

# Why Europe in the Middle Ages Was So Filthy



This article was inspired by an exchange I had on Facebook with a man who posted this meme.



My comment:

Religion is NOT the same thing as a personal relationship with God.

His reply:

Name withheld [Author](#)

James Arendt SOCIAL COGNITION

During the Middle Ages, it was not uncommon for a European passerby to be hit by human waste while walking down the street. Sometimes, at that time, urban residents emptied their chamber pots – containers filled with urine and excrement – throwing the contents out the window. The waste would sit there, causing pestilence and disease, until street sweepers took it away, usually to be used as fertilizer. To the modern mind, this system seems rudimentary and foolish, especially when one knows that older civilizations, such as the Greeks, Romans and Mayans, had developed much better systems – with indoor plumbing and even flush toilets.

Why did they replace indoor plumbing with chamber pots? At that time, people were convinced of many things that simply were not true: that nudity was sinful, that the naked body left one vulnerable to attack by evil spirits, and that evil spirits made people sick.<sup>1</sup> Daily bathing, Disseminated by the Romans in their beautiful public bathhouses, it was discouraged and replaced by the washing of hands, faces and other publicly visible parts of the body. These superstitions had two notable effects. First, practically everything and everyone smelled horrible. As one writer described it, “The peasant and the priest, the apprentice and the master’s wife stank, the entire nobility stank, even the king stank like an animal of prey, and the queen like an old goat, both in summer and winter. .”<sup>2</sup> Second, the Indoor bathrooms ended up in ruins and citizens lost the skills needed to maintain plumbing. Therefore, primitive sewage systems and chamber pots were, for a time, the best solution to a self-inflicted problem. It would be several hundred years before the “spiritual” theory of disease gave way to science, which identified microbes as the invisible culprits for making people sick.

My reply:

Thank you for sharing all that. It’s interesting that the Roman Catholic Church discarded all the good practices of the Roman empire such as indoor plumbing and daily bathing while mixing their religion with demonic Roman paganism and forbidding the laity to read the Bible on their own. Had the common people of the Middle Ages read the Bible, they would have known the cleanliness laws of the Old Testament and would not have been influenced by unscientific notions such as bathing is harmful to health. The Creator of life and the possessor of all knowledge inspired those laws of cleanliness to maintain proper health. And yet the Vatican today considers

the 13th century one of the most civilized of all!!! Civilized from their point of view when they had total control over the minds and hearts of the nations they ruled.

It's interesting to note that the Japanese who were not under the influence of the West until the 19th century have always been known for their personal hygiene and daily bathing. There's a theory that some of the scattered tribes of Israel pioneered the islands of Japan 2000 years ago and took them over from the indigenous Ainu people. Though the people of Israel were backslidden in their worship of God, they apparently hung on to the Hebrew traditions of sanitation and cleanliness they got from the Laws of Moses. There's lots of evidence that [Japanese Shintoism evolved from Hebrew traditions!](#)

At the time of posting this article, I have not yet received a reply from the man on Facebook who posted the anti-religion meme. I try to come across as non-confrontational. If he responds in a friendly manner, I may continue the discussion with him. If not, I'll end it there. But thanks to what he wrote, I was inspired to re-post from a previous article what the Bible says about cleanliness and sanitation.

## **The Bible confirms the existence of harmful bacteria**

The laws of sanitation in the Bible were written some 3000 years before Louis Pasteur in the 19th century linked germs with infectious disease!

There are numerous rules for sanitation and quarantine found in the Old Testament, and especially in the Book of Leviticus that God gave for the benefit of His children to keep them free from contagious diseases. The scientific community only much later in time discovered the importance of these health rules which includes washing one's body in *running water!*

*Leviticus 15:13 And when he that hath an issue is cleansed of his issue; then he shall number to himself seven days for his cleansing, and **wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in running water, and shall be clean.***

“Soap and water don't kill germs; they work by mechanically removing them from your hands. **Running water by itself does a pretty good job of germ removal...**” (Quoted from [https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter\\_article/The\\_handiwork\\_of\\_good\\_health](https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter_article/The_handiwork_of_good_health))

You have probably heard the proverb, “Cleanliness is next to godliness.” The phrase “running water” is found exactly seven times in the King James translation of the Bible! The number seven is God's special number, for it signifies spiritual perfection and completion. The Bible mentions it more than any other number.

*Leviticus 14:5 And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over **running water:***

Leviticus 14:6 As for the living bird, he shall take it, and the cedar wood, and the scarlet, and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the **running water**:

Leviticus 14:50 And he shall kill the one of the birds in an earthen vessel over **running water**:

Leviticus 14:51 And he shall take the cedar wood, and the hyssop, and the scarlet, and the living bird, and dip them in the blood of the slain bird, and in the **running water**, and sprinkle the house seven times:

Leviticus 14:52 And he shall cleanse the house with the blood of the bird, and with the **running water**, and with the living bird, and with the cedar wood, and with the hyssop, and with the scarlet:

Leviticus 15:13 And when he that hath an issue is cleansed of his issue; then he shall number to himself seven days for his cleansing, and wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in **running water**, and shall be clean.

Numbers 19:17 And for an unclean person they shall take of the ashes of the burnt heifer of purification for sin, and **running water** shall be put thereto in a vessel:

## More Scriptures about sanitation

Leviticus 11:31 These are unclean to you among all that creep: whosoever doth touch them, when they be dead, shall be unclean until the even.

32 And upon whatsoever any of them, **when they are dead**, doth fall, it shall be **unclean**; whether it be any vessel of wood, or raiment, or skin, or sack, whatsoever vessel it be, wherein any work is done, **it must be put into water**, and it shall be unclean until the even; **so it shall be cleansed**.

33 And every earthen vessel, whereinto any of them falleth, whatsoever is in it shall be unclean; and ye shall break it.

34 Of all meat which may be eaten, that on which such water cometh shall be unclean: and all drink that may be drunk in every such vessel shall be unclean.

35 And every thing whereupon any part of their carcase falleth shall be unclean; whether it be oven, or ranges for pots, they shall be broken down: for they are unclean, and shall be unclean unto you.

36 Nevertheless a fountain or pit, **wherein there is plenty of water**, shall be clean: but **that which toucheth their carcase shall be unclean**.

The words "unclean" and "clean" indicate to me either the presence of germs and harmful bacteria or the absence of them. The microscope had not yet been invented in the time Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt. The people of course could not see microbes. They didn't have the "germ theory" in their education. They just obeyed God's commands to Moses not knowing the scientific reasons why they should.

Medieval Europe was plagued with diphtheria, measles, tuberculosis, leprosy, typhus, anthrax, smallpox, salmonella and other maladies. The worst of such diseases was of course the Black Death.

Leviticus 15:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses and to Aaron, saying,  
2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When any man hath a running issue (a discharge such as puss) out of his flesh, **because of his issue he is unclean**.

3 And this shall be his uncleanness in his issue: whether his flesh run with his issue, or his flesh be stopped from his issue, it is his uncleanness.

4 Every bed, whereon he lieth that hath the issue, is unclean: and every thing, whereon he sitteth, shall be unclean.

5 And whosoever toucheth his bed shall **wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water**, and be unclean until the even.

6 And he that sitteth on any thing whereon he sat that hath the issue shall **wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water**, and be unclean until the even.

7 And he that toucheth the flesh of him that hath the issue **shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water**, and be unclean until the even.

8 And if he that hath the issue spit upon him that is clean; then he shall **wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water**, and be unclean until the even.

9 And what saddle soever he rideth upon that hath the issue shall be unclean.

10 And whosoever toucheth any thing that was under him shall be unclean until the even: and he that beareth any of those things **shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water**, and be unclean until the even.

11 And whomsoever he toucheth that hath the issue, and hath not rinsed his hands in water, he shall **wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water**, and be unclean until the even.

12 And the vessel of earth, that he toucheth which hath the issue, shall be broken: and every vessel of wood **shall be rinsed in water**.

13 And when he that hath an issue is cleansed of his issue; then he shall number to himself seven days for his cleansing, and **wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in running water**, and shall be clean.

Does modern science tell us it's important for good health to keep our bodies and hands clean? You know it does. And why? To remove the presence of harmful bacteria, that's why.

Did you know that in the early part of the 19th century, ['Wash your hands' was once controversial medical advice?](#)

Regarding the hygiene principle and germs, Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis (1818 –1865), who was a Hungarian physician, discovered that 10%–35% of the mothers that came to the medical institutions suffered fatalities. Puerperal fever was common in mid-19th-century hospitals and was fatal. Doctors in those clinics had three times the mortality of midwives' wards. Sadly, nobody knew why. But after close observation, Semmelweis discovered that the incidence of puerperal fever or "childbed fever" could be **greatly reduced by the use of hand disinfection** in obstetrical clinics.

Semmelweis proposed the practice of washing hands with chlorinated lime solutions in 1847 while working in Vienna General Hospital's First Obstetrical Clinic. He ordered physicians to wash their hands thoroughly after every examination. In three months, **the death rate fell from 18% to 1%**. These were astounding results. And he was called the "savior of mothers." He published a book of his findings in Etiology, Concept and Prophylaxis of Childbed Fever. Despite various publications of his successful results, Semmelweis's

suggestions were **not accepted by the medical community** of his time.

Why was Semmelweis research rejected? Because germs were virtually a foreign concept for the Europeans in the middle-19th-century. Later, Semmelweis's publications earned widespread acceptance only years after his death, when Louis Pasteur confirmed the "germ theory" and Joseph Lister, acting on the French microbiologist's research, practiced and operated on patients while using hygienic methods with great results.

Had the medical community paid attention to God's instructions that were given 3000 years before, many lives would have been saved. The Lord gave the Israelites hygienic principles against the contamination of germs and taught the necessity to quarantine the sick (Numbers 19:11-12). And the book of Leviticus lists a host of diseases and ways where a person would come in contact with germs (Leviticus 13:46).

Germs were no new discovery in 1847. And for this fact, Roderick McGrew testified in the Encyclopedia of Medical History: "The idea of contagion was foreign to the classic medical tradition and found no place in the voluminous Hippocratic writings. The Old Testament, however, is a rich source for contagionist sentiment, especially in regard to leprosy and venereal disease" (1985, pp. 77-78). – (from <https://bibleask.org/did-the-bible-teach-the-germs-theory/>)

## **The practice of the quarantine of people with infectious diseases is in the Bible**

Numbers 12:10 ¶And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, **Miriam became leprous**, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous.

11 And Aaron said unto Moses, Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned.

12 Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb.

13 And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee.

14 And the LORD said unto Moses, If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? **let her be shut out from the camp seven days**, and after that let her be received in again.

15 And Miriam was shut out from the camp seven days: and the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again.

## **Other than the "germ theory" we also have the "terrain theory"**

Diseases are results of our internal environment and its ability to maintain homeostasis against outside threats. Terrain theory believes if an individual maintains a healthy terrain, it can handle outside invaders or threats which cause diseases. When

terrain is weak, it favors the microorganisms. Hence, health depends on the quality of an individuals' terrain. (Quoted from <https://drkarenwolfe.org/germ-theory-or-terrain-theory-of-disease/>)

Are these two theories of the cause of disease at odds with each other? I personally do not think so. In my opinion, both are true. We are supposed to wash our hands before we eat so we do not transfer harmful bacteria into our mouths, and we try as much as possible to live in an environment free of toxic chemicals. We also are supposed to maintain a strong immune system by eating a nutritious diet, daily exercise, taking a good night's sleep and rest when our bodies tell us it's tired, and having a good mental attitude toward life in general.

People who have a relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ are the most likely people to have such a good positive attitude. They are less likely to worry about the future or experience stress which is harmful to health. If you are searching for such a relationship with your Creator God, please see [The Lover of all Lovers.](#)