

US DISASTER PROGRAM

Integrating Healed People Back Into Our Community



Bible Study for times of disaster

EXPLORING NEW RITUALS

Thinking carefully about religious practice concerning an infectious disease is not something new. At the time that the Bible was written, leprosy was understood to be a disease transmitted by touch, whose spread through a population could be prevented if appropriate measures were taken.

Read Leviticus 13: 1-8

The instructions given in this passage have much in common with good practice concerning infectious diseases.

First, when a person shows signs of having an infection (v 2), Leviticus is clear that the person affected is not to hide or deny what is happening. Rather, "he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests."

Leviticus next recognizes that any symptoms observed need to be the subject of careful diagnosis (vv 3-4). The text displays an understanding that not all infections are the same. Only proper diagnosis can tell accurately what is causing the ailment.

The instructions in Leviticus make careful use of the practice of quarantine. Verses 4-5 speak of the priest confining a person affected for seven days, re-examining the person, and then requiring an additional seven-day quarantine. Such quarantine is recommended as an effective means of preventing the transmission of the disease. At the end of the full quarantine, further scrutiny is commanded so that the priest can discern whether the infection has passed (v 6).

When the infection has gone, the priest declares the person "clean," ready to return to normal life within the community.

"The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: This shall be the ritual for the leprous[a] person at the time of his cleansing: He shall be brought to the priest; the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall make an examination. If the disease is healed in the leprous person, the priest shall command that two living clean birds and cedarwood and crimson yarn and hyssop be brought for the one who is to be cleansed" (Leviticus 14:1-4)

Adapted from *La foi en temps d'Ebola* by Dr. Isaac Muyonga and Rt. Rev. Michael Beasley



Read Leviticus 14: 1-9

Leviticus goes further than purely giving instructions about deciding whether a person is infected or not. It also recognizes that a person who has come through an infectious episode must be reintegrated into the life of the community. In Leviticus, this happens through a clear and public ritual that shows that all is now well with the person who had been infected and that the individual no longer poses a risk to others. In Leviticus, the public ritual was culturally appropriate for its time. Back then, it involved sprinkling the recovered person with the blood of a sacrificed bird and then a process of ritual bathing and shaving. As modern-day Christians, we don't employ the ritual practices of the Old Testament. But we nonetheless should heed the need for people who have been affected by infection to be readmitted into the community and publicly shown to be safe.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How could your church publicly and joyfully acknowledge the recovery of those who have lived through sickness from an infectious disease?
2. What kind of ritual, appropriate for today, would demonstrate that people who had been infected now are safe and able to take part fully in the life of the community?