

# The Miracles Of Jesus Christ: Healing A Leper (Part One)

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The Bible shows Christ healing people of leprosy twice during His ministry. The first case, in which a single man is healed, appears in Matthew 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-45; and Luke 5:12-16. The three parallel accounts provide a more complete witness by adding valuable details. The second healing of lepers, involving ten men, is found only in Luke 17:12-19.

Throughout history, few diseases have been as dreaded as the horrible affliction known as leprosy. It was so common and severe among ancient peoples that God gave Moses extensive instructions to deal with it (Leviticus 13 and 14). Biblically, leprosy refers to several skin diseases and even some kinds of fungus, such as those found in the walls of houses and in clothing. The leprosy that Christ healed was similar to what is today called Hansen's Disease, a detestable infection that can greatly disfigure and destroy the human body. Though not as contagious as scarlet fever, it can still be transmitted through an infected person's secretions. Dr. Richard H. Pousma, a missionary in Asia and a hospital superintendent in New Mexico, explains:

Leprosy was greatly feared by the Israelites, not only because of the physical damage done by the disease, but also because of the strict isolation laws applying to leprosy, making patients feel like feared outcasts of society. . . . Leprosy [in the Bible] appears in two principle forms. The first, and by far the more dangerous, is called *lepomatous*; and the other, more benign type is designated *tuberculoid*. Both start with discoloration of a patch of skin. . . . In the lepomatous type of leprosy, the patch may spread widely in all directions. Portions of the eyebrows may disappear. Spongy, tumor-like swellings grow on the face and body. The disease becomes systemic and involves the internal organs as well as the skin. Marked deformity of the hands and feet occur when the tissues between the bones deteriorate and disappear. . . . Untreated cases may be sick with lepomatous leprosy from ten to twenty years, death occurring from the disease itself. . . . The tuberculoid type is less severe. . . . [It] tends to be limited and even untreated cases heal completely in from one to three years. (*The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, "Leprosy.")

In biblical times, it was almost universally believed that only God could heal. Even the king of Israel, to whom the king of Syria sent his general, Naaman, for healing, remarks, "Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy?" (II Kings 5:7). The prophet Elisha intervenes, suggesting how Naaman could be healed. The belief that only God could heal leprosy is key to Christ's use of this miracle to prove who He was. Beyond that, in His healing of the leper are timeless spiritual truths applicable to our lives today.

## 1. What can we learn personally from leprosy in Scripture?

**Comment:** Leprosy vividly illustrates sin and its fruits. The disease's effects on the body demonstrate the effects of sin on the mind. Leprosy represents God's view of sin, as detestable, deforming, and unclean. Both leprosy and sin begin small then grow

relentlessly until they infect the whole person. They also both cause heartrending social problems, as the quarantine laws suggest. Families are often split. Lepers suffer both the disease and ostracism from society. In the end, they both destroy their victims' lives.

Luke the physician, in describing the man as "full" of the dreadful disease (Luke 5:12), implies that he was about to die. In this advanced stage of leprosy, he was living apart from other people. According to Leviticus 13:45, he had to wear a cloth over his mouth and cry, "Unclean, unclean."

In this situation, as in others, Christ performs a miracle in which there can be no doubt that God alone healed him. God's healing power is most obviously seen when He provides deliverance in a "hopeless" situation. He often works this way with us, allowing trials to become increasingly worse before He works His will. Though He seems deaf to our prayers as the situation deteriorates, He may simply be letting the situation progress so that we have no doubt about who has come to our aid and whose power solved the crisis. In persevering, we grow spiritually, and He receives greater glory.

## 2. What national lesson can we learn from leprosy in Scripture?

**Comment:** The condition of the leper parallels the spiritual condition of today's sinful society, which is reminiscent of ancient Israel as Isaiah the prophet describes it in Isaiah 1:6-7:

From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; strangers devour your land in your presence; and it is desolate. . . .

America today wallows in immorality and deals treacherously with other nations, while thumbing its nose at the merciful God who has given it abundant blessings. Like men, nations reap what they sow (Galatians 6:7). We have, and still are, sowing curses, and we are beginning to suffer loss—of freedoms, sovereignty, land, culture, and many other long-cherished things. The loathsome signs that this country is spiritually sick are easily seen. It is leprous!