

Leviticus 13:1 ¶ And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, saying,

As I read through this chapter, I was reminded of how the LORD is concerned about every part of our lives. In continuing to make a difference between what is clean and unclean, He continues to give detailed instructions regarding skin diseases. It seems that the term “leprosy” is used as a general term for skin infection. I found the following helpful information at www.jewishencyclopedia.com.

“In the Biblical description, one is immediately impressed by the absence of all allusion to the hideous facial deformity, the loss of feeling, and the rotting of the members. If such conspicuous manifestations had existed they could not possibly have escaped observation. . . . The white spots, upon which so much diagnostic stress was laid, were in all likelihood those of vitiligo, a disease quite common in tropical countries, and characterized by bright white spots, the hairs on which also become white. Vitiligo begins as small patches, which slowly spread, often involving ultimately large areas of the body's surface. The disease is harmless, but most disfiguring in those of swarthy complexion.”

I will go through the chapter trying to summarize the instructions and make personal observations at the end.

Leviticus 13:2 When a man shall have in the skin of his flesh a rising, a scab, or bright spot, and it be in the skin of his flesh *like* the plague of leprosy; then he shall be brought unto Aaron the priest, or unto one of his sons the priests: Leviticus 13:3 And the priest shall look on the plague in the skin of the flesh: and *when* the hair in the plague is turned white, and the plague in sight *be* deeper than the skin of his flesh, it is a plague of leprosy: and the priest shall look on him, and pronounce him unclean.

In Old Testament times, the priest ministered to both the spiritual and the physical health of the people. It reminds me that our physical and spiritual beings are connected and that both need continued attention.

If someone discovered that he had a swelling, scab or white spot on the skin (keep in mind that the Jewish people have darker skin), he was to go the priest to have it checked out. If the priest saw that the hair in the affected area was white and the spot more than skin deep, the person was to be declared unclean.

Leviticus 13:4 If the bright spot *be* white in the skin of his flesh, and in sight *be* not deeper than the skin, and the hair thereof *be* not turned white; then the priest shall shut up *him that hath* the plague seven days:

Leviticus 13:5 And the priest shall look on him the seventh day: and, behold, *if* the plague in his sight *be* at a stay, *and* the plague spread not in the skin; then the priest shall shut him up seven days more:

Leviticus 13:6 And the priest shall look on him again the seventh day: and, behold, *if* the plague *be* somewhat dark, *and* the plague spread not in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him clean: it *is but* a scab: and he shall wash his clothes, and be clean.

If the priest saw that the affected area was only skin deep and that hair in the area had not turned white, the person was to be quarantined for seven days and seen by the priest once again. If the area of concern had not gotten larger, the person was to be quarantined for seven more days and seen by the priest again. If the affected area was turning dark and not spreading, it was considered a scab and he was to be declared clean after washing his clothes.

Leviticus 13:7 But if the scab spread much abroad in the skin, after that he hath been seen of the priest for his cleansing, he shall be seen of the priest again:

Leviticus 13:8 And if the priest see that, behold, the scab spreadeth in the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean: it is a leprosy.

If, however, the scab had spread after being pronounced clean, the person was to go back to the priest. When the priest confirmed that the scab had spread, the person was pronounced unclean.

Leviticus 13:9 When the plague of leprosy is in a man, then he shall be brought unto the priest;

Leviticus 13:10 And the priest shall see *him*: and, behold, if the rising be white in the skin, and it have turned the hair white, and *there be* quick raw flesh in the rising;

Leviticus 13:11 It is an old leprosy in the skin of his flesh, and the priest shall pronounce him unclean, and shall not shut him up: for he is unclean.

When a person was brought to the priest because of an apparent infection that had turned the skin white and caused the hair in the affected area to turn white and the surrounding area was raw, he was to be declared unclean. The Hebrew for “old leprosy” seems to reference a long-term infection.

Leviticus 13:12 And if a leprosy break out abroad in the skin, and the leprosy cover all the skin of *him that hath* the plague from his head even to his foot, wheresoever the priest looketh;

Leviticus 13:13 Then the priest shall consider: and, behold, if the leprosy have covered all his flesh, he shall pronounce *him* clean *that hath* the plague: it is all turned white: he is clean.

If a person developed a skin condition that covered his whole body, the priest was to pronounce him clean.

This seems to be describing just a change in pigment that affects the whole body, like the vitiligo mentioned above in the definition from the Jewish Encyclopedia.

Leviticus 13:14 But when raw flesh appeareth in him, he shall be unclean.

Leviticus 13:15 And the priest shall see the raw flesh, and pronounce him to be unclean: for the raw flesh is unclean: it is a leprosy.

Leviticus 13:16 Or if the raw flesh turn again, and be changed unto white, he shall come unto the priest;

Leviticus 13:17 And the priest shall see him: and, behold, *if the plague be turned into white*; then the priest shall pronounce *him clean that hath the plague: he is clean.*

If, however, the skin condition included raw flesh, the priest was to declare the person unclean. Once the raw flesh disappeared and turned white, the person was to return to the priest to be pronounced clean once again.

Leviticus 13:18 ¶ The flesh also, in which, *even in the skin thereof, was a boil, and is healed,*

Leviticus 13:19 And in the place of the boil there be a white rising, or a bright spot, white, and somewhat reddish, and it be shewed to the priest;

Leviticus 13:20 And if, when the priest seeth it, behold, it *be in sight lower than the skin, and the hair thereof be turned white*; the priest shall pronounce him unclean: it *is a plague of leprosy broken out of the boil.*

If someone had a boil (an inflamed area) that healed but a white swelling developed in the place of the boil that was somewhat reddish, he was to be seen by the priest. If the priest saw that it was more than skin deep and the hair in the affected area had turned white, he was to pronounce the person unclean.

Leviticus 13:21 But if the priest look on it, and, behold, *there be no white hairs therein, and if it be not lower than the skin, but be somewhat dark*; then the priest shall shut him up seven days:

Leviticus 13:22 And if it spread much abroad in the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean: it *is a plague.*

However, if the priest saw that the hair in the affected area looked normal and it was no more than skin deep but somewhat dark, he was to quarantine the person for seven days before seeing him again. If the area had grown larger, the person was to be pronounced unclean.

Leviticus 13:23 But if the bright spot stay in his place, *and spread not, it is a burning boil*; and the priest shall pronounce him clean.

If the affected area did not spread, the priest was to pronounce the person clean.

Leviticus 13:24 Or if there be *any flesh, in the skin whereof there is a hot burning, and the quick flesh that burneth have a white bright spot, somewhat reddish, or white*;

Leviticus 13:25 Then the priest shall look upon it: and, behold, *if the hair in the bright spot be turned white, and it be in sight deeper than the skin*; it *is a leprosy broken out of the burning: wherefore the priest shall pronounce him unclean: it is the plague of leprosy.*

If a person had an inflamed area of skin that was hot and discolored (reddish or white), he was to see the priest. If the priest saw that the hair in the affected area was white and it was more than skin deep, the person was to be pronounced unclean.

Leviticus 13:26 But if the priest look on it, and, behold, *there be* no white hair in the bright spot, and it *be* no lower than the *other* skin, but *be* somewhat dark; then the priest shall shut him up seven days:

Leviticus 13:27 And the priest shall look upon him the seventh day: *and* if it be spread much abroad in the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean: *it is* the plague of leprosy.

Leviticus 13:28 And if the bright spot stay in his place, *and* spread not in the skin, but it *be* somewhat dark; *it is* a rising of the burning, and the priest shall pronounce him clean: for it *is* an inflammation of the burning.

However, if the priest saw that the hair in the affected area was normal and it was no more than skin deep and somewhat dark, the person was to be quarantined for seven days and seen again. If the area had spread, the person was unclean. If the area had not spread and was somewhat dark, the person was declared clean.

Leviticus 13:29 If a man or woman have a plague upon the head or the beard;

Leviticus 13:30 Then the priest shall see the plague: and, behold, if it *be* in sight deeper than the skin; *and there be* in it a yellow thin hair; then the priest shall pronounce him unclean: *it is* a dry scall, *even* a leprosy upon the head or beard.

If a man or woman developed a skin condition on his head or in his beard, the priest was to inspect it. If it was slightly deeper than the skin and the hair in it yellow and abnormal, the person was to be declared unclean.

The NIV Dictionary compares the scall to ringworm or eczema.

Leviticus 13:31 And if the priest look on the plague of the scall, and, behold, it *be* not in sight deeper than the skin, and *that there is* no black hair in it; then the priest shall shut up *him that hath* the plague of the scall seven days:

Leviticus 13:32 And in the seventh day the priest shall look on the plague: and, behold, *if* the scall spread not, and there be in it no yellow hair, and the scall *be* not in sight deeper than the skin;

Leviticus 13:33 He shall be shaven, but the scall shall he not shave; and the priest shall shut up *him that hath* the scall seven days more:

Leviticus 13:34 And in the seventh day the priest shall look on the scall: and, behold, *if* the scall be not spread in the skin, nor *be* in sight deeper than the skin; then the priest shall pronounce him clean: and he shall wash his clothes, and be clean.

If, however, the area was only skin deep and contained no black hair, the person was to be quarantined for seven days and seen by the priest once again. If the area had not spread and contained no yellow hair and the area was still not more than skin deep, the person was to be shaved around the affected area and quarantined for seven more days. After that time, if the priest saw that the area had not spread and was still no deeper than the skin, the person was to be pronounced clean after washing his clothes.

Leviticus 13:35 But if the scall spread much in the skin after his cleansing;
Leviticus 13:36 Then the priest shall look on him: and, behold, if the scall be spread in the skin, the priest shall not seek for yellow hair; he *is* unclean.
Leviticus 13:37 But if the scall be in his sight at a stay, and *that* there is black hair grown up therein; the scall is healed, he *is* clean: and the priest shall pronounce him clean.

If the area of concern spread after being pronounced clean, the priest was to check to confirm the spreading. If confirmed, the person was to be declared unclean no matter the condition of the hair. If, however, the area didn't appear to have spread and the hair in it was black, the person was determined to be healed and was declared clean.

Leviticus 13:38 ¶ If a man also or a woman have in the skin of their flesh bright spots, *even* white bright spots;
Leviticus 13:39 Then the priest shall look: and, behold, *if* the bright spots in the skin of their flesh *be* darkish white; it *is* a freckled spot *that* groweth in the skin; he *is* clean.

If a person developed white spots on their skin, he/she was to go to the priest for inspection. If he determined that the spots were darkish white, it was declared a freckle and the person was declared clean.

Leviticus 13:40 And the man whose hair is fallen off his head, he *is* bald; *yet is* he clean.
Leviticus 13:41 And he that hath his hair fallen off from the part of his head toward his face, he *is* forehead bald: *yet is* he clean.

Losing one's hair did not make one unclean.

Leviticus 13:42 And if there be in the bald head, or bald forehead, a white reddish sore; it *is* a leprosy sprung up in his bald head, or his bald forehead.
Leviticus 13:43 Then the priest shall look upon it: and, behold, *if* the rising of the sore *be* white reddish in his bald head, or in his bald forehead, as the leprosy appeareth in the skin of the flesh;
Leviticus 13:44 He *is* a leprous man, he *is* unclean: the priest shall pronounce him utterly unclean; his plague *is* in his head.

If the man with a bald head developed a reddish sore, the priest was to inspect it. If he saw that the sore was white reddish, he was declared unclean.

Leviticus 13:45 And the leper in whom the plague *is*, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean.
Leviticus 13:46 All the days wherein the plague *shall be* in him he shall be defiled; he *is* unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp *shall* his habitation *be*.

Anyone declared a leper and unclean must wear torn clothes and his head left bare. He was to cover the lower part of his face and yell “Unclean, unclean” when anyone approached him. He was to live outside the camp during the time that he was unclean.

Leviticus 13:47 ¶ The garment also that the plague of leprosy is in, *whether it be* a woollen garment, or a linen garment;

Leviticus 13:48 Whether *it be* in the warp, or woof; of linen, or of woollen; whether in a skin, or in any thing made of skin;

Leviticus 13:49 And if the plague be greenish or reddish in the garment, or in the skin, either in the warp, or in the woof, or in any thing of skin; *it is* a plague of leprosy, and shall be shewed unto the priest:

Leviticus 13:50 And the priest shall look upon the plague, and shut up *it that hath* the plague seven days:

Leviticus 13:51 And he shall look on the plague on the seventh day: if the plague be spread in the garment, either in the warp, or in the woof, or in a skin, *or* in any work that is made of skin; the plague *is* a fretting leprosy; *it is* unclean.

Leviticus 13:52 He shall therefore burn that garment, whether warp or woof, in woollen or in linen, or any thing of skin, wherein the plague is: for *it is* a fretting leprosy; it shall be burnt in the fire.

Leviticus 13:53 And if the priest shall look, and, behold, the plague be not spread in the garment, either in the warp, or in the woof, or in any thing of skin;

Leviticus 13:54 Then the priest shall command that they wash *the thing* wherein the plague *is*, and he shall shut it up seven days more:

Leviticus 13:55 And the priest shall look on the plague, after that it is washed: and, behold, *if* the plague have not changed his colour, and the plague be not spread; *it is* unclean; thou shalt burn it in the fire; *it is* fret inward, *whether it be* bare within or without.

Leviticus 13:56 And if the priest look, and, behold, the plague *be* somewhat dark after the washing of it; then he shall rend it out of the garment, or out of the skin, or out of the warp, or out of the woof:

Leviticus 13:57 And if it appear still in the garment, either in the warp, or in the woof, or in any thing of skin; *it is* a spreading *plague*: thou shalt burn that wherein the plague *is* with fire.

Leviticus 13:58 And the garment, either warp, or woof, or whatsoever thing of skin *it be*, which thou shalt wash, if the plague be departed from them, then it shall be washed the second time, and shall be clean.

Leviticus 13:59 This *is* the law of the plague of leprosy in a garment of woollen or linen, either in the warp, or woof, or any thing of skins, to pronounce it clean, or to pronounce it unclean.

Similar instructions were given regarding clothing that developed areas of contamination such as mildew. The inspection process was established to preserve the garment if possible. If necessary, however, the garment would be destroyed by fire.

Personal observations:

It stood out to me as I was going through these instructions that an infection that was more than skin deep usually made one unclean. It reminds me of the harsh words the Lord Jesus had for the Pharisees.

Matthew 23:25–28 “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.”

This also reminded me that we sometimes make the wrong assumptions from the appearance of things—whether in our own life or the lives of others. Circumstances do not always provide an accurate assessment of our spiritual well being.

It also stood out to me that a change in the area that caused it to swell often characterized that which was considered unclean. I connected that to our propensity to fall victim to pride. It also reminded me that sin easily spreads to affect others.

The fact that one was declared unclean did not preclude the possibility of future healing and restoration. What a blessed truth that pictures. The fact that we are sinners condemned to judgment doesn’t mean that we have to remain condemned. Jesus has provided for our salvation—for our healing and restoration to fellowship with the LORD.

Isaiah 53:5 “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”

The contaminated clothing made me think of how we present ourselves to the world. Do we choose to cover ourselves with the righteousness that is available in Jesus through obedience to God’s word, or do we choose to cover ourselves with the things of the world that often reflect a rebellious and disobedient spirit?

On a practical note, these instructions were also important to the health of the people of Israel who did not have the benefit of the medicines we have today to prevent the spread of disease.