



## מצרע Metzora Leper

[Leviticus 14.1—15.33](#) / [2 Kings 7.3—20](#) / [Luke 10—13](#)

**Leprosy** This portion continues the discussion of צרעת *tsara'at* “leprosy” from the previous portion, *Tazria*. As we saw there, צרעת is not the disease of leprosy we think of today, but an affliction which is a symptom of consequences for gossip.



**Now the Neighbors are Talking** [Leviticus 14.33-57](#) goes on to describe what to do if the plague of צרעת affects the house. First, everything is put outside, and then the house is shut up for seven days. If the plague continues to spread, the house would be destroyed. This makes it obvious to everyone: “The Joneses have been talking bad about others—look what’s happening to their home!”

“It Seems to Me...” Notice that the owner can’t say, “My house has צרעת” or “My house has no צרעת.” All he can say is, “It seems to me...” Only the priest can say the house is afflicted. “It seems to me” is a useful phrase. I have an uncle who was a judge for decades. He was so used to hearing contradicting testimony, that he frustrated my Dad. Dad would tell him an interesting story, and Uncle Joe would say, “I don’t know that.” He just wouldn’t believe anything until it had been proven to him. He may not have been an exciting conversationalist, but he couldn’t be accused of gossip, either.

## לשון הרע Lashown Hara The Evil

**Tongue** is one type of evil speech if it meets four criteria: 1) it’s true 2) it’s negative 3) it’s not generally known and 4) repeating it serves no useful purpose. By avoiding לשון הרע, even refusing to listen to it, we will save ourselves and others a lot of pain. Another type of לשון הרע to avoid is talking about ourselves that way. It may be true, but if it’s negative, not generally known, and serves no useful purpose in telling, just keep quiet.





**ישוע Cleanses** Despite the prescription for the cleansing of **צרעת**, there was rarely any healing of **צרעת** in Israel, [Luke 4.27](#). That's why in [Matthew 11.4-5](#), when John the Baptist is in prison and wondering if **ישוע** *Yeshua* Jesus really is the promised Messiah, **ישוע** sends back word about His various miracles, including the healing of leprosy. **ישוע** heals several with **צרעת** and in one case 10 at a time, [Luke 17.11-19](#). Several times He orders the healed person, as in [Mark 1.40-45](#), not to tell anyone. It is the leper's tongue that got him in trouble in the first place, and **ישוע** basically says, "Keep your mouth shut." But the man still can't control himself and tells everyone!

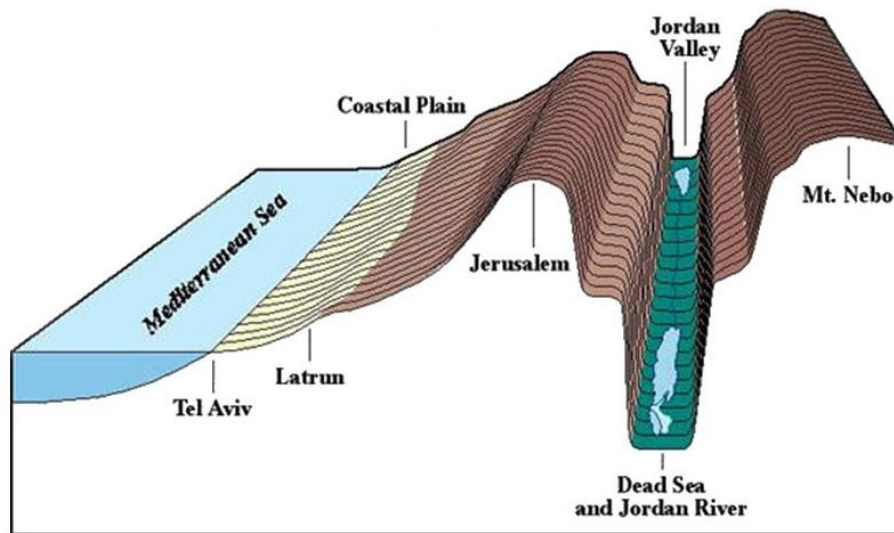
**When It's OK to Speak Negatively** All the warnings against gossip and slander don't mean that you can't rebuke your neighbor. I have heard a Christian say that conflict and rebuke are "un-Christian and immature." Too often we ignore what the Bible says:

- [Leviticus 19.17](#) Rebuke your neighbor—just before the verse to love!
- [Proverbs 27.5](#) Open rebuke is better than hidden love
- [Proverbs 28.23](#) Rebuke earns favor
- [Proverbs 29.1](#) Ignoring rebukes is dangerous
- [Matthew 18.15-20](#) **ישוע** gives instruction on rebuking.

In our family when our children were growing up, we called Matthew 18.15-20 the "Four Steps." Notice that Step 1 is to speak directly to the offending person. Often we want to complain to a person's supervisor, but if we have a complement, we tell the person directly. That's backward. Complain directly and praise indirectly! Step 2 is to take someone with you. If you can't find someone to agree there's a problem, maybe there isn't. Step 3 is to go before the Church. And if there still isn't repentance, Step 4 is to treat the offender as a pagan or tax collector.

**The Good Samaritan** יְשׁוּעַ in [Luke 10.25-37](#) tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. Many people know יְשׁוּעַ tells this story to demonstrate who is a neighbor. But the people of that culture hear more in what יְשׁוּעַ says than we do.

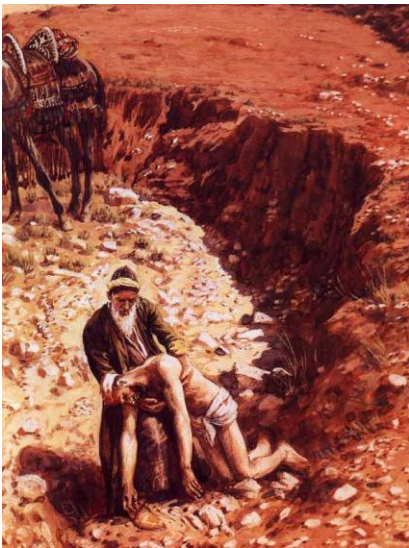
It is an expert in תּוֹרָה [Torah](#) Law/Instruction, a scribe, who understands the two greatest commandments, to love God and to love neighbor. Scribes were as highly respected concerning תּוֹרָה as a modern-day lawyer is concerning secular law. This scribe seems genuinely concerned and asks יְשׁוּעַ, “Who is my neighbor?” He is wondering how far to take [Leviticus 19.18](#), love your neighbor as yourself. After you read this explanation of the story יְשׁוּעַ tells, you will have a better idea of the kinds of legitimate-sounding concerns this scribe would have.



A man travels from Jerusalem down to Jericho when he is stripped and beaten by robbers and almost killed. Jerusalem is on a mountain range about 2,550' above sea level. Jericho in the Jordan Valley is about 850' below sea level, an elevation change of about 3,400' and a distance of about 15 miles through hot, arid terrain. About half the thousands of priests who serve in the Temple live in Jericho and make this trek.



**Rationalizing Selfishness** The first person to see the beaten man is a priest, a chief among his people, who could be returning home to Jericho from Temple service. As a priest, he has what some people listening to **ישוע** would consider a fair reason for not going near the man in case he is dead. [Leviticus 21.1-4](#) says that a priest may not defile himself for the dead except for certain relationships. It's possible, but unlikely, that the beaten man could be a relative of the priest, now unrecognizable because of the beating and stripping. The second man to come along is a Levite. If he assists the man thinking he isn't dead, and then finds out he is, then he has touched a corpse, may not return home, and must journey back to the Temple for cleansing with the ashes of the red heifer, [Numbers 19](#), adding an exhausting 30 miles plus seven days outside the community before he may return home. Or he may be thinking of [Deuteronomy 21.1-9](#), which says that if a man is found dead outside the city, the elders of the nearest city have to offer a



sacrifice and testify that they did not shed the man's blood, nor did they see it. If the beaten man is actually dead and near Jericho, the priest or Levite would be the one to break the bad news and involve Jericho in this sacrifice. This might earn him a, "Hey, thanks,"

from the townspeople. Probably very few listening to **ישוע** would think these last two are valid reasons not to help a man in need. But by crossing to the other side of the road, the priest and the Levite each have what is called "plausible deniability." They could rationalize their reasons for not getting involved, but in their hearts they would know they were being selfish. Someone listening to **ישוע** at this point would expect to hear that the third person to come by is an Israelite, the regular guy as the hero to save the day. Instead, **ישוע** throws a curve and jumps to the lowest rung of society, a Samaritan, the least likely of all to help a Jew.

Jews at the time of **ישוע** hated Samaritans. After the Assyrian captivity of about 722 BC, Assyria scattered the Jewish residents of Samaria and replaced them with people from other nations, [2 Kings 17.24](#). Samaria became a mixed race, half-Jew, half-Gentile.

They believed **תורה**, but worshipped at Mt. Gerzim rather than Jerusalem, [John 4.20-22](#). And Samaritans didn't care for Jews, either. Josephus records in his [Antiquities 18.2.2](#) that between 6 and 9 AD, when the priests opened the Temple gates just after midnight on Passover, some Samaritans crept into the Temple courts and threw corpses around. The corpses had to be removed, and anyone who touched them became unclean for seven days, missing Passover. After this, Samaritans were barred from the Temple. Both sides understood, "Jews do not associate with Samaritans," [John 4.9b](#).

The robbers rob, beat, strip, and abandon the man. The Samaritan, who could also become unclean from touching a dead body, pushes that thought aside and reverses all the damage: he assists the man, bandages his wounds, arranges for medical attention, and covers expenses. The teacher of the Law understands now that a neighbor is the one who shows mercy. And God is not fooled when we rationalize selfishness.

Glossary, in order of appearance

מצרע	<i>Metzora</i>	“leper”
צרעת	<i>tsara'at</i>	“leprosy”/an affliction which results from bad talk
לשון הרע	<i>Lashown Hara</i>	The Evil Tongue
ישוע	<i>Yeshua</i>	Jesus/salvation
תורה	<i>Torah</i>	Law/Instruction/first 5 books of the Bible