

LEVITICUS

Lesson 20 - Chapter 13

Before we get back into Leviticus 13, let me take a moment to make a couple of observations which, I hope, help to keep us on track and keep what it is we are studying in proper context and perspective.

First I'd like to reinforce why it is that studying the Torah, and especially as it concerns Leviticus, is so important for us. For those of us who were saved and brought up in the traditional church environment the world of Torah and the Old Testament sounds almost like a different Bible than the world of the New Testament. I contend that that is because we read the ending before reading the beginning and the middle. It was as though we went to a theatre, saw only the final act of a 3 act play, and went back many times to see that 3rd act.....without ever viewing acts 1 and 2. And when one does that the conclusions one draws can be anywhere from incomplete to several degrees off the mark of what was intended by the author.

Well we're now finally giving serious study to the opening scenes of God's Word to mankind and in some cases it is establishing a context that is somewhat different than we might have expected. For some Believers this is quite uncomfortable and a few will lash out in fear that cherished manmade doctrines could be compromised. But, that discomfort is something we must fight through, or we're just not going to absorb all the wonder that is there for us to absorb in the New Testament.

I want to assure all of you that the further we get into the Torah, the greater your faith will grow; and the greater will you understand why Yehoveh sent His Messiah to save us. What will be challenged is not our faith in the Word of God, or in Jesus Christ, but rather **some** of the doctrines of men that we have all been taught. The book of John tells us that Yeshua is the Word, and the Word is God. Every Christian knows that "the Word" is just another term for Scriptures or Bible. But what "word" was John talking about? Believers rarely stop to think that the Word of God for John, and Paul, and Peter and all the rest of Christ's disciples was the OT, primarily the Torah. There was no such thing as "other Scripture" than the OT for at least 150 years after Jesus' death on the cross. There was no such thing as a New Testament until around 200 A.D. So as far as what John was directly referring to in his book as the meaning of "the Word", it was ONLY the Old Testament. Jesus, Yeshua, was the Torah.

Now let me state before I am misconstrued that I certainly accept the New Testament as God breathed and part of God's Word. But to make the New Testament as the only surviving remnant or still-valid portion of God's Word is a grievous error. Further it is intellectually inaccurate (if not dishonest) to say that any reference to the Word or to Scripture in the New Testament was referring only to itself. Not one NT writer had any inkling that a century or so

after their writings that panels of church leaders would get together and declare the epistles, gospels, and apocryphal letters as new Scripture.

Jesus put all this in a way that I would like to see actually become part of the creed that Torah Class endeavors to follow; and it is this:

NAS John 5:46 *"For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me. 47 "But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"*

In John 5 Yeshua is in the Temple, on Sabbath, talking to some Jews. Now these Jews would argue vehemently that they CERTAINLY knew Moses and what he wrote. But, in fact they only thought they did. What they knew most, and what colored the Torah scripture they read, were their doctrines and traditions. They would try to pound the Scripture into a mold created by Tradition. Christianity has done the same thing for 1800 years. We establish doctrines and then make the Scriptures read in such a way to validate those doctrines. Scriptures that don't validate the doctrines are left out of the argument, or more often, verses are taken completely out of context and ascribed to some meaning about which they have nothing to do.

Yeshua is telling all who will listen that the Torah of Moses is the foundation for understanding everything that follows it (including the New Covenant) means. How, Yeshua says, can you possibly believe MY words, if you won't believe Moses' words....FIRST? Understanding Moses is important not just to Jews but also to gentiles. So, I ask you, how do you think we can possibly understand what Jesus was MEANING by the things He said, if we not only don't understand what Moses was meaning, but have never even seriously read his words? Or worse yet we discount those words, say they are just a burden that has been lifted from us and discarded by the very one who has just said that FIRST you must believe Moses? Hopefully Torah Class is on the way to remedying some of that.

Second matter; it is particularly hard for Americans to read the Torah without bristling at some point, because it constantly shows Yehoveh destroying individuals, even entire nations, for the sake of His elect group as a whole, and for the sake of His purposes.

I've traveled much of the world (and many of you more than I have) and in my experience I've not encountered a culture that is more individualistic than America. We look at things based on the rights of a single person being most important. And so we Americans view the Bible through that lens. It is hard for us to read Leviticus, especially, and see multitudes of innocent animals sacrificed; for otherwise innocent people who get a skin disease to be ostracized from the community; for priests to be burned up by God who apparently did little more than botch a ritual procedure; and all this at Yehoveh's specific command. Yet God's holiness....which was represented by His Tabernacle and by the nation of Israel.....would tolerate no threat. God's holiness, and therefore the holiness of His people, is so preeminent that individuals and their families often suffered or died in order that purity would not be harmed or holiness defiled. The discomfort of individuals was not going to be tolerated at the expense of jeopardizing the spiritual well being of His holy nation and His Kingdom.

If we want the truth then we must view God in the context of who He actually is and not in the context of what we'd like to have. The God we see in Torah is the truth, just as the God we

see in the New Testament is the truth. One has not given way to the other; they are one in the same. Yehoveh has not discarded some of his attributes in favor of others; the sum of the parts paints the best picture of the whole.

So let's get back to the Word and get some more of the picture. We were in Leviticus 13, and the study of tzara'at.....serious skin diseases that causes one to become ritually unclean. When we ended our lesson last time, we were discussing this state of Limbo (again, limbo is my word, not the Scriptures'), a kind of no-man's land, that a person who was suspected of having tzara'at, but it was not yet confirmed, found himself in. He was not put outside the camp as the unclean typically were, however, he was considered unclean while in that period of waiting for the decision to be rendered. Guilty until proved innocent, so to speak.

Yet, we must recognize that these laws in Leviticus about tzara'at and ritual impurity are but a physical demonstration of a spiritual reality that exists even today: the unclean are seen by God as unfit to have a relationship with Him or with the community of Yehoveh. The unclean are in a hopeless state UNLESS they repent and accept Yeshua. Today, the unclean are unbelievers. This is because even though all people are born common and clean, our sin natures lead to our sinning and therefore to uncleanness.

How often do we hear, even in some excellent Bible teaching churches, that God's love is too great to damn everyone to Hell and eternal separation from Himself who does not submit to His Sonthat His holy back surely could not be turned on those who live a good and moral life, give to charity and care for the poor, are nice and generous to a fault, even spiritually oriented, but cannot bring themselves to make Yeshua the Lord of their lives.....surely a loving and merciful God would not do such a thing. The God of the NT is no less severe than the God of the OT because He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. You are either clean and holy and in the Kingdom of God.....or you are unclean and unholy and out of His Kingdom. And that judgment is made purely on whether or not you trust Christ.

Let's read Leviticus 13 from verse 1 through 17.

READ LEVITICUS 13:1 - 17

Chapter 13 is another of those few times in the Torah when Yehoveh speaks to BOTH Aaron and Moses. And, in verse 2, a list of general symptoms of skin disease is given, such that anyone having any of these is to come to a priest for examination. Rashes, swellings, hair and skin discolorations that are not normal are each a cause for concern.

Basically the idea is that if the hair in an affected area has turned white, or if the rash seems to go deeper than just the surface of the skin, or if the lesion leaves a depression in the skin deeper than the surrounding skin area then serious tzara'at is to be suspected. But it is the priest...not the individual who has the disease..... who must determine it; because it is the priest whose job it is to distinguish between clean and unclean.

Of course there are some stages of certain skin diseases that make it hard to determine just

how serious the matter is. So if an affected area on the body has started to turn white, but the hair in the area is not YET white, then the person is usually isolated but not sent out of the camp. At this point the person is in a kind of limbo (my word, not the Bible's), until 7 more days pass and he is re-examined by the priest. If the situation has **not** worsened he is quarantined for yet another 7 days and re-examined yet again. If after 14 days the affliction has lessened he is declared clean and can return to his home. But if the afflicted area enlarges after having been declared clean he must present himself to the priest yet again.....and in all likelihood will be declared UNCLEAN..... meaning, he will be sent outside the camp for as long as the disease persists.

Much like the new mother who gave birth and goes first through a time of **greater** impurity and then a time of **lesser** impurity....yet unclean in both cases.... the person that is in limbo awaiting the outcome of a diagnosis is in a state of impurity....unclean. But it is of a lesser degree so he is NOT put outside the camp; however he may NOT live in the tent or home of his family or with the general population and certainly can have no part of religious ritual during this time. Rashi, a great Hebrew sage, said that there was a special tent or home for these limbo-people, near the outskirts of the camp, but still not outside of the camp.

Though the Bible doesn't necessarily equate the two, it was generally assumed by the Israelites that a skin disease, if diagnosed as tzara'at, was essentially an outward mark of an inward and hidden spiritual condition known only to God. That is that this person had committed some kind of offense against Yehoveh and was therefore being punished by having his sinful condition exposed in the form of a skin disease. Several weeks ago we discussed how some sacrifices were performed if a person should start feeling guilty, but was not sure what it is he might have done. When we connect that with the concept of the Hebrews' belief that tzara'at was a punishment from Yehoveh for a secret or unknown trespass of some kind, then we see why the more nervous and insecure among the Israelites probably offered a LOT of Zevah sacrifices to atone for something that might result in tzara'at if they didn't do these rituals and atone for their trespass.

Yet we must never think that that was the purpose God intended, not even in the OT days.....Christ makes clear that we must NEVER assume that (for instance) someone's illness or misfortune is directly associated to a trespass, a sin, that they might have committed. Obviously, as Believers, we are aware that when sin entered the world so did death and disease; and as Believers we are not immune to death and disease because these outer shells, our bodies, are just the same as the non-Believers run around in. So it is fair to say that there is some kind of relationship between sin and sickness. Yet, as is pointed out time and again in the Bible, one cannot and should not make the judgment that a person's health can be directly correlated to how good or bad of a life he has led, or that we can blame a person's disease on behavior that is inferior to our own.

The Israelites, just out of Egypt, were a VERY superstitious people. So were the Israelites who first entered Canaan, and those who first formed a sovereign nation of Israel, and those who were exiled to Assyria and later to Babylon, and so on. It is not much of a leap for us to understand the horrible social stigma that was carried with contracting tzara'at, and being put outside the camp. As devastating as it was to be declared ritually unclean, thereby separated

from all relationship with Yehoveh, you were now a social outcast.....and as far as the healthy Israelites were concerned you deserved it. For the family of the afflicted person it was equally devastating because the outcast's condition reflected on them. If it was the man of the family who contracted tzara'at it could mean poverty for his family. If it was the mother, and wife, it was going to mean their separation from even an infant child, possibly for life.

Just as the first 8 verses of chapter 13 dealt with newly discovered instances of skin disease, verses 9-17 deal with CHRONIC cases of skin disease....some translations might say "old", which is a bit confusing.....but it means ongoing or reoccurring. So the idea is that someone may have a skin disease that is ongoing but has been determined NOT to be serious and therefore the person has NOT been declared unclean. Or he may have HAD tzara'at, he was put outside the camp, it healed, and he was restored to purity and therefore has been allowed to continue his life as normal. BUT.....because some of the symptoms are persistent, or it has returned, it must be re-examined by the priest in order to insure that it has not worsened and become tzara'at, thereby requiring quarantine.

So, for chronic skin afflictions, a little different set of criteria is called for. In a nutshell, if raw (exposed) flesh is present it means the disease has not healed properly and it is to be considered tzara'at. NO 7-day period of limbo, after which there is another examination, is called for. In the case of chronic skin disease you are immediately put outside the camp if tzara'at is indicated. Most of our translations talk about the flesh turning white and if it has turned white then it is a GOOD indication.....that healing is taking place. This is a little confusing because whereas in previous verses the skin turning white was a BAD indication (it was Leucoderma) as it was involving a loss of skin pigment, it was a sign of disease. In this case, WHITE skin is referring to newly grown and healthy skin, a sign of healing, and so the person is declared "clean" and sent home.

Let's move on to verses 18-46.

READ LEVITICUS 13:18-46

These verses continue with the diagnosis of skin disease on people; and these conditions are ones that seem to arise as a sort of secondary infection. That is perhaps there was a burn that never healed correctly, and now it is infected. Or the person had some other condition for a time and now these recognizable skin disease traits of tzara'at begin to show up. We're not going to go over the long list of fine points contained in these 28 verses as they simply define in great detail what a certain skin condition is to be diagnosed as, in accordance with how it looks and where it is (hair, scalp, etc.). And it helps the priest to determine if what is occurring is natural or not; as an example is hair loss the result of disease or is it from natural balding. If it is normal balding the person is to be declared clean; if it is the result of certain diseases then the person is to be deemed unclean.

Verse 42 introduces us to a term we need to be familiar with: ***metsora***. ***Metsora*** is the name a person is called who is diagnosed with tzara'at.....and this title means that that person is impure, unclean. And, in verse 45, we get the instructions of just what is to be done with a ***Metsora***.....someone who has been declared by a priest to have tzara'at. First the person's garments are to be torn.....in Hebrew it is the word ***parum***, usually translated, correctly, as rent

or torn. Although, by tradition, rather than the cloth of the garment literally being torn or shredded like one would a rag the person would pull his garment apart at a seam; undoubtedly so that at a later time the article of clothing could be mended without it being terribly unsightly. The tearing, the **parum**, of the garment was not so much a signal to others that the person was unclean and must be avoided, as it was an indication that the person was in mourning....in the case of tzara'at the mourning was DUE to his condition of being unclean and the serious repercussions that followed. The next step was that the **Metsora's** head had to be bared. As with the tearing of the garment the baring of the head was NOT a specific indicator of being unclean; rather it was a general sign of that person being shamed for some reason. A woman committing adultery, for instance, had to bare her head. Baring the head meant a woman would take off her typical scarf-like head covering, unpin her hair, and let it hang loose in a disheveled fashion.....this was the way a prostitute was forced to wear her hair at all times. A man would no longer wear a cap; and he, too, would let his typically long hair loose and unkempt. Thus the community could see that this person was bearing shame for some offense.

The 3rd requirement was that a **Metsora** was to cover his upper-lip with his hand whenever anyone approached. This WAS the specific indicator that that person was unclean and others should steer clear. The **Metsora** was to take his hand and place it above his upper lip and below his nose and when anyone came near he was to say "unclean, unclean", which was a warning to others to stay away. So, we see here that a sense of personal mourning, and of personal shame, and a personal loss of holiness were **all** involved with contracting tzara'at. A person's life could be ruined from such a thing....a thing that usually was not that person's fault.

But that is not the worst of it; at this point the person must be set outside the camp, alone or often with others who are afflicted. And as long as it is determined by the priest that he or she is still infected with tzara'at, he or she will remain outside the fellowship and proximity of his family, friends, and the entire nation of Israel. And this person is also shunned by God. This is NOT a supposition or a Tradition; Scripture plainly says that person has been separated from the Lord.

What a picture this paints! What a SAD picture this paints. A person is declared unclean due to a skin disease, often through no fault of his own, and he is excommunicated from his family, his people, and from any relationship with God. I've said on numerous occasions that I believe that perhaps the primary reason for Yehoveh ordaining the rules and laws and procedures and rituals as He did was to use these often heartbreaking and wrenching situations as dramatic visuals of spiritual principles. You see the condition of these poor wretched **Metsoras** is basically the way Yehoveh sees all unbelievers. As unclean, and Outcasts. Yes in the current world these unclean people (unbelievers), the majority of our planet.....represented by so many people we dearly love: our neighbors, and friends, and family members.....are as **Metsoras** to God. They live out their days outside the camp.....outside of any relationship with Him. They may well be popular, and have a happy marriage and many children, work at a great job, be financially successful and admired by many.....but.....that time is so short. Upon their inevitable death they will be forever separated from everything and everyone who is Godly.

So from a spiritual principle standpoint, the tzara'at on a person is but an outward visualization

of his inward.....that is, his spiritual... condition. We saw this same principle demonstrated back in Exodus with Moses when Yehoveh had him put his arm into his cloak and pull it out NOT with leprosy on it.....but with tzara'at. Now that we have studied tzara'at can you better see the significance of that incident between God and Moses? For a moment Moses was made acutely aware of being unclean. Then Yehoveh had him put that diseased arm back into his cloak, and it was healed of the tzara'at, and Moses was made clean. God was showing Moses his true spiritual condition; and then just as dramatically showed Moses that it would take an act of God to HEAL him from this spiritual uncleanness. This was all a pattern, a model, and a shadow of what God was going to make available to all mankind by means of His Son, Yeshua. Yeshua, God, would make the incurably unclean...you, me, everybody... clean. Yeshua would take us who were hopelessly exiled outside the camp....suffering from a kind of uncleanness from which no man could claim exemption..... and bring us into the camp, and into fellowship with the God of Israel.

READ LEVITICUS 13:47-59

We encounter a really odd twist beginning with verse 47: the condition of tzara'at is now applied to inanimate objects. Not people but fabrics and leather. Obviously we are no longer talking about human diseases like Psoriasis and Leucoderma; yet the Torah continues to refer to the discolorations and growths on fabric and leather as tzara'at and the condition made that fabric and leather ritually unclean. This is consistent with what we learned several chapters earlier that uncleanness could be transmitted to things like pots, and bowls, and chairs, and other inanimate objects.

It is probably good to pause for a moment and remember that the underlying issues of the matters of tzara'at, kosher eating, a new mother's impurity, and so on, are of **holiness** and its opposite, **uncleanness**. And, what we find is that holiness and uncleanness are incompatible.....the two cannot be allowed to touch. One aspect of holiness is whole-ness; and in verse 47 where it speaks of cloth made of wool **or** linen, the operative word is "OR". Wool and linen were the two most widely used fibers for making clothing in Bible times. But it was Yehoveh's command that His people NOT mix the two fibers in the same piece of cloth (we find this direct command in Deut.22:11).....wool was not to be used along with linen to form a piece of cloth. Much speculation is offered as to WHY these two fibers, linen and wool, are not to be mixed. Perhaps the most apparent is that one fiber, wool, comes from an animal, and the other, linen, comes from a plant. So, Hebrews were not to wear garments made from a mixture of animal and plant life. It is **the mixture** of the fibers that is at odds with holiness.....mixture as opposed to whole-ness.....and Yehoveh's opposition to anything that does not represent whole-ness is what is being demonstrated as a spiritual principle here. This spiritual principle of whole-ness is, as are ALL spiritual principles, applicable in the NT as well for there we find dozens of scriptures warning against believers marrying unbelievers, believers lying with prostitutes (the clean mixing with the unclean), believers worshipping Yehoveh AND other gods, the general command not to be unequally yoked, and on and on.

The rule about tzara'at on cloth and leather is that if a tzara'at type of infection is found in the cloth used for garments, or on leather used for garments or shoes or anything for that matter, then that object is unclean and must be dealt with. And, the procedure is familiar and basic; the

common Israelite brings the suspected object or article of clothing to the priest, and if the priest suspects tzara'at, the item is put into isolation for 7 days. If after 7 days the infection has spread it is deemed to be tzara'at and the item must be burned because it is ritually impure....unclean. However if the infection has NOT spread then the item is to be washed with water and then isolated for another 7 days. If the infection's appearance is still the same after those 7 days it is deemed unclean and must be burned up. If, however, the infection has diminished then ONLY the part of the cloth or leather that had the infection on it must be torn out; if the remainder of the article stays free of infection then all is fine. But if the infection returns then the entire object must be burned.

An object that had the infected part removed must be washed, immersed in water, in order to be used again. It is interesting, is it not, that the idea of water immersion as the method of purification from uncleanness is woven so tightly together here in Leviticus, and then later in John the Baptist's ministry, and then finally in Christ's. WHY is immersion in **water** so integral to all of these rituals and ministries? Does water have some inherent property that when used as a ritual purification (like baptism) produces spiritual cleansing? Why not be immersed in wine? Or Olive Oil? The answer to that question is like the matter of "why?" God's choice of certain animals for sacrifice and for the kosher eating requirements; after all, a clean animal is not a normal or whole animal, while an unclean animal is an abnormal or not-whole animal. There is nothing inherently BETTER about a sheep than a camel or a rabbit or a pig for that matter. The use of water for immersion instead of something else, the choice of which animals are clean and unclean, which food is clean and unclean, is simply a decision and declaration by Yehoveh made for His own good reasons; reasons which somehow mirror the eternal spiritual world; reasons which never change, because He who is the Creator of the spiritual and the physical never changes. The answer to "why?" water immersion was so central in John the Baptist's and Jesus' ministries is because it stays within the spiritual PATTERN and MODEL set down here in Leviticus; a pattern demonstrating how the unclean become clean.

And, that is exactly what the last verse of chapter 13 tells us: that the purpose for these procedures that determine if one has tzara'at is not about diseases and plagues; it is to distinguish the clean from the unclean. Do you realize that that is one of the primary duties a Believer is charged with? We are to live our lives determining what is clean for us, and what is unclean. We are to shun that which is spiritually unclean for us. How, exactly, do we know what can be clean and unclean for us? Read the Torah. For as Paul says in NAS 2 **Corinthians 6:15** ***" Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? 16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 17 "Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate," says the Lord. "And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. 18 "And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty."***

As we approach the end of chapter 13 I would like to say that as with most commentary, Christian or Jewish, some is helpful and some is fanciful. There are many Jewish commentaries on the subject of Tzara'at and they certainly are about equally divided into those same two categories. What is helpful for our purposes, though, is that the Jews have

ALWAYS seen Tzara'at as a SPIRITUAL DISEASE rather than a physical disease. In other words Tzara'at is a physical SIGN as well as a physical judgment by Yehoveh on the person who has it. It is a physical SIGN of that person's spiritual condition. The question always asked, then, is "what sin" did that person commit or "what problem" was that person having with God.

The **Gemara** (a Jewish commentary on the Mishna, which itself is also Jewish Commentary.....so it is commentary on commentary) lists 7 sins and bad character traits that are said to be the cause of tzara'at on a human. Of those 7 by far the primary offense was that of **lashon hara**.....**lashon hara** means "forbidden speech". What this generally refers to is talking evil about someone.....or using words to destroy a person's reputation.....but usually it is referring to slanderous remarks. Many of the great Hebrew Sages regarded the sin of **Lashon Hara** as the equal, if not worse, of murder.

The reason for that assertion is that speech was held in high regard....fear, actually..... because the Torah tells us that God "spoke" the universe into existence. We are all aware that the most religious Jews have not, since about 300 B.C., spoken God's name and will not tolerate someone speaking it in their presence. Therefore speech is considered VERY powerful and our words must be chosen carefully. This OT and traditional belief has it's parallel in the NT in the book of James, and the traditional Jewish beliefs about speech likely colored James, brother of Jesus', views on speech. Listen to James in

NAS James 3:5 So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. Behold, how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.

Obviously this NT passage is about speech, words. It is a warning against **Lashon Hara**. Jesus once said that it was not what went into our mouths that make us unclean, its what comes out. Obviously, again, the reference is to speech. So we can see why this concept of **Lashon Hara** eventually became the prime suspect as the "sin" or "problem" that caused a person to burst out in tzara'at.

The point is that while the skin diseases suffered by a **Metsora** were quite real, the cause was not thought by the Hebrews to be biological, but spiritual. So even as earthbound as Jewish thought tended, and still tends, to be, they recognized what it is that we've been discussing in Torah Class; that what is at play in the Torah scriptures concerning tzara'at, and the unclean state it causes, is spiritual principles. And that since tzara'at brings such devastating consequences with it that the "sin" that brought it on must have also been devastating. And one of the most devastating sins (the Jewish Sages believed) was to slander or talk evil of someone.....**Lashon Hara**.

Next week we'll start Leviticus 14.