

Numbers 5:1-4

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/num/num-5/numbers-51-4/>

Numbers 5:1-4 includes the LORD's commands concerning personal uncleanness. There are several ways mentioned here that a person could become unclean. Any unclean person was to be sent outside the camp to quarantine for a period of time.

Again, *the Lord spoke to Moses* (v. 1). This time, His statements concerned *the sons of Israel* (v. 2), not only the leaders or the priests as in the previous chapters. The LORD commanded the people to *send away from the camp*:

- *Every leper.* The word for *leper* (Hebrew “tsarua”) might refer to any infectious skin disease, including leprosy (or “Hansen’s disease”).
- *Everyone having a discharge.* A *discharge* (Heb. “zub”) could point to any flow of fluid from the body, including the result of a chronic disease, menstrual flow, and seminal fluid.
- *Everyone who is unclean because of a dead person.* The Hebrew for “dead person” is “nephesh,” which normally refers to the “soul” or more generally the “person.” Here, it refers to the physical body. Someone who touches a dead body must be declared “unclean” and separated from the camp.

Today, we could observe that all these health regulations are good public health practices to prevent spread of disease and infection. God does not explain bacteria, and how it spreads. He simply asks the nation to trust that His ways are for their best. Given that they were encamped in fairly close quarters, these methods of quarantine would have substantial positive impact on the public health.

Moses was to *send away both male and female* (v. 3) who were unclean. He was given the command to *send them outside the camp so that they will not defile their camp where I dwell in their midst*. This highlights the principle that to be “unclean” was the opposite of holiness, and that which was unclean could not dwell near the tabernacle where the holy God dwelt. But, as always, there was a very practical benefit. Just as the Ten Commandments were given to bring social order and mutual prosperity, these personal regulations bring physical health and prosperity.

Verse 4 reports that *the sons of Israel did so and sent them outside the camp* (v. 4). Thus, again the people did *just as the Lord had spoken to Moses, thus the sons of Israel did*. The people of Israel, like their leaders, diligently obeyed the LORD’s commands concerning the organization and administration of their camp. They were quite a bit less diligent obeying the LORD in spiritual and moral matters.

Biblical Text

¹Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²“Command the sons of Israel that they send away from the camp every leper and everyone having a discharge and everyone who is unclean because of a *dead* person. ³You shall send away both male and female; you shall send them outside the camp so that they will not defile their camp where I dwell in their midst.” ⁴The sons of Israel did so and sent them outside the camp; just as the Lord had spoken to Moses, thus the sons of Israel did.