

and in this case that wish is that he should not be buried in the land of Egypt. Once again KJV is more or less literal, although "deal kindly" does carry something of the element of the action required. Certainly RSV with "promise to deal loyally" places the emphasis on the responsibility, but it is very difficult for the reader to make any sense of this in light of what the real meaning of the Hebrew is. NEB makes a correction of this particular problem by the formulation in the longer sentence which makes it clear that this obligation is to be carried out. GNB, on the other hand, does not make any effort to translate literally the words "mercy" and "truth", but rather assumes that the whole reference to mutual responsibility is at this point picked up in the requirement that a solemn vow be taken. In other words, GNB makes the assumption that "deal loyally and truly" has the sense "make a solemn promise", "tell me that you will carry out your obligation".

Conclusion

These examples from the book of Genesis should serve as a key to the translator as to how he should proceed in the translation of the Hebrew word "mercy", "love", "faithful love", "covenant love", "kindness". In each case he needs to pay very careful attention to the context. From the context he will need to decide what the "group" is: that is to say, what specific relationship, whether that of family, marriage, blood relationship, business relationship, covenant relationship, and so on, is involved. In addition, he will need to decide from the context what particular obligation is being referred to with the Hebrew word. Once he has done this, he will need to use the resources of his own language and his own imagination in reconstructing the situation. He should then be able to decide how best to convey the primary element of the Hebrew word, whether this be that of mercy, faithful love, obligation under some contract or agreement, devotion, responsibility to help, tender love, sympathy, or whatever else it may be.

Translation of this Hebrew word reinforces a basic lesson for the translator; no word can be translated in isolation. Every word must be understood against its cultural background and in its overall context if the aim of the translator is to be fulfilled that he convey accurately what the original text says and express it in a form that will be readily understood by his readers.

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LEPROSY IN TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE

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It is the task of the Bible translator to understand the words of the original text and to translate them in such a way that readers are unlikely to misunderstand or to get the wrong meaning from the translation.

The translation of the term "leprosy" or rather its Hebrew and Greek equivalents, presents a problem for the translator, both in understanding what it refers to and in finding a suitable equivalent for that in the language of translation. In this article we will examine this problem in three different ways:

1. We will examine the introduction of the disease we know as leprosy into the part of the world where the biblical scriptures were written, the spread of the disease, and the terms used by medical men to describe it.
2. We will look at the biblical texts, in all the passages that are relevant to this study, and try to arrive at the correct meaning of the terms used.
3. We will refer to the confusion of terms that arose in the Middle Ages and that has affected both medical usage and interpretation of the Bible.

Early references to leprosy

Leprosy was well known and well described in the classical Indian texts, centuries before the birth of Christ, and long before the biblical texts were committed to writing. Actually there is good reason to believe that India is the country where leprosy first appeared.

A number of historians have claimed that leprosy was prevalent in classical Egypt. A close examination of the texts on which this claim is based, however, gives a completely different picture. Nowhere in the classical Egyptian texts can a description of leprosy be found. Plinius the Second (AD 23–79) who describes the introduction of leprosy into Italy, claims that the disease had arrived in Egypt from “Nubia”, that is the region to the south of Egypt; but there does not seem to be any foundation for this claim.

Hippocrates (460–377 BC), the famous Greek physician, indeed does describe a disease, which he calls *lepra*. Whatever this disease is, however, it certainly is not leprosy. It would appear to be a group of skin conditions, which today we cannot diagnose definitely. As we will see, this introduction of the term *lepra* with its connotation of an unpleasant skin disease, something not very nice, something you did not want to associate with or get into your home—had important consequences later.

Leprosy in the countries of the Bible

The first description of leprosy in the biblical world is found in the form of quotations from older sources by Oribaseos (AD 326–403), a Byzantine physician who is famous for his accurate and extensive quotations from older and otherwise lost texts. He himself describes the disease called *elephantiasis* which can now be identified unmistakably as leprosy. He also quotes from Rufus of Ephesus (98–117) who is himself quoting from another Alexandrian physician, Straton, of whom little is known otherwise. This Straton was writing as a medical student about an important but quite new disease; and he gives a very good description of it, easily recognizable as leprosy.

To find out more about the situation that Straton was writing about it is reasonable to look to modern experiences of the introduction of leprosy into areas where it has not been known before. It is reasonable to expect about 50 years to pass between the introduction of the disease and the time when it becomes a major public health problem. And that is probably just the moment when a leading professor would request a bright medical student to write an essay about the new disease. What happened round the Eastern shores of the Mediterranean around 50 years before the student days of Straton? Only one new contact with the outside world took place during that period. And that was

with an area where we know that leprosy was prevalent. Alexander (356–323 BC) returned in 326 BC from his Indian campaign. That return would appear to be the time and the means by which leprosy was introduced to the Mediterranean countries.

Plinius mentions as a definite fact that *elephantiasis*, that is leprosy, was unknown in Italy until Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus (106–48 BC) returned from his campaign against King Mithridates of Pontus in 62.

During the whole Hellenistic and classical Latin period we have a number of clear descriptions of *elephantiasis*, that is leprosy. It is very clear that the excellent physicians of this period do not make the mistake of confusing *elephantiasis* with the skin condition, or range of conditions, known as *lepra*.

The confusion of terms

In order to understand the confusion of terms that arises later, we must follow the medical history of leprosy a bit further.

With the collapse of the Christian, Byzantine empire, much of the knowledge of the West was recovered by Arabic physicians. From our point of view the most important of these was Yohannis Crysorrhas (777–857). He is responsible for the translation of the Hellenistic *elephantiasis* into Arabic *juzam*, a term which he took from the Koran. Now *juzam* certainly did not mean leprosy, but Yohannis used it as the equivalent for *elephantiasis*, which is leprosy. This possibly indicates that a confusion of terms had already begun before his time. (Incidentally, *juzam* in the Koran is probably equivalent to Hebrew *zarath*, which as we will see later does not refer to leprosy either.)

At the time of the Renaissance, a great work was undertaken in translating re-discovered Greek and Latin texts from their Arabic translations back into Latin, which was the language used by scholars at that time. The original Greek and Latin texts were only re-discovered much later. But now the confusion of terms really sets in: we have very good physicians, writing in very bad Latin, describing leprosy clearly and well, some of them using the term *lepra*, others using the term *elephantiasis*. And this confusing use of two different terms for the same disease continued until it was abolished at the International Leprosy Congress in Berlin in 1905.

Now although the physicians of the Renaissance period used two different terms for leprosy, not one of them confuses their term with the biblical "leprosy". In fact several of them even distinctly refer to the difference between them. But from the 19th century on the confusion seems to be complete, both in language and in thought.

To sum up what we know from the early history and description of leprosy:

1. We can state quite definitely that at the time when the Old Testament literature was created, leprosy simply did not exist in that part of the world.
2. On the other hand, when the New Testament literature was written, leprosy was known and described in the area, under the term *elephantiasis*. At that time and in that area, the term *lepra* was used for a group of undefined but unpleasant skin diseases.

We shall now turn to the Biblical literature.

***Zarath* in the Old Testament**

The Hebrew word that has been translated "leprosy" is *zarath*. It is found in 8 passages. We shall examine these in four groups.

In Exodus 4.6, Numbers 12.10, Deuteronomy 24.8–9, 2 Samuel 3.29 and 2 Chronicles 26.16–21 the dominant feature is of somebody who by an action or an attitude has invoked the anger of Yahweh. As a result he or she has been declared unclean and unfit to approach Yahweh. And a certain outward sign accompanies the declaration of uncleanness. However the description in some of these passages of the whole hand or the whole body suddenly turning white means that the condition cannot be what we know as leprosy. And the way in which King Uzziah's "leprosy" suddenly appeared does not point to the disease we know as leprosy today, either.

In 2 Kings 5.1–27 we have a description that easily allows a modern physician to make a definite diagnosis. The transmission of scabies through wearing the clothing of an infected person is so typical that this can hardly be anything else. The treatment that the prophet Elisha prescribed, bathing in hot spring waters containing sulphur, has been known in that area since early times, and is still in use.

In 2 Kings 7.3–8 we have a reference to the condition of four men; but we also have the interesting suggestion that their state of uncleanness was only recognized as such by the Jews and not by the Syrians. This shows clearly that the uncleanness is of a ritual nature, and not something which is primarily medical.

Finally we come to the most important passage, Leviticus 13.1–46. The detailed description here of the skin conditions that make a man ritually unclean, and the elaborate examinations that are needed in order to make him clean again, clearly indicate a ritual condition. (Of course it is obvious that there also is a physical condition.) The descriptions are remarkably similar to those in a classical Egyptian military medical treatise, where the author mentions Chon's swellings and Chon's mutilations. These descriptions most likely refer to the conditions called gasgangrena and ergotism, both of which are conditions that are of the greatest importance to a fighting army on the march. And the need for a strict religious, moral, and physical discipline in a fighting army like the one Moses commanded cannot be overemphasized. The description of *zarath* of clothing at the end of this chapter makes an old army doctor remember the many times he has told his soldiers about the importance of keeping their underclothing clean.

The conclusion is inevitable: *zarath* cannot by any stretch of the imagination be identical with leprosy. It is essentially a ritual condition, and should not be identified with particular diseases.

***Lepra* and *lepros* in the New Testament**

In the New Testament we are dealing with two words, *lepra* and *lepros*, translated "leprosy" and "leper". We shall look at the occurrences of these words in three groups.

In Matthew 8.2–4, Matthew 11.5, Mark 1.40–44, Luke 5.12–16, and in that most beautiful description in Luke 17.11–19, we have several incidents mentioned where Jesus cleanses or heals lepers. There is absolutely no description

of the disease, either here or elsewhere in the New Testament. But the way in which Jesus deals with the lepers, and in particular the way in which he sends them to the priests to be declared clean, brings to mind the descriptions of the ritual cleansing in Leviticus 13 and 14. It is quite obvious that Jesus considered that these people suffered from *zarath*.

In Luke 4.27 we have just a passing reference to Naaman, and what happened in his time. This passage is of little interest to us.

In Matthew 26.6 and Mark 14.3 we meet Simon the Leper. Here again we have no description of his condition. We do know that he could not have been suffering from *zarath* at the time of the incident, since he was not cast out of the city. He could possibly have been the one leper who returned to give thanks (Luke 17.15–19). He would then have kept the nickname as a kind of reminder of what Jesus had done for him.

Can we then arrive at a common understanding of what is behind the New Testament word *lepra*? It is remarkable that all three gospel writers use the same word. Luke who at the very least must have had some association with a qualified physician, would certainly not have used the word *lepra* if he had had *elephantiasis* (leprosy) in mind. And the other writers are not unlearned, ignorant men either. We should not forget that physical health was a major preoccupation of people at that time, and that medical terminology was by no means unknown to reasonably well-educated men. I cannot imagine that Mark or Matthew committed the gross error of calling *elephantiasis lepra*. It seems that we have to accept that in the days of Jesus, the Jews accepted and understood *lepra*, if they were Greek-speaking, as *zarath* of the Law.

We do have in the New Testament one description of a man in a particular condition which it is possible to understand as a description of leprosy—Lazarus of the parable. We have no clinical description, but the whole situation reminds us of the way sufferers from leprosy have been treated in many countries, with a mixture of compassion, religious obligation, fear and contempt. We should well notice that the word *lepra* does not appear here.

It is reasonable to suggest that the gospel writers have selected the Greek word *lepra* with its rather vague suggestion of something unpleasant and unwanted when they were looking for an equivalent of the Hebrew *zarath*.

***Zarath* and *lepra* in translations of the Bible**

The scholars who translated the Old Testament into Greek around 150 BC probably followed the same line of thinking as the writers of the gospels. It is unbelievable that educated scholars in the Hellenistic period should have been so ignorant that they confused a ritual condition, *zarath*, with a particular, well-described disease, *elephantiasis*. It is even more unbelievable that they should have written *lepra* when they had *elephantiasis* (leprosy) in mind.

Probably *lepra* in Hellenistic medicine was never attached to one specific skin condition, but rather to a group of unpleasant conditions in which the skin is affected by weeping sores or rashes. This makes it easy to understand why a Hellenistic translator, with his period's concern about bodily cleanliness, should relate what was unacceptable to Yahweh to what was physically unpleasant.

The Latin translations, both of the Old Testament and the New Testament, use the word *lepra* for *zarath*, following the Greek translation, and directly translated the Greek *lepra* into Latin *lepra*.

The earliest European translations also use the same word for both *lepra* and *zarath* in their various languages, probably regarding a firm diagnosis of leprosy as something else—it is more than likely that they had the same understanding as medical people of their day, that though the word leprosy is derived from the Greek *lepra*, the diseases were quite different. At that time it is unlikely that this would have caused any great harm.

It is a completely different story, however, when leprosy ceased to be a problem in Europe, and knowledge of the disease was no longer common. The later translations in Europe, and the translations in other parts of the world, where leprosy really was a problem, by mistake indicated a definite diagnosis of leprosy. Many translations into many other languages followed this unhappy trend and translated *zarath* and *lepra* into whichever word in their own language definitely meant leprosy. The amount of unnecessary suffering caused by this cannot be measured.

Conclusion

How then should we translate *zarath* and *lepra* today? We should not follow translations like the New English Bible, where the translators by the use of words that suggest definite skin diseases, seem to have in mind that *zarath* and *lepra* were particular medical conditions that made people and implements unsuitable for holy use. This is as bad as the suggestion that in the eyes of God there is a connection between particular diseases and sin. We must rather find expressions that can convey the meaning that by certain acts or attitudes a person separates himself from God, and thus becomes a sufferer from *zarath* or *lepra*, the state where he is unacceptable in the eyes of the Lord.

In some of the passages in which *zarath* and *lepra* are found there are descriptions of the condition of the people who suffered from them. And of course we must try to translate those descriptions as accurately as possible, using the words that the language of translation has available. However, in dealing with the terms themselves, the important thing is to use words and expressions that focus on the ritual separation from God which is the main element in their meaning.

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THE USE AND LIMITATIONS OF INTERLINEAR EDITIONS

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Ideally, Bible translators should not need Greek-English or Hebrew-English interlinear editions. They should know Greek and Hebrew. In practice, however, it is not always possible to find people who are well trained in the biblical languages as well as having the other necessary qualifications, and who are