so that we are no longer strangers and aliens but “one new humanity” (v. 15).

 **Do you recognize name-calling and labeling in your community that violates Jesus’ teaching? Have you ever been guilty of such things yourself?**

SCRIPTURE NOTES

The following notes provide additional information about today’s Scripture that may be helpful for your study.

1. The lepers’ shared misery brought them together despite their religious and ethnic differences. In this light, the fact that Jesus finds them on the borderlands between Samaria and Galilee is evocative of their liminal state: They are literally marginalized by their disease and forge their own “unclean” community on the borderlands.
2. Leviticus 13:34–46 emphasizes two principles of importance: (a) The necessity to guard the general health of the community; and (b) that no injustice be done to the individual in the interest of the community.
3. The leprous person was required to behave as one who mourned for the dead or for some great and public calamity. He was to tear his clothes as a demonstration of extreme sorrow; shave his head; and wear a covering over his upper lip with his jaws tied with a linen cloth.
4. Lepers were required to cry, “Unclean, unclean,” when anyone approached in order to avoid contaminating a non-infected person.
5. The ten lepers met Jesus as he was entering the village. They were not allowed to enter the village while they were afflicted with leprosy (Lev. 13:46, Num. 5:2–3).
6. The lone Samaritan’s expression of gratitude was especially remarkable to the Jews. They considered the Samaritans wicked, while Jews considered themselves righteous.