

Matthew 8:1 – 17

Mt.8:1 When Jesus came down from the mountain, large crowds followed him. ² And a leper came to him and bowed down before him, and said, 'Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.' ³ Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. ⁴ And Jesus said to him, 'See that you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest and present the offering that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.' ⁵ And when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, imploring him, ⁶ and saying, 'Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented.' ⁷ Jesus said to him, 'I will come and heal him.' ⁸ But the centurion said, 'Lord, I am not worthy for you to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed.' ⁹ For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it.' ¹⁰ Now when Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who were following, 'Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. ¹¹ I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; ¹² but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹³ And Jesus said to the centurion, 'Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed.' And the servant was healed that very moment. ¹⁴ When Jesus came into Peter's home, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick in bed with a fever. ¹⁵ he touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she got up and waited on him. ¹⁶ When evening came, they brought to him many who were demon-possessed; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill. ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: 'He himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases.'

Historical and Cultural Background

- *Lepers in Israel:* The Sinai Law instructed Israel to take great caution with anything that looked like a skin disease, because it could be highly infectious. A priest was to inspect the person, and if it was leprosy, pronounce him 'unclean.' 'As for the leper who has the infection, his clothes shall be torn, and the hair of his head shall be uncovered, and he shall cover his mustache and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!' He shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.' (Lev.13:45 – 46)
- *Touching Unclean Things:* In the symbolic world of the Old Testament, a clean person touching an unclean person or thing became unclean (e.g. Hag.2:11 – 13). Interestingly, touching the holy altar in the sanctuary of God's tabernacle/temple made an ordinary person or thing holy (Ex.29:37).
- *Jesus Stretched Out His Hand:* A Jewish reader would hear this phrase (Mt.8:3) as an echo of God delivering Israel from Egypt with ten plagues by God's word (Ex.3:20; 7:5; Ps.136:12). In Matthew 8:1 – 9:38, Jesus does ten miracles (or groupings of miracles) by his word.
- *The Roman Centurion:* Romans were occupying Israel militarily, so the Jewish population hated them. The house of a Gentile was considered to be unclean, according to Acts 10:28. This did not come from the Old Testament itself, but was an extension of other ideas.