Leprosy in the Bible (Mike Kaye, CE Elder)

Leprosy--mentioned in both Old and New Testaments a total of over 40 times, is a highly contagious skin disease that made a person ceremonially unclean and led to banishment from the community. It is also used as a symbol of sin, moral decay and spiritual blindness. Leprosy is recognized by white patches, boils, or sores that form and spread over the body. Severe cases, could include twisting of limbs, curling of fingers, and disfiguration. Though incurable by humans, the healings in the Bible were brought about by God, acting thru His prophets in the Old Testament and via Jesus in the New.

Leviticus 13-14 gives detailed instructions on diagnosis and management of leprosy. Lepers were required to wear torn clothes, leave their hair unkempt, cover the lower part of their faces, and cry out, "Unclean! Unclean!" Note that leprosy then was actually a broad range of skin diseases; modern leprosy (*Hansen's disease*), is a bacterial infection that is curable with antibiotics.

The Bible implies that the disease was at times a divine punishment for sin. In Numbers 12:10-15, Miriam, Moses's sister, was struck with leprosy after she and Aaron spoke against Moses. She became '*white as snow'* because the Lord was angry with her.

Also, in 2 Chronicles 26:16-23, King Uzziah arrogantly and against the Mosaic Law entered the temple to burn incense; as a result, God punished him with leprosy. But wait, there's more! This incident is a great example of every other time of which I am aware where human unbelief and archaeology intersect. Scholars considered this as a metaphor invented by priests to teach a moral lesson about pride. But in 1931 a heavy burial plaque was discovered on the Mount of Olives; written in Aramaic were the words: "Hither were brought the bones of Uzziah, King of Judah. Do not open!"

In the New Testament, Jesus is seen compassionately healing lepers rather than turning them away or shrinking away from them; in fact, in Luke 5:12-19, He touched a leper to heal him, at which His disciples must have been horrified, because (they would have thought) Jesus would now be unfit to be amongst them. This leper had approached Jesus (which would have shocked all around Him) and showed his faith by saying: "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." And as is written: *Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man. "I am willing," He said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him.* Notice that it does not say that Jesus *healed* him, but made him *clean*--like He *cleanses* us of sin with justification when we come to Him.

Jesus also directed His Apostles to: "cleanse the lepers" in Matthew 10:8. Of course, that would be done not in their own power, but in His.