

IN THE VALLEY OF THE LEPERS A Devotional Meditation from

Leviticus 14:1-15:33; 2 Kings 7:3-20; Exodus 29:19-21;
John 5:19-20, 14:9-15; James 1:26-27, 4:1-12

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In the gospels we learn that Messiah Yeshua wants His disciples to do the same things He did, which means doing the same things His Father does. That's what we understand from Yeshua's statement that He never said or did anything He had not first heard or seen the Father saying and doing.

If we want to know what our Heavenly Father is doing now, we have to find out what He has been doing since the foundation of the world. According to Moses and the Prophets, our Creator's business is all about redeeming, reconciling, and restoring. That's why He emphasizes taking care of the most vulnerable in our midst: the widow, the orphan, the foreigner, the poor, the sick, the weak. In other words, all those people who wouldn't otherwise have a voice in the community, and whose lives, liberty, and property are easily trampled underfoot by the beautiful and desirable people, also known as the strong, the wealthy, and the powerful. Those are the people we simultaneously admire, fear, and hate. We admire them because we want to be like them; we fear them because of what they can do to us; and we hate them because we are not them, and because we do not have what they have.

Is this attitude a true imitation of Messiah? I think not. What I read about Him tells me He spent a lot of time with those poor, sick, weak, and outcast people. We read about Yeshua healing lepers, the ones everyone agrees were the outcasts of the day. Their deficiencies were visible to everyone. How, for example, could one hide an inflamed rash covering the whole face, or rotted fingers, or the stench of decaying flesh? There were many others, however, also considered outcasts by the "normal" people of the day – the ones the gospels call "tax collectors and sinners."

That's such a nice, antiseptic phrase, but what does it mean? As I look at society of our day, knowing that there is nothing new under the sun, I can hazard a few guesses about who those tax collectors and sinners would have been. They would include:

- Petty thieves, gang members, and crime bosses.
- Sexually promiscuous people who may or may not have been prostitutes.
- Gender confused people, such as men who wore women's clothing, and women who had attractions to other women.
- People of less-than-acceptable social standards, such as the hygiene challenged who rarely bathed, the annoyingly awkward who couldn't stop talking, and the intellectually challenged who could never understand simple instructions.



*"Leper on the day of his cleansing,"
Simon Fokke, after a drawing Louis
Fabritius Dubourg, 1722-1784,
[Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.](https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-1000)*

- The people (especially men) who could never hold a job or exhibit any form of ambition.
- The people (especially women) who exhibited too much ambition and were never satisfied with the status quo.
- People of questionable ethnicity, like the Samaritans, or like any ethnic group other than our own.
- People with abnormal theology and doctrine, again like the Samaritans, or maybe like those groups we call cults, or any denomination other than our own.
- The chronically ill, like that woman with the issue of blood, or maybe like the woman in our church with fibromyalgia, or the guy with Crohn's disease.
- The elderly who were constantly cranky because everything hurt and they couldn't remember from one minute to the next what they were trying to do.

Maybe one didn't have to have leprosy to be excluded from society like a leper. In fact, it seems the entire society consisted of outcasts. Some, like those lepers, never fit in anywhere, but no one fit in everywhere. That's why our Messiah went to anyone and everyone who would receive Him, offering the hope of redemption, reconciliation, and restoration, just like His Father has been doing from the foundation of the world. He never offered a ticket to acceptance into polite society, but He did offer exactly the thing lepers need most: the chance to live normal lives and fulfill their God-ordained destiny.

It's a curious thing about lepers. The Torah tells us about the terrible disease they suffer, and that they must be separated from society so their infection doesn't spread. However, it never says the disease is incurable. There is no cure specified, but there is an elaborate protocol for readmittance to society once the cure has happened. That protocol requires submission to the priests, the very ones who would have diagnosed their leprosy in the first place. Then there is the seven-day separation for purification, and then presentation of lambs as sin and trespass offerings. This is where a peculiar ceremony takes place:

Then he is to slaughter the male lamb in the place where they slaughter the sin offering and the burnt offering, in the Sanctuary area. For the sin offering like the trespass offering belongs to the *kohen* [priest]. It is most holy. Then the *kohen* is to take some of the blood of the trespass offering and dab it on the tip of the right ear of the one being cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. The *kohen* should then take some of the pint of oil and pour it into the palm of his own left hand. He is to dip his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand and sprinkle some of the oil with his finger seven times before *ADONAI*. Then the *kohen* should dab some of the rest of the oil that is in his hand on the tip of the right ear of the one being cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot, on top of the blood of the trespass offering. From what remains of the oil that is in his hand, the *kohen* is to dab on the head of the one being cleansed. In this way the *kohen* will make atonement for him before *ADONAI*.

Leviticus 14:13-18 TLV

This cleansing ceremony for the leper is very much like the consecration ceremony for the priests. They, too, have blood of the sacrificial offering placed on their right ears,

thumbs, and toes, and they, too, are anointed with oil. It's almost like the cleansed leper is being readmitted not only to society, but to the priesthood.

Which, of course, makes sense when we realize Israel – the same Israel into which we are adopted through the atoning blood of Israel's Messiah – is a kingdom of priests.

Come to think of it, every single one of us are lepers living in exclusion from the community of heaven. Some of us have manifestations of this disease that are less odious than others, but none of us can gain admittance to heavenly society. Our infection is too contagious and too deadly to be allowed to spread. It has already infected one third of the heavenly host, and from them it spread to us.

The most tragic thing about this infection is not that we can't cure it ourselves, but that we so easily make it worse. We who enjoy a measure of acceptability tend to deepen the wounds of those who are less acceptable. This includes not only criminals and other outcasts from our polite congregational circles, but also the ones still in our midst who suffer grievously because they don't fit in with the expected norms of polite Christian society. The truth is, we're a society of walking wounded, of lepers who cannot acknowledge the creeping infection in our midst. Maybe the best thing for all of us living in this valley of the lepers is to stop judging one another by our lofty self-imposed standards, and start listening with sympathetic ears. Maybe that way we can help ease each other's pain while we wait for our final redemption.