

The Good Word

PUBLISHED BY ST. SERAPHIM OF SAROV AND ST. JOHN OF KRONSTADT ORTHODOX CHURCH, LA MESA, CA
WITH THE BLESSING OF HIS EMINENCE BISHOP AUXENTIOS OF ETNA AND PORTLAND, GOC-K



LEPROSY AND THE BIBLE, PART I

by Dr. Seraphim Steger, M.D.,

Fellow of the American Academy of Dermatology

For centuries leprosy patients have been segregated from society in leper colonies, often forced to wear a sign or a bell for to warn others of their presence, and often considered “cursed by God” because of the Bible. Yet, there are only a few examples of “leprosy” mentioned in the *Scriptures*. To understand what *biblical leprosy* is, let us first study these Scriptural examples to ascertain how and why it occurred and what was done about it. Then we can ask, “Is it the same as the disease of leprosy that we know today?”

“LEPROSY” IN THE NEW TESTAMENT TEXT

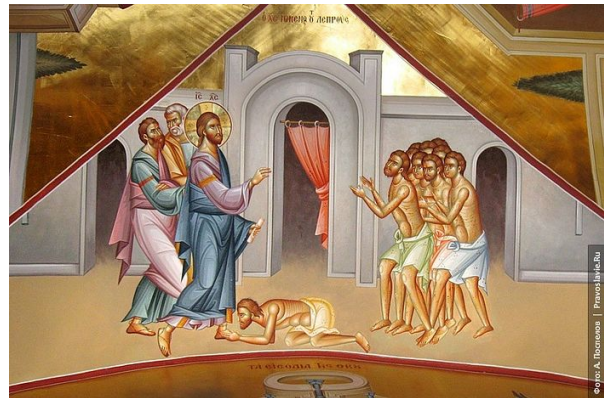
St. Matthew (KJV) 8:1 When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. 2 And, behold, there came a **leper** and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean 3 And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his **leprosy** was cleansed. 4 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.

St. Mark (KJV) 1:40 And there came a **leper** to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean 41 And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. 42 And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the **leprosy** departed from him, and he was cleansed 43 And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away; 44 And saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them 45 But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.

St. Luke (KJV) 5:12 And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of **leprosy**: who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. 13 And he put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately the **leprosy** departed from him. 14 And he charged him to tell

no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. 15 But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. 16 And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.

St. Luke (KJV) 17:11 And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. 12 And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were **lepers**, which stood afar off: 13 And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. 14 And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. 15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, 16 And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. 17 And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? 18 There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. 19 And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.



It is notable that in none of these encounters of the lepers with Jesus were the types of lesions or locations of the “leprosy” noted. In three of these it was a single “leper” who approached the Lord and asked to be made clean. Jesus extended His hand and touched each one of them, speaking to each, “I will; be thou clean.” The “leprosy” was immediately cleansed from or departed from the “leper.” Jesus then instructed them to refrain from telling anyone about their cleansing, then show themselves to the priests, and offer the gift that Moses commanded as an offering for their cleansing for a testimony to them, i.e., for a testimony to the priests. In contrast in the fourth case, ten “lepers” pleaded with Jesus to have mercy on us. He told them to go and show themselves to the priests, and as they obediently

followed His instructions, behold they were *cleansed*, and only one, a Samaritan, returned to thank Him. In none of these cases was their “*leprosy*” described, but in telling all of the lepers to show themselves to the priests and give them the gift that Moses commanded, the Lord was identifying their condition as that described in *Leviticus 13* which we will review a bit later.

Interestingly, St. Luke, a physician, writes of that Samaritan, that *when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, 16 And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks.* Here “*healed*” in the Greek can mean “*cured/healed*” or “*cleansed/restored from a state of sin.*”¹

“LEPROSY” IN THE OLD TESTAMENT SEPTUAGINT TEXT AND IN THE MASORETIC TEXT

CASE I

In *Exodus* the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, chose Moses, at the burning bush, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt (c. 1446 BC). Moses doubted that the Egyptians would listen to him and do what he said, so the Lord gave him a couple of signs to help convince them of the truth of his words:

Exodus (Lxx Brenton) 4:1 And Moses answered and said, If they believe me not, and do not hearken to my voice (for they will say, God has not appeared to thee), what shall I say to them? 2 And the Lord said to him, What is this thing that is in thine hand? and he said, A rod. 3 And he said, Cast it on the ground: and he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses fled from it. 4 And the Lord said to Moses, Stretch forth thine hand, and take hold of its tail: so he stretched forth his hand and took hold of the tail, 5 and it became a rod in his hand,-- that they may believe thee, that the God of thy fathers has appeared to thee, the God of Abraam, and God of Isaac, and God of Jacob. 6 And the Lord said again to him, Put thine hand into thy bosom; and he put his hand into his bosom, and brought his hand out of his bosom, and his hand became as snow. 7 And he said again, Put thy hand into thy bosom; and he put his hand into his bosom, and brought his hand out of his bosom, and it was again restored to the complexion of his [other] flesh. 8 And if they will not believe thee, nor hearken to the voice of the first sign, they will believe thee [because] of the voice of the second sign.

Although there is no mention of “*leprosy*” in the *Septuagint (Lxx)* text above, the Jewish *Masoretic Text (MT)* does contain the phrase *יָדוֹ מִצָּרַעַת כִּשְׁלֵג*: *his hand יָדוֹ / smitten with m'zora'at מִצָּרַעַת / as snow כִּשְׁלֵג*, which the King James Version translates as *his hand was “leprous” as snow*. The Hebrew participle *מִצָּרַעַת* in its different grammatical forms is usually

1. Greek: ἰάθη 3 per. sing. aor. 1, ind. pass. of ἰάομαι 1. to heal. 2. to restore from a state of sin and condemnation. Mouton, HK, Zondervan, Grand Rapids MI, 1978, p. 198b.

transliterated in English translations by Orthodox Jews rather than given a specific translated meaning because the full meaning of the word, *tzara'at* *תִּצְרָעַת*, has been lost long ago, even though it is thought to be derived from the verb *צָרַף* “to smite or strike suddenly.”

Thus, we can conclude, that at its very first appearance, the sign of “*leprosy*” placed on Moses’ hand was a sign of God’s authority and power being present in Moses to convince the Israelites of his divinely appointed mission to lead them out of Egypt. The sign appeared suddenly in response to Moses’ obedience to the Lord’s instruction to place his hand in his bosom, thus causing his hand to look *like snow*. When he returned his hand to *his bosom* it reverted to its normal appearance. Whether *like snow* meant that it was white like snow or cold like snow or flaky like snow or all the above is not discernible in these verses.

CASE II

The second instance of “*leprosy*” occurred in Moses’ sister Mariam [Miriam *KJV*] (c. 1445 BC):

Numbers (Lxx Brenton [Note: bracketed words in italics in this passage are Brenton’s own additions]) 12:1 And Mariam and Aaron spoke [MT *תִּצְרָעַת* (3rd per. sing. fem. verb); *Lxx* ἐλάλησε, (3rd per. sing. verb)] against Moses, because of the Ethiopian [Lxx Αἰθιοπίσσης “Ethiopian”, MT *הַכְּשִׁיטִי* “the Cushite”] woman² whom Moses took; for he had taken an Ethiopian woman. 2 And they said, Has the Lord spoken to Moses only? has he not also spoken to us? and the Lord heard it. 3 And the man Moses was very meek beyond all the men that were upon the earth. 4 And the Lord said immediately to Moses and Aaron and Mariam, Come forth all three of you to the tabernacle of witness. 5 And the three came forth to the tabernacle of witness; and the Lord descended in a pillar of a cloud, and stood at the door of the tabernacle of witness; and Aaron and Mariam were called; and both came forth. 6 And he said to them, Hear my words: If there should be of you a prophet to the Lord, I will be made known to him in a vision, and in sleep will I speak to him. 7 My servant Moses [is] not so; he is faithful in all my house. 8 I will speak to him mouth to mouth apparently, and not in dark speeches; and he has seen the glory of the Lord; and why were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? 9 And the great anger of the Lord [was] upon them, and he departed. 10 And the cloud departed from the tabernacle; and, behold, Mariam was *leprous*, [white] as snow; and Aaron looked upon Mariam, and, behold, she [was] *leprous*. 11 And Aaron said to Moses, I beseech thee, my lord, do not lay sin upon us, for we were ignorant wherein we sinned. 12 Let her not be as it were like death, as an abortion coming out of his mother’s womb, when [the disease] devours the half of the flesh. 13 And Moses cried to the Lord, saying, O God, I beseech thee, heal

2. a Cushite, a descendant of Ham, not an Israelite. Moses also had a Midianite wife for the previous 40 years, Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro, a priest of Midian. This unnamed (in Scripture) Cushite woman was most likely part of the mixed multitude that left Egypt with the Israelites. Cushites were more darkly pigmented than the Egyptians and Israelites.

her. 14 And the Lord said to Moses, *If her father had only spit in her face, would she not be ashamed seven days? Let her be set apart seven days without the camp, and afterwards she shall come in.* 15 And Mariam was separated without the camp seven days; and the people moved not forward till Mariam was cleansed.

Here, for speaking the truth against Moses with a bit of indignation, i.e., implying that there was something wrong in his taking of a second wife, an Ethiopian/Cushite woman, only Mariam was smitten with “leprosy” by the Lord. Verse 12:1 has a feminine singular verb in the *MT* and a singular verb in the *LXX* pointing to her as instigator. Aaron, Moses’ brother and the High Priest of Israel, also rose up against Moses with Mariam: 8b ... and why were *yg* not afraid? The verb form here is in 2nd person plural in both the *MT* and the *LXX*, indicates that both Miriam and Aaron were not afraid to speak against my servant Moses. Although both were rebuked, yet only Miriam became leprous as snow, for which Aaron interceded immediately with Moses. Nevertheless, she had to be set apart from the camp of Israel for 7 days before being allowed to rejoin the camp. Brenton’s *Lxx* translation and the *KJV* both add the adjective *white* to her description, i.e., leprous, [white] as snow to the text. However, neither the *LXX* nor the *MT* contain the word *white*. Aaron himself appears to add some detail in verse 12: *Let her not be as it were like death, as an abortion coming out of his mother’s womb, when [the disease] devours the half of the flesh.* By this he suggests that Mariam may have had a “deathly” appearance to her “leprosy” like that of a stillborn child. However, the description is insufficient to better define that appearance. So why was “leprosy” given as punishment to Mariam for speaking against her brother the Prophet Moses, but not given to the High Priest Aaron for speaking against him -- most likely because she was the instigator based on the singular verb in verse 1 (feminine in the *MT*). Aaron was most likely spared because he held the office of the High Priest and Israel could little afford to be without the High Priest for 7 days.

CASE III

In the third example King David placed a curse which included “leprosy” on Joab and all his house for the revenge murder of Abner (c. 1005 B.C.):

2 Kingdoms (Lxx Brenton) 3:23 *And Joab and all his army came, and it was reported to Joab, saying, Abenner [Abner] the son of Ner is come to David, and David has let him go, and he has departed in peace. 3:24 And Joab went in to the king, and said, What [is] this [that] thou hast done? behold, Abenner came to thee; and why hast thou let him go, and he has departed in peace? 25 Knowest thou not the mischief of Abenner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive thee, and to know thy going out and thy coming in, and to*

know all things that thou doest? 26 And Joab returned from David, and sent messengers to Abenner after [him]; and they bring him back from the well of Seiram [Sirah]: but David knew [it] not. 27 And he brought back Abenner to Chebron [Hebron], and Joab caused him to turn aside from the gate to speak to him, laying wait for him: and he smote him there in the loins, and he died for the blood of Asael the brother of Joab. 28 And David heard [of it] afterwards, and said, I and my kingdom are guiltless before the Lord even for ever of the blood of Abenner the son of Ner. 29 Let it fall upon the head of Joab, and upon all the house of his father; and let there not be wanting of the house of Joab one that has an issue, or a leper, or that leans on a staff, or that falls by the sword, or that wants bread. 30 For Joab and Abessa [Abishai] his brother laid wait continually for Abenner, because he slew Asael [Asahel] their brother at Gabaon in the battle.

CASE IV

The fourth example of “leprosy” involves Naiman [Naaman], the captain of the host of the king of Syria; the prophet Elisaie [Elisha] (active c. 853-814 B.C.); and Giezi [Gehazi] the servant of Elisha:

4 Kingdoms (Lxx Brenton) 5:1 *Now Naiman, the captain of the host of Syria, was a great man before his master, and highly respected, because by him the Lord had given deliverance to Syria, and the man was mighty in strength, [but] a leper [LXX λελεπρωμένος, (he) having become] leprous: MT m'z'orah טַרְסָר, one smitten with “leprosy”]. 2 And the Syrians went forth in small bands, and took captive out of the land of Israel a little maid: and she waited on Naiman’s wife. 3 And she said to her mistress, O that my lord were before the prophet of God in Samaria; then he would recover [MT הִרְפִּי, remove] him from his leprosy [LXX ἀπό τῆς λέπρας from his leprosy; MT וְהִרְפִּי מִן הַלֵּפְרוֹן from his being stricken with “leprosy”]. 4 And she went in and told her lord, and said, Thus and thus spoke the maid from the land of Israel. 5 And the king of Syria said to Naiman, Go to, go, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel. And he went, and took in his hand ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment. 6 And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now then, as soon as this letter shall reach thee, behold, I have sent to thee my servant Naiman, and thou shalt recover him from his leprosy. 7 And it came to pass, when the king of Israel read the letter, [that] he rent his garments, and said, [Am] I God, to kill and to make alive, that this [man] sends to me to recover a man of his leprosy? Consider, however, I pray you, and see that this [man] seeks an occasion against me. 8 And it came to pass, when Elisaie heard that the king of Israel had rent his garments, that he sent to the king of Israel, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy garments? Let Naiman, I pray thee, come to me, and let him know that there is a prophet in Israel. 9 So Naiman came with horse and chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisaie. 10 And Elisaie sent a messenger to him, saying, Go and wash seven times in Jordan, and thy flesh shall return to thee, and thou shalt be cleansed. 11 And Naiman was angry, and departed, and said, Behold, I said, He will by all means come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of his God, and lay his hand upon the place, and recover the leper. 12 [Are] not the Abana and Pharphar,*

rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not go and wash in them, and be cleansed? and he turned and went away in a rage. 13 And his servants came near and said to him, [Suppose] the prophet had spoken a great thing to thee, wouldest thou not perform it? yet he has but said to thee, Wash, and be cleansed. 14 So Naiman went down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the word of Elisaie: and his flesh returned to him as the flesh of a little child, and he was cleansed. 15 And he and all his company returned to Elisaie, and he came and stood before him, and said, Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth, save only in Israel: and now receive a blessing of thy servant. 16 And Elisaie said, [As] the Lord lives, before whom I stand, I will not take [one]. And he pressed him to take [one]: but he would not. 17 And Naiman said, Well then, if not, let there be given to thy servant, I pray thee, the load [of a] yoke of mules; and thou shalt give me of the red earth: for henceforth thy servant will not offer whole-burnt-offering or sacrifice to other gods, but only to the Lord by [reason of] this thing. 18 And let the Lord be propitious to thy servant when my master goes into the house of Remman to worship there, and he shall lean on my hand, and I shall bow down in the house of Remman when he bows down in the house of Remman; even let the Lord, I pray, be merciful to thy servant in this matter. 19 And Elisaie said to Naiman, Go in peace. And he departed from him a little way. 20 And Giezi the servant of Elisaie said, Behold, my Lord has spared this Syrian Naiman, so as not to take of his hand what he has brought: as the Lord lives, I will surely run after him, and take somewhat of him. 21 So Giezi followed after Naiman: and Naiman saw him running after him, and turned back from his chariot to meet him. 22 And [Giezi] said, All is well: my master has sent me, saying, Behold, now are there come to me two young men of the sons of the prophets from mount Ephraim; give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of raiment. 23 And [Naiman] said, Take two talents of silver. And he took two talents of silver in two bags, and two changes of raiment, and put them upon two of his servants, and they bore them before him. 24 And he came to a secret place, and took them from their hands, and laid them up in the house, and dismissed the men. 25 And he went in himself and stood before his master; and Elisaie said to him, 26 Whence [comest thou], Giezi? and Giezi said, Thy servant has not been hither or thither. And Elisaie said to him, Went not my heart with thee, when the man returned from his chariot to meet thee? and now thou hast received silver, and now thou hast received raiment, and olive yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants. 5:27 **The leprosy** [תַּצְרָא, λέπρα] **also of Naiman shall cleave to thee, and to thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence leprous, like snow** [KJV: a leper as **white** as snow].

Here in *4 Kingdoms* 5:27a we find the first mention of “leprosy” in the nominative case, i.e., the name of the condition: in the Hebrew תַּצְרָא *tzara’at*, in the Greek λέπρα.³ Regarding its appearance, the **KJV** translates 5:27b as *And he went out from his presence a*


3. λέπρα: *leprosy which makes the skin scaly*, as in Hippocrates, Ἀφορισμαί 3.2; λεπρός: *scaly, scabby, rough*, H.G. Liddell, H.G. and Scott, R., **Greek-English Lexicon**, Clarendon Press, Oxford, England, 1996, p. 1039.

leper as white as snow. The word *white* is not in the **MT** which reads גַּלְשָׁן עֲרֵבָה, a *m’zora(h) as snow*. The **Lxx** is similar, with the masculine singular nominative perfect dependent middle/passive participle, λελερωμένος ὡσεὶ χιῶν, [(he) having become] *leprous like snow*. Why did Naiman acquire leprosy? It is not specifically stated, but perhaps because as the captain of the host of Syria, with the great victories he achieved and being highly respected, he became full of self-importance, pride, and arrogance. That is reflected also in his initial response to Elisaie. He was so filled with self-importance that he felt Elisaie should personally come out to him rather than sending a servant as messenger with instructions to wash 7 times in the Jordan. He also thought he deserved better than the Jordan River. But he eventually swallowed his pride and obeyed and was cleansed of his leprosy. So from the story of Naiman the Syrian and Gehazi the servant of Elisaie we learn that obedience to the word of the prophet and dipping in the Jordan River 7 times led to the cleansing/recovering (of the original normal skin) of the *place* (5:11) of Naiman’s “leprosy” wherever it was and however big it was. However, Giezi’s avarice and his theft of the money intended for others, and his lying about it twice led the clairvoyant Prophet Elisaie to punish him by smiting him with “leprosy” which was to continue in his family for ever. Unfortunately, we learned nothing more about the appearance or the location of his “leprosy.” So Naiman the gentile had “leprosy” but was cleansed of his, whereas Giezi, the Israelite was smitten with Naiman’s “leprosy” for his avarice and lying.

CASE V

Just a couple of chapters later in *4 Kingdoms* we meet 4 additional “lepers” who are neither described nor cleansed of their “leprosy”. In spite of their “leprosy” they nevertheless, “unclean” as they were, yet, as patriots, provided a great service to the inhabitants of Samaria who, at that time, were under siege by the Syrians:

4 Kingdoms (Lxx Brenton) 7:1 And Elisaie said, Hear thou the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord, As at this time, to-morrow a measure of fine flour [shall be sold] for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gates of Samaria. 2 And the officer on whose hand the king rested, answered Elisaie, and said, Behold, [if] the Lord shall make flood-gates in heaven, might this thing be? and Elisaie said, Behold, thou shalt see with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof. 3 And there were **four leprous men** by the gate of the



city: and one said to his neighbour, Why sit we here until we die? 4 If we should say, Let us go into the city, then [there is] famine in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit here, then we shall die. Now then come, and let us fall upon the camp of the Syrians: if they should take us alive, then we shall live; and if they should put us to death, then we shall [only] die. 5 And they rose up while it was yet night, to go into the camp of Syria; and they came into a part of the camp of Syria, and behold, there [was] no man there. 6 For the Lord had made the army of Syria to hear a sound of chariots, and a sound of horses, [even] the sound of a great host: and [each] man said to his fellow, Now has the king of Israel hired against us the kings of the Chettites, and the kings of Egypt, to come against us. 7 And they arose and fled while it was yet dark, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses in the camp, as they were, and fled for their lives. 8 And these **lepers** entered a little way into the camp, and went into one tent, and ate and drank, and too thence silver, and gold, and raiment; and they went and returned thence, and entered into another tent, and took thence, and went and hid [the spoil]. 9 And [one] man said to his neighbour, We are not doing [well] thus: this day is a day of glad tidings, and we hold our peace, and are waiting till the morning light, and shall find mischief: now them come, and let us go into [the city], and report to the house of the king. 10 So they went and cried toward the gate of the city, and reported to them, saying, We went into the camp of Syria, and, behold, there is not there a man, nor voice of man, only horses tied and asses, and their tents as they were. 11 And the porters cried aloud, and reported to the house of the king within. 12 And the king rose up by night, and said to his servants, I will now tell you what the Syrians have done to us. They knew that we are hungry; and they have gone forth from the camp and hidden themselves in the field, saying, They will come out of the city, and we shall catch them alive, and go into the city. 13 And one of his servants answered and said, Let them now take five of the horses that were left, which were left here; behold, they are the number left to all the multitude of Israel; and we will send thither and see. 14 So they took two horsemen; and the king of Israel sent after the king of Syria, saying, Go, and see. 15 And they went after them even to Jordan: and, behold, all the way was full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their panic. and the messengers returned, and brought word to the king. 16 And the people went out, and plundered the camp of Syria: and a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord, and two measures of barley for a shekel. 17 And the king appointed the officer on whose hand the king leaned [to have charge] over the gate: and the people trampled on him in the gate, and he died, as the man of God [had] said, who spoke when the messenger came down to him. 18 So it came to pass as Elisaie had spoken to the king, saying, Two measures of barley [shall be sold] for a shekel, and a measure of fine flour for a shekel; and it shall be as at this time to-morrow in the gate of Samaria. 19 And the officer answered Elisaie, and said, Behold, [if] the Lord makes flood-gates in heaven, shall this thing be? and Elisaie said, Behold, thou shalt see [it] with thine eyes, but thou shalt not eat thereof. 20 And it was so: for the people trampled on him in the gate, and he died.

CASE VI

This next *Old Testament* example of “leprosy” is

that of King Azarias [Azariah] (c. 792-740 B.C.) of Judah. Here the king is presented righteous in every way except for his failure to remove any of the *high places* which were used for idolatrous worship. However, his family was spared being stricken with “leprosy”. Thus, the “leprosy” was due to the Lord’s displeasure with King Azariah’s lack of zeal to carry out His will in this matter:

4 Kingdoms (Lxx Brenton) 15:1 *In the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel Azarias [Azariah] the son of Amessias [Amaziah] king of Juda began to reign. 2 Sixteen years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem: and his mother’s name was Jechelia [Jecholiah] of Jerusalem. 3 And he did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all things that Amessias his father did. 4 Only he took not away [any] of the high places: as yet the people sacrificed and burnt incense on the high places. 5 And the Lord plagued the king, and he was leprous till the day of his death; and he reigned in a separate house. And Joatham the king’s son [was] over the household, judging the people of the land. 6 And the rest of the acts of Azarias, and all that he did, [are] not these written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Juda? 7 And Azarias slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David: and Joatham [Jotham] his son reigned in his stead.*

CASE VII

Now we come to the seventh and final example of “leprosy” in the Old Testament: a second version of King Azarias’ [Azariah] “leprosy. Here in *Paraleipomenon*, however, he is identified by his alternative name Ozias [Uzziah]. Like in *4 Kingdoms* above, Ozias’ father and co-regent for many years was Amasias [Amessias in *4 Kingdoms* and Amaziah in *2 Kings (KJV)*] and his son Joatham:

2 Paraleipomenon (Lxx Brenton) 26:1 *Then all the people of the land took Ozias, and he was sixteen years old, and they made him king in the room of his father Amasias. 2 He built Aelath, he recovered it to Juda, after the king slept with his fathers. 3 Ozias began to reign at the age of sixteen years, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem: and his mother’s name was Jechelia of Jerusalem. 4 And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that Amasias his father did. 5 And he sought the Lord in the days of Zacharias, who understood the fear of the Lord; and in his days he sought the Lord, and the Lord prospered him. 6 And he went out and fought against the Philistines, and pulled down the walls of Geth, and the walls of Jabner, and the walls of Azotus, and he built cities [near] Azotus, and among the Philistines. 7 And the Lord strengthened him against the Philistines, and against the Arabians that dwelt on the rock, and against the Kinæans. 8 And the Kinæans gave gifts to Ozias; and his fame spread as far as the entering in of Egypt, for he strengthened [himself] exceedingly. 9 And Ozias built towers in Jerusalem, both at the gate of the corners, and at the valley gate, and at the corners and he fortified them. 10*

And he built towers in the wilderness, and dug many wells, for he had many cattle in the low country and in the plain; and vinedressers in the mountain country and in Carmel: for he was a husbandman. 11 And Ozias had a host of warriors, and that went out orderly to war, and returned orderly in number; and their number was [made] by the hand of Jeiel the scribe, and Maasias the judge, by the hand of Ananias the king's deputy. 12 The whole number of the chiefs of families of the mighty men of war [was] two thousand six hundred; 13 and with them was a warrior force, three hundred thousand and seven thousand and five hundred: these waged war mightily to help the king against [his] enemies. 14 And Ozias prepared for them, [even] for all the host, shields, and spears, and helmets, and breastplates, and bows, and slings for stones. 15 And he made in Jerusalem machines invented by a wise contriver, to be upon the towers and upon the corners, to cast darts and great stones: and [the fame] of their preparation was heard at a distance; for he was wonderfully helped, till he was strong. 16 And when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction; and he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to turn incense on the altar of incense. 17 And there went in after him Azarias the priest, and with him eighty priests of the Lord, mighty men. 18 And they withstood Ozias the king, and said to him, [It is] not for thee, Ozias, to burn incense to the Lord, but only for the priests the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to sacrifice: go forth of the sanctuary, for thou hast departed from the Lord; and this shall not be for glory to thee from the Lord God. 19 And Ozias was angry, and in his hand [was] the censer to burn incense in the temple: and when he was angry with the priests, then the leprosy [καὶ ἡ λέπρα, ΠΥΡΡΑΙ] rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord, over the altar of incense. 20 And Azarias the chief priest, and the [other] priests, turned [to look] at him, and, behold, he [was] leprous [λεπρός, ΠΥΡΡΑΙ] in his forehead; and they got him hastily out thence, for he also hastened to go out, because the Lord had rebuked him. 21 And Ozias the king was a leper [λεπρός, ΠΥΡΡΑΙ] to the day of his death, and he dwelt [as] a leper [λεπρός, ΠΥΡΡΑΙ] in a separate house; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord: and Joatham his son [was set] over his kingdom, judging the people of the land. 22 And the rest of the acts of Ozias, the first and the last, [are] written by Jessias the prophet. 23 And Ozias slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the field of the burial [place] of the kings, for they said, He is a leper; and Joatham his son reigned in his stead.

King Ozias, a righteous king of Judah, had many successes in his younger days, but because of them his heart was elevated through pride. As a result, in his pride, he is reported as trying to usurp the role of the descendants of Aaron the High Priest, for only the priests are consecrated for burning the incense before the Lord. His usurpation of the burning of incense was the cause of his chastisement by the Lord: the smiting of him with “leprosy” on his forehead making him utterly unclean (Lev 13:44 in *KJV* & *MT*, but not *LXX*). It remained on him until his death and separated him

from the Temple and from his family. Thus, in the “supplemental” biblical book known as **2 Paraleipomemon** [Greek: “things omitted”], we find many extra details of his life and quite a different reason for his “leprosy:” a very serious sin -- “things omitted” from the historical records of **4 Kingdoms**.

So up to this point in these seven *Old Testament* and four *New Testament* passages we have learned just a little bit about the physical appearance of “*biblical leprosy*” as well as a few reasons why people were suddenly smitten with it:

(1) “*leprosy*” has been mentioned to occur on the hand and on the forehead (the latter is more serious);

(2) it has been described as being *like snow* with the additional word *white* being inserted in many English translations, i.e., (*white*) *like snow*;

(3) it has resulted from the Lord’s displeasure as chastisement or punishment for envy, impugning another’s character, murder, pride/arrogance/egotism, avarice/theft, failure to carry out the Lord’s commands, usurping the office of a priest, and has been given as a curse by the prophet Elisaie and by King David;

(4) it can be removed by obedience to the word of a prophet through washing 7 times in the Jordan River, by the healing grace of our Lord, or by obeying the instructions given by Lord Jesus Christ Himself;

(5) and, lastly, if one is cleansed, he is required to present himself before the priests and give the offerings that Moses commanded for one’s cleansing.

“LEPROSY” IN LEVITICUS 13-14

Thankfully, the appearance of “*leprosy*” in the skin, scalp, and beard is further described in the *Book of Leviticus* chapters 13-14. Therein are the instructions given to the priests of Israel through Moses for them to recognize eleven different clinical signs of *tzara’at/leprosy* in any Israelite. They were also given the instructions for separating the smitten one from the camp of Israel and from worship in the Temple because they were “unclean.” Instructions were also given for recognizing the signs of remittance in previously afflicted persons, so that they could undergo ritual cleansing, be proclaimed “clean”, re-enter Israelite society, and lastly, allowed to participate in worship in the Temple. Instructions are further given to the priests for recognizing “*leprosy*” in wool and linen garments, in animal skins, as well as in houses. Unfortunately the instructions given to the priests for recognizing “*leprosy*” in people are quite confusing in Hebrew and Greek, let alone in English.

The oldest Orthodox commentary that we have on the book of *Leviticus* is, in reality, the *Septuagint* (*LXX*)

Greek translation of its Hebrew exemplar made in Alexandria, Egypt, during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-247 BC) for the benefit of the Greek speaking Jews of that city. The translators read the original Hebrew text and gave us their understanding of the descriptions of “leprosy” in the Greek language. Even today, contemporary Orthodox Jewish rabbis admit that there is no good translation or ancient understanding for several critical Hebrew words in their Masoretic text for these chapters. The definitions below derive from various later Jewish rabbinic sources:^{4,5}

שֵׁי־תְּשֵׁי *sei-th*: lesion with the whiteness of natural wool
 סַפְּחָחַת *sappachath*: lesion with the color of egg membrane
 בְּהֵרֶת *bahereth*: lesion with the color of chalk
 בֹּהַק *bohak*: whiteness as in a red head or freckled person
 מִסְפַּחַת *mispachath*: a skin disease, not tzara’at (“leprosy”)
 נֶתֶחַק *nethek*: a “leprosy” of the scalp or beard area

Moreover, the lengthy discussions in the *Mishnah* (c. 200 AD), *Order Taharos* (*Purities*), *Tractate Nega'im* (*Plagues*) 1-14 over these words are not particularly useful either -- they are full of arguments on minutiae.

Although many of these critical words have whiteness in their *Mishnah* definition, the *Biblical* text below may also contain the adjective “white” along with the critical word. Even as a dermatologist, these definitions do not help me to diagnose what *tzara’at* is from a medical point of view. [Note: The corresponding *MT* text is shown below in italic square brackets [].]

Leviticus (Lxx Brenton) 13:1 And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 2 If any man should have in the skin of his flesh a **bright clear spot** [a *se’eith*, a *sappachath*, or a *bahereth*] and there should be in the skin of his flesh a plague of **leprosy** [*tzara’at*], he shall be brought to Aaron the priest, or to one of his sons the priests. 3 And the priest shall view the spot in the skin of his flesh; and if the hair in the spot be changed to **white**, and the appearance of the spot be below the skin of the flesh, it is a plague of leprosy; and the priest shall look upon it, and pronounce him unclean. 4 But if the spot be clear and **white** [a *white bahereth*] in the skin of his flesh, yet the appearance of it be not deep below the skin, and its hair have not changed itself for **white** hair, but it is dark, then the priest shall separate him that has the spot seven days; 5 and the priest shall look on the spot the seventh day; and, behold, if the spot remains before him, if the spot has not spread in the skin, then the priest shall separate him the second time seven days. 6 And the priest shall look upon him the second time on the seventh day; and, behold, if the spot be dark, and the spot have not spread in the skin, then the priest

shall pronounce him clean; for it is a mere **mark** [*mispachath*], and the man shall wash his garments and be clean. 7 But if the **bright spot** [*mispachath*] should have changed and spread in the skin, after the priest has seen him for the purpose of purifying him, then shall he appear the second time to the priest, 8 and the priest shall look upon him; and, behold, if the mark have spread in the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean: it is a leprosy [*tzara’at*].

9 And if a man have a plague of leprosy, then he shall come to the priest; 10 and the priest shall look, and, behold, if it is a **white spot** [*white se’eith*] in the skin, and it has changed the hair to white, and there be some of the sound part of the quick flesh in the **sore** [*se’eith*]- 11 it is a leprosy waxing old in the skin of the flesh; and the priest shall pronounce him unclean, and shall separate him, because he is unclean.

12 And if the leprosy should have come out very evidently in the skin, and the leprosy should cover all the skin of the patient from the head to the feet, wheresoever the priest shall look; 13 then the priest shall look, and, behold, the leprosy has covered all the skin of the flesh; and the priest shall pronounce him clean of the plague, because it has changed all to **white**, it is clean. 14 But on whatsoever day the quick flesh shall appear on him, he shall be pronounced unclean. 15 And the priest shall look upon the sound flesh, and the sound flesh shall prove him to be unclean; for it is unclean, it is a leprosy. 16 But if the sound flesh be restored and changed to **white**, then shall he come to the priest; 17 and the priest shall see him, and, behold, if the plague is turned **white**, then the priest shall pronounce the patient clean: he is clean.

18 And if the flesh should have become an ulcer in his skin, and should be healed, 19 and there should be in the place of the ulcer a **white sore** [*white se’eith*], or one looking white and bright [*bahereth*], or fiery, and it shall be seen by the priest; 20 then the priest shall look, and, behold, if the appearance be beneath the skin, and its hair has changed to white, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean; because it is a **leprosy** [*tzara’at*], it has broken out in the ulcer. 21 But if the priest look, and behold there is no **white** hair on it, and it be not below the skin of the flesh, and it be dark-coloured; then the priest shall separate him seven days. 22 But if it manifestly spread over the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean: it is a plague of **leprosy** [*tzara’at*]; it has broken out in the ulcer. 23 But if the bright spot should remain in its place and not spread, it is the scar of the ulcer; and the priest shall pronounce him clean.

24 And if the flesh be in his skin in a state of fiery inflammation, and there should be in his skin the part which is healed of the inflammation, bright, clear, and **white**, suffused with red or very **white** [*MT* adds *bahereth*]; 25 then the priest shall look upon him, and, behold, if the hair being **white** is changed to a bright colour, and its appearance is lower than the skin, it is a leprosy; it has broken out in the inflammation, and the priest shall pronounce him unclean: it is a plague of leprosy. 26 But if the priest should look, and, behold, there is not in the **bright spot** [*bahereth*] any **white** hair, and it should not be lower than the skin, and it should be dark, then the priest shall separate him seven days. 27 And the priest shall look upon him on the seventh day; and if the spot be much spread in the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean: it is a plague of leprosy, it has broken out in the

4. The oldest *MT* manuscript with vowels, which fixes the meaning, is the *Codex Cairensis*, redacted by Moses ben Asher, 895 AD.

5. Rabbis Nosson Scherman and Hersh Goldwurm, *Vayikra-Leviticus: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic, and Rabbinic Sources*, Art Scroll Tanach Series, Vol. IIIa, Mesorah Publications, Ltd., Brooklyn, NY, 1989, pp.190-209.

THE GOOD WORD

c/o St. Seraphim of Sarov & St. John of Kronstadt Orthodox Church
6063 Lake Murray Blvd.
La Mesa, CA 91942-2506,
U.S.A.

ulcer. 28 But if the bright spot [**bahereth**] remain stationary, and be not spread in the skin, but the sore should be dark, it is a **scar** [**se'eith**] of inflammation; and the priest shall pronounce him clean, for it is the mark of the inflammation.

29 And if a man or a woman have in them a plague of leprosy in the head or the beard; 30 then the priest shall look on the plague, and, behold, if the appearance of it be beneath the skin, and in it there be thin yellowish hair, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean: it is a **scurf** [**nethek**], it is a leprosy of the head or a leprosy of the beard. 31 And if the priest should see the plague of the scurf, and, behold, the appearance of it be not beneath the skin, and there is no yellowish hair in it, then the priest shall set apart him that has the plague of the scurf seven days. 32 And the priest shall look at the plague on the seventh day; and, behold, if the scurf be not spread, and there be no yellowish hair on it, and the appearance of the scurf is not hollow under the skin; 33 then the skin shall be shaven, but the scurf shall not be shaven; and the priest shall set aside the person having the scurf the second time for seven days. 34 And the priest shall see the scurf on the seventh day; and, behold, if the scurf is not spread in the skin after the man's being shaved, and the appearance of the scurf is not hollow beneath the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him clean; and he shall wash his garments, and be clean. 35 But if the scurf be indeed spread in the skin after he has been purified, 36 then the priest shall look, and, behold, if the scurf be spread in the skin, the priest shall not examine concerning the yellow hair, for he is unclean. 37 But if the scurf remain before him in its place, and a dark hair should have arisen in it, the scurf is healed: he is clean, and the priest shall pronounce him clean. 38 And if a man or woman should have in the skin of their flesh spots of a bright whiteness, 39 then the priest shall look; and, behold, there being bright spots of a bright whiteness in the skin of their flesh, it is a **tetter** [**bohak**]; it burst forth in the skin of his flesh; he is clean. 40 And if any one's head should lose the hair, he is only bald, he is clean. 41 And if his head should lose the hair in front, he is forehead bald: he is clean.

42 And if there should be in his baldness of head, or his baldness of forehead, a white or fiery plague, it is leprosy in his baldness of head, or baldness of forehead. 43 And the priest shall look upon him, and, behold, if the appearance of the **plague** [**se'eith**] be white or inflamed in his baldness of head or baldness in front, as the appearance of leprosy in the skin of his flesh, 44 he is a leprous man: the priest shall surely pronounce him [**KJV** & **MT** add **utterly**] unclean, his plague is in his head. 45 And the leper in whom the plague is, let his garments be ungirt, and his head uncovered; and let him have a covering put upon his mouth, and he shall be called unclean. 46 All the days in which the plague shall be upon him, being unclean, he shall be esteemed unclean; he shall dwell apart, his place of sojourn shall be without the camp ...

The rest of *Lev. 13* deals with leprosy in woolen or linen garments. *Lev. 14* deals with the ritual purification of "lepers", the offerings that Moses commanded them to give to the priests for their cleansing, and lastly, with leprosy in houses.

Deuteronomy (Lxx Brenton) 24:8 Take heed to thyself in [regard of] the plague of leprosy: thou shalt take great heed to do according to all the law, which the priests the Levites shall report to you; take heed to do, as I have charged you. 9 Remember all that the Lord thy God did to Mariam in the way, when ye were going out of Egypt.

NEXT ISSUE: PART II, MEDICAL VS. BIBLICAL LEPROSY

