

# “Unclean, Unclean!”

## *Skin, Clothes, and Houses Diseases*

Leviticus 13:1 The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying,

<sup>2</sup> "When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling or an eruption or a spot, and it turns into a case of leprous disease on the skin of his body, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests,

<sup>3</sup> and the priest shall examine the diseased area on the skin of his body. And if the hair in the diseased area has turned white and the disease appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a case of leprous disease. When the priest has examined him, he shall pronounce him unclean.

<sup>4</sup> But if the spot is white in the skin of his body and appears no deeper than the skin, and the hair in it has not turned white, the priest shall shut up the diseased person for seven days.

<sup>5</sup> And the priest shall examine him on the seventh day, and if in his eyes the disease is checked and the disease has not spread in the skin, then the priest shall shut him up for another seven days.

<sup>6</sup> And the priest shall examine him again on the seventh day, and if the diseased area has faded and the disease has not spread in the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him clean; it is only an eruption. And he shall wash his clothes and be clean.

<sup>7</sup> But if the eruption spreads in the skin, after he has shown himself to the priest for his cleansing, he shall appear again before the priest.

<sup>8</sup> And the priest shall look, and if the eruption has spread in the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is a leprous disease.

<sup>9</sup> "When a man is afflicted with a leprous disease, he shall be brought to the priest,

<sup>10</sup> and the priest shall look. And if there is a white swelling in the skin that has turned the hair white, and there is raw flesh in the swelling,

<sup>11</sup> it is a chronic leprous disease in the skin of his body, and the priest shall pronounce him unclean. He shall not shut him up, for he is unclean.

<sup>12</sup> And if the leprous disease breaks out in the skin, so that the leprous disease covers all the skin of the diseased person from head to foot, so far as the priest can see,

<sup>13</sup> then the priest shall look, and if the leprous disease has covered all his body, he shall pronounce him clean of the disease; it has all turned white, and he is clean.

<sup>14</sup> But when raw flesh appears on him, he shall be unclean.

<sup>15</sup> And the priest shall examine the raw flesh and pronounce him unclean. Raw flesh is unclean, for it is a leprous disease.

<sup>16</sup> But if the raw flesh recovers and turns white again, then he shall come to the priest,

<sup>17</sup> and the priest shall examine him, and if the disease has turned white, then the priest shall pronounce the diseased person clean; he is clean.

<sup>18</sup> "If there is in the skin of one's body a boil and it heals,

<sup>19</sup> and in the place of the boil there comes a white swelling or a reddish-white spot, then it shall be shown to the priest.

<sup>20</sup> And the priest shall look, and if it appears deeper than the skin and its hair has turned white, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean. It is a case of leprous disease that has broken out in the boil.

<sup>21</sup> But if the priest examines it and there is no white hair in it and it is not deeper than the skin, but has faded, then the priest shall shut him up seven days.

<sup>22</sup> And if it spreads in the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is a disease.

<sup>23</sup> But if the spot remains in one place and does not spread, it is the scar of the boil, and the priest shall pronounce him clean.

<sup>24</sup> "Or, when the body has a burn on its skin and the raw flesh of the burn becomes a spot, reddish-white or white,

<sup>25</sup> the priest shall examine it, and if the hair in the spot has turned white and it appears deeper than the skin, then it is a leprous disease. It has broken out in the burn, and the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is a case of leprous disease.

<sup>26</sup> But if the priest examines it and there is no white hair in the spot and it is no deeper than the skin, but has faded, the priest shall shut him up seven days,

<sup>27</sup> and the priest shall examine him the seventh day. If it is spreading in the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is a case of leprous disease.

<sup>28</sup> But if the spot remains in one place and does not spread in the skin, but has faded, it is a swelling from the burn, and the priest shall pronounce him clean, for it is the scar of the burn.

<sup>29</sup> "When a man or woman has a disease on the head or the beard,

<sup>30</sup> the priest shall examine the disease. And if it appears deeper than the skin, and the hair in it is yellow and thin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean. It is an itch, a leprous disease of the head or the beard.

<sup>31</sup> And if the priest examines the itching disease and it appears no deeper than the skin and there is no black hair in it, then the priest shall shut up the person with the itching disease for seven days,

<sup>32</sup> and on the seventh day the priest shall examine the disease. If the itch has not spread, and there is in it no yellow hair, and the itch appears to be no deeper than the skin,

<sup>33</sup> then he shall shave himself, but the itch he shall not shave; and the priest shall shut up the person with the itching disease for another seven days.

<sup>34</sup> And on the seventh day the priest shall examine the itch, and if the itch has not spread in the skin and it appears to be no deeper than the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him clean. And he shall wash his clothes and be clean.

<sup>35</sup> But if the itch spreads in the skin after his cleansing,

<sup>36</sup> then the priest shall examine him, and if the itch has spread in the skin, the priest need not seek for the yellow hair; he is unclean.

<sup>37</sup> But if in his eyes the itch is unchanged and black hair has grown in it, the itch is healed and he is clean, and the priest shall pronounce him clean.

<sup>38</sup> "When a man or a woman has spots on the skin of the body, white spots,

<sup>39</sup> the priest shall look, and if the spots on the skin of the body are of a dull white, it is leukoderma that has broken out in the skin; he is clean.

<sup>40</sup> "If a man's hair falls out from his head, he is bald; he is clean.

<sup>41</sup> And if a man's hair falls out from his forehead, he has baldness of the forehead; he is clean.

<sup>42</sup> But if there is on the bald head or the bald forehead a reddish-white diseased area, it is a leprous disease breaking out on his bald head or his bald forehead.

<sup>43</sup> Then the priest shall examine him, and if the diseased swelling is reddish-white on his bald head or on his bald forehead, like the appearance of leprous disease in the skin of the body,

<sup>44</sup> he is a leprous man, he is unclean. The priest must pronounce him unclean; his disease is on his head.

<sup>45</sup> "The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.'

<sup>46</sup> He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.

<sup>47</sup> "When there is a case of leprous disease in a garment, whether a woolen or a linen garment,

<sup>48</sup> in warp or woof of linen or wool, or in a skin or in anything made of skin,

<sup>49</sup> if the disease is greenish or reddish in the garment, or in the skin or in the warp or the woof or in any article made of skin, it is a case of leprous disease, and it shall be shown to the priest.

<sup>50</sup> And the priest shall examine the disease and shut up that which has the disease for seven days.

<sup>51</sup> Then he shall examine the disease on the seventh day. If the disease has spread in the garment, in the warp or the woof, or in the skin, whatever be the use of the skin, the disease is a persistent leprous disease; it is unclean.

<sup>52</sup> And he shall burn the garment, or the warp or the woof, the wool or the linen, or any article made of skin that is diseased, for it is a persistent leprous disease. It shall be burned in the fire.

<sup>53</sup> "And if the priest examines, and if the disease has not spread in the garment, in the warp or the woof or in any article made of skin,

<sup>54</sup> then the priest shall command that they wash the thing in which is the disease, and he shall shut it up for another seven days.

<sup>55</sup> And the priest shall examine the diseased thing after it has been washed. And if the appearance of the diseased area has not changed, though the disease has not spread, it is unclean. You shall burn it in the fire, whether the rot is on the back or on the front.

<sup>56</sup> "But if the priest examines, and if the diseased area has faded after it has been washed, he shall tear it out of the garment or the skin or the warp or the woof.

<sup>57</sup> Then if it appears again in the garment, in the warp or the woof, or in any article made of skin, it is spreading. You shall burn with fire whatever has the disease.

<sup>58</sup> But the garment, or the warp or the woof, or any article made of skin from which the disease departs when you have washed it, shall then be washed a second time, and be clean."

<sup>59</sup> This is the law for a case of leprous disease in a garment of wool or linen, either in the warp or the woof, or in any article made of skin, to determine whether it is clean or unclean.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Leviticus 14:1** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

<sup>2</sup> "This shall be the law of the leprous person for the day of his cleansing. He shall be brought to the priest,

<sup>3</sup> and the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall look.

Then, if the case of leprous disease is healed in the leprous person,

<sup>4</sup> the priest shall command them to take for him who is to be cleansed two live clean birds and cedarwood and scarlet yarn and hyssop.

<sup>5</sup> And the priest shall command them to kill one of the birds in an earthenware vessel over fresh water.

<sup>6</sup> He shall take the live bird with the cedarwood and the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, and dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water.

<sup>7</sup> And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed of the leprous disease. Then he shall pronounce him clean and shall let the living bird go into the open field.

<sup>8</sup> And he who is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes and shave off all his hair and bathe himself in water, and he shall be clean. And after that he may come into the camp, but live outside his tent seven days.

<sup>9</sup> And on the seventh day he shall shave off all his hair from his head, his beard, and his eyebrows. He shall shave off all his hair, and then

he shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and he shall be clean.

<sup>10</sup> "And on the eighth day he shall take two male lambs without blemish, and one ewe lamb a year old without blemish, and a grain offering of three tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, and one log of oil.

<sup>11</sup> And the priest who cleanses him shall set the man who is to be cleansed and these things before the LORD, at the entrance of the tent of meeting.

<sup>12</sup> And the priest shall take one of the male lambs and offer it for a guilt offering, along with the log of oil, and wave them for a wave offering before the LORD.

<sup>13</sup> And he shall kill the lamb in the place where they kill the sin offering and the burnt offering, in the place of the sanctuary. For the guilt offering, like the sin offering, belongs to the priest; it is most holy.

<sup>14</sup> The priest shall take some of the blood of the guilt offering, and the priest shall put it on the lobe of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot.

<sup>15</sup> Then the priest shall take some of the log of oil and pour it into the palm of his own left hand

<sup>16</sup> and dip his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand and sprinkle some oil with his finger seven times before the LORD.

<sup>17</sup> And some of the oil that remains in his hand the priest shall put on the lobe of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot, on top of the blood of the guilt offering.

<sup>18</sup> And the rest of the oil that is in the priest's hand he shall put on the head of him who is to be cleansed. Then the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD.

<sup>19</sup> The priest shall offer the sin offering, to make atonement for him who is to be cleansed from his uncleanness. And afterward he shall kill the burnt offering.

<sup>20</sup> And the priest shall offer the burnt offering and the grain offering on the altar. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be clean.

<sup>21</sup> "But if he is poor and cannot afford so much, then he shall take one male lamb for a guilt offering to be waved, to make atonement for him, and a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, and a log of oil;

<sup>22</sup> also two turtledoves or two pigeons, whichever he can afford. The one shall be a sin offering and the other a burnt offering.

<sup>23</sup> And on the eighth day he shall bring them for his cleansing to the priest, to the entrance of the tent of meeting, before the LORD.

<sup>24</sup> And the priest shall take the lamb of the guilt offering and the log of oil, and the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before the LORD.

<sup>25</sup> And he shall kill the lamb of the guilt offering. And the priest shall take some of the blood of the guilt offering and put it on the lobe of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot.

<sup>26</sup> And the priest shall pour some of the oil into the palm of his own left hand,

<sup>27</sup> and shall sprinkle with his right finger some of the oil that is in his left hand seven times before the LORD.

<sup>28</sup> And the priest shall put some of the oil that is in his hand on the lobe of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot, in the place where the blood of the guilt offering was put.

<sup>29</sup> And the rest of the oil that is in the priest's hand he shall put on the head of him who is to be cleansed, to make atonement for him before the LORD.

<sup>30</sup> And he shall offer, of the turtledoves or pigeons, whichever he can afford,

<sup>31</sup> one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering, along with a grain offering. And the priest shall make atonement before the LORD for him who is being cleansed.

<sup>32</sup> This is the law for him in whom is a case of leprous disease, who cannot afford the offerings for his cleansing."

<sup>33</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying,

<sup>34</sup> "When you come into the land of Canaan, which I give you for a possession, and I put a case of leprous disease in a house in the land of your possession,

<sup>35</sup> then he who owns the house shall come and tell the priest, 'There seems to me to be some case of disease in my house.'

<sup>36</sup> Then the priest shall command that they empty the house before the priest goes to examine the disease, lest all that is in the house be declared unclean. And afterward the priest shall go in to see the house.

<sup>37</sup> And he shall examine the disease. And if the disease is in the walls of the house with greenish or reddish spots, and if it appears to be deeper than the surface,

<sup>38</sup> then the priest shall go out of the house to the door of the house and shut up the house seven days.

<sup>39</sup> And the priest shall come again on the seventh day, and look. If the disease has spread in the walls of the house,

<sup>40</sup> then the priest shall command that they take out the stones in which is the disease and throw them into an unclean place outside the city.

<sup>41</sup> And he shall have the inside of the house scraped all around, and the plaster that they scrape off they shall pour out in an unclean place outside the city.

<sup>42</sup> Then they shall take other stones and put them in the place of those stones, and he shall take other plaster and plaster the house.

<sup>43</sup> "If the disease breaks out again in the house, after he has taken out the stones and scraped the house and plastered it,

<sup>44</sup> then the priest shall go and look. And if the disease has spread in the house, it is a persistent leprous disease in the house; it is unclean.

<sup>45</sup> And he shall break down the house, its stones and timber and all the plaster of the house, and he shall carry them out of the city to an unclean place.

<sup>46</sup> Moreover, whoever enters the house while it is shut up shall be unclean until the evening,

<sup>47</sup> and whoever sleeps in the house shall wash his clothes, and whoever eats in the house shall wash his clothes.

<sup>48</sup> "But if the priest comes and looks, and if the disease has not spread in the house after the house was plastered, then the priest shall pronounce the house clean, for the disease is healed.

<sup>49</sup> And for the cleansing of the house he shall take two small birds, with cedarwood and scarlet yarn and hyssop,

<sup>50</sup> and shall kill one of the birds in an earthenware vessel over fresh water

<sup>51</sup> and shall take the cedarwood and the hyssop and the scarlet yarn, along with the live bird, and dip them in the blood of the bird that was killed and in the fresh water and sprinkle the house seven times.

<sup>52</sup> Thus he shall cleanse the house with the blood of the bird and with the fresh water and with the live bird and with the cedarwood and hyssop and scarlet yarn.

<sup>53</sup> And he shall let the live bird go out of the city into the open country. So he shall make atonement for the house, and it shall be clean."

<sup>54</sup> This is the law for any case of leprous disease: for an itch,

<sup>55</sup> for leprous disease in a garment or in a house,

<sup>56</sup> and for a swelling or an eruption or a spot,

<sup>57</sup> to show when it is unclean and when it is clean. This is the law for leprous disease.

(Lev 13:1-14:57)

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## The Tabernacle “Sevens”

Much of the second half of Exodus is taken up with describing all of the things that went into making the tabernacle. It had to have the proper **materials**, **clothing**, and **people** to serve and guard the precincts. The interesting thing about this is that it gives several different series of “sevens” to do it.<sup>1</sup>

The **first series** tells us seven times that “**the LORD spoke to Moses**” (**Ex 25:1, 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12**). This

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<sup>1</sup> For these see Nahum Sarna, *Exodus* .

is very deliberate. The materials for the construction of the tabernacle are then grouped into **seven categories** (metals, dyed yarns, fabrics, timber, oil, spices, and gems). The priests were to be ordained for **seven days** (Ex 29:35). The lampstand had to have **seven lamps on it** (Ex 25:37), and so on. After explaining what it was to look like, it teaches us how Moses did everything exactly as right. It tells us **seven times** in Exodus 39 that it all happened “**just as the LORD had commanded Moses**” (Ex 39:1, 5, 6, 21, 26, 29, 31). This is followed up in chapter 40 with the same phrase repeated **seven more times** (40:17, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32).

Curiously, if we were to move forward to the construction of Solomon’s temple, we would see that:

- Solomon took **seven** years to build the temple (1 Kgs 6:38).
- The temple dedication occurs during the Feast of Tabernacles which was a **seven**-day festival and fell on the **seventh** month of the year (1 Kgs 8:2, 65; Ezek 45:21–25; 2 Chr 7:9; cf. Lev 23:34).
- Solomon’s dedication speech included **seven** petitions.

All of this may remind you of the way the number **seven** dominates Genesis 1. You know that there are seven days, but it so much more than that:

- **Genesis 1:1** contains **seven** words.
- **Genesis 1:2** contains fourteen words (7x2).
- God (*elohim*) occurs thirty-five times (7x5).
- Earth occurs twenty-one times (7x3).
- Heavens/firmament occurs twenty-one times (7x3).
- After the introductory verse, there are **seven** natural paragraphs.
- There are **seven** divine fiats.
- “Light” and “day” are found **seven** times in the first paragraph.
- “Light” occurs **seven** times in the fourth paragraph.
- Water is mentioned **seven** times in the course of paragraphs two and three.
- “Alive” or “living” (*hayya*) occurs **seven** times in the fifth and sixth paragraphs.
- “It was good” appears **seven** times with emphasis on the **seventh** (“very good”).
- The **seventh** paragraph which deals with the **seventh** day contains three sentences (three for emphasis). Each consists of **seven** words and contains in the middle the expression *the seventh day*.
- The words of the **seventh** paragraph total thirty-five (7x5).<sup>2</sup>

What’s the reason for this? **Seven is the number associated with the temple.** “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest” (**Isa 66:1**). “Rest” is the

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<sup>2</sup> **U. Cassuto**, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis Part I: From Adam to Noah: Genesis I-VI*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961 [1944]), 12-13.

sabbath, the seventh day. The temple is God's house, God is perfect, and seven is the number of perfection.

Seven can also be the number of **anti-perfection**, or better, something that can't be seen around perfection, especially when things surrounding the temple are still in view. In **Lev 13-14**, the temple analogy continues. A main way we will see that these **laws of disease** demonstrate this is through the predominance of the number seven. This begins to help explain, theologically, why these chapters are here.

## Leviticus 13-14 Context

Another way is through the continued idea of “**eruptions**” or “**reproductions**.” In Ch. 11, life erupted in the form of various creatures. In Ch. 12, the woman gives birth to a baby and again, life erupts. In both chapters, the focus was on the uncleanness, the unwholeness, that arises from these eruptions. Now, the eruptions move from the **uncleanliness that accompanies childbirth**, to the **uncleanliness that accompanies the eruptions of certain kinds of “leprosy”** that reproduce themselves throughout the **body**, the **clothing**, or the **house**, the same three ideas that were find Moses having to prepare in Exodus. This is

not accidental.<sup>3</sup> The structure for these two long chapters is an ABAB pattern:

- A. Disease of a **body**, diagnosis (13:1-46)
- B. Disease of a **garment**, diagnosis (13:47-59)
- A<sup>1</sup>. Disease of a **body**, declaring clean and atonement (14:1-32)
- B<sup>1</sup>. Disease of a **house**, diagnosis and cleansing atonement (14:33- 57)

You can see that Ch. 13 deals with the **diagnosis** of the uncleanness while Ch. 14 deals with its ceremonial **cures**. Thus, it makes good sense to talk about these together, even though they are so long.

Chapter 13 can be narrowed down into **seven categories of marring**:

- (1) shiny mark/eruption (13:4-8),
- (2) raw (living) flesh (13:9-17);
- (3) boil (13:18-23),
- (4) burn from fire (13:24-28) both of which could scar (23, 28),
- (5) itching disease (13:29-37),
- (6) leukoderma, vitiligo which has no flaking (13:38-39),
- (7) baldness (13:40-44)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “When body, garment, and house are found in a carefully constructed set of rules, we have been warned. It signals a return to the body/temple microcosm.” Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 176.

<sup>4</sup> I’ve compiled this and the following information (and changed some of the terms) from Pieter Van Der Zwan, “Some Psychoanalytical Meanings of the Skin in Leviticus 13-14, *Verbum et*

There are **five symptoms** that accompany the diagnosis of the diseases: is it deep or low in skin, does it spread, does it turn the hair white or yellow, does it fade, does raw flesh appears in it. But there are **seven parts of the body** that apply: the **flesh** (19x), the **hair** (18x), **head/forehead** (17x), the **beard** (3x), the **upper lip/moustache** (1x), the **feet** (1x), and **the right toe, ear, thumb** (4x). When these diseases appear and are diagnosed, the person must be shut up by themselves for **seven days** (Lev 13:4, 5, 21, 26, 31, 33, 50, 54) or live outside the tent for **seven days** (14:8), or the house is to be shut up for **seven days** (14:38). When cleansing can finally ensue, sprinkling with various substances is to happen **seven times** (14:6, 16, 27, 51). In chapter 14, something has to die in order for cleansing to occur. Thus, “kill” or “slay” (*shachat*) appears **seven times** (14:5, 6, 13[x2], 19, 25, 50).<sup>5</sup>

One final piece to add to the picture of these two chapters is how **touch, proximity, and distance** play a vital role. The word נָגַע (*ng`*) and its derivatives which are

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*Ecclesia* 37/1 (2016): 1-10.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308577758\\_Some\\_pschoanalytical\\_meanings\\_of\\_the\\_skin\\_in\\_Leviticus\\_1314](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308577758_Some_pschoanalytical_meanings_of_the_skin_in_Leviticus_1314).

<sup>5</sup> When the person is “healed”, he gets yet another new identity, that of הַמְצֻרֵט (the one with a scale disease), the technical term reserved for the purification ritual and period in Leviticus 14 which is exactly the same as for the corpse-contaminated person and so associates him with death: it was as if he had “touched” death and so was not to be touched, but now welcomed back to life. This association with death is then displaced by killing (the word occurs 7 times!) animals as sacrifice in 14:5.6.13(bis).19.25.50. *Van Der Zwaren*, 8.

translated as infection, touches, mark, disease, wound occurs 47 times in these two chapters, which is more than two thirds of the total number mentioned in the OT.<sup>6</sup> This will become more important as we move into its relevance for today.

## Leviticus 13: Diagnosis

The passage again begins, “The LORD (or the Word of the LORD in the Targums) spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying...” (Lev 13:1). It then gives an introduction. “When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling or an eruption or a spot, and it turns into a case of leprous disease on the skin of his body, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests, and the priest shall examine the diseased area on the skin of his body. And if the hair in the diseased area has turned white and the disease appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a case of leprous disease. When the priest has examined him, he shall pronounce him unclean” (2-3). You can see here the word “eruption,” which connects us to the material before it.

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<sup>6</sup> Van Der Zwaren, 6.

The focus here is **the skin of the body**. Someone who did a study on the skin in these chapters concludes, it is “... **fragile and penetrable. It is the interface where the world observed, was met, let in or blocked out ... it keeps the inside together and the outsiders out ... it is not only part of self-presentation and appearance, but also site of contact and conflict. It is the area of either intimate or cruel touch.**”<sup>7</sup> In a word, it is like the **barrier** to the inner parts of the tabernacle itself. It is “**a border which may not be transgressed and which prevents any trespassing.**”

Humans are driven to be **attracted to beautiful skin** and **repulsed by diseased skin**. It is interesting to think about why this is the case, but at its heart, I think it is because skin is alive. It isn't the shiny metal of a robot. It is living flesh and the life itself is attractive; it teaches us of our Creator who made it and is Life. Conversely, diseased skin is a picture of decay, rot, and eventually, death. Theologically, this is related to how touching **dead animal carcasses** makes a person unclean and how when the bloody flow of a pregnant woman erupts out of her at birth, she is unclean because she is **losing some of her life-force**. Death can have nothing to do with God's temple.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 9.

## “Leprous Disease”

The focus in this chapter is on the **seven kinds of skin-distortions** mentioned earlier. In **vs. 2**, three words summarize the first: swelling, eruption, or spot. But the key word is this idea of a “**leprous disease**.” A lot of ink has been spilt on this. The Hebrew word here is *tsara‘t*. It is the Greek translation that is more interesting. The word is *lepra*. I’m sure you can hear the English word that comes from it.

The word appears 43 times in the Bible (including the NT). Only 11 of those are found outside of Lev 12-13. In our chapter, it needs to be noted that **skin**, a **garment** (**Lev 13:47, 49, 51, 52, 57**), and a **house** (**14:34, 44**) can all be *lepra*. That should give you a hint that what is in mind here is more than what we commonly call leprosy or Hansen’s Disease. Houses don’t get Hansen’s disease.

If you’ve even seen shows like *Ben Hur* or *Braveheart*, then you’ve been acquainted with **Hansen’s Disease**. This is a terrible affliction that **mutilates and disfigures** people. Afflicted skin becomes lumpy and lesioned, eyeballs become glazed, the forehead and face skin thickens, bones are deformed, and people lose their fingers and toes as they rot off from the disease, because it effects the nerve endings,

making you numb and insensitive to pain which is supposed to warn you that something is wrong. Until only very recent times, Hansen's Disease was not curable. Then, they discovered that it is caused by a bacterium. Today, they can treat it with antibiotics and people can live fairly normal lives.

The word *lepra* simply means something rough, scabby, or scaly. Ancient Greek leather workers prepared *ek leprōn* (roughly textured) skins and hides.<sup>8</sup> While Hansen's Disease falls within the broad range of meaning of the word (and would be included among possible diseases in this chapter, though, we do not have records of Hansen's that predate the third cent. B.C.<sup>9</sup>), it was well-known among ancient Jews that it had to include many more scaly and scabby diseases than just leprosy. These could include anything from skin cancer to psoriasis, plague, smallpox, mumps, chicken-pox, measles,<sup>10</sup> favus (a fungal infection), vitiligo (leukoderma),

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<sup>8</sup> R. K. Harrison, "Leprosy," ed. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 464.

<sup>9</sup> Katlein França, et al, "A Synopsis of the History of Hansen's Disease," *Wiener Medizinische Wochenschrift* (August 2017).

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319068175\\_A\\_synopsis\\_of\\_the\\_history\\_of\\_Hansen's\\_disease](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319068175_A_synopsis_of_the_history_of_Hansen's_disease).

<sup>10</sup> Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 183-84.

eczema, scarlet fever,<sup>11</sup> and so on. These are diseases that cause spots or lumps or textures to the skin. As we will see, it's all really quite disgusting, and that's kind of the point. The disgusting and decaying is not to go near a perfect God.

One final thought here, Heiser points out, “The priest is not a doctor. He’s not even an ancient doctor. This should be one clue to tell us that since this is a concern of the priest, this has nothing to do with medical practice, principles, and diagnosis for us today. It has all to do with ritual impurity and being unfit to occupy sacred space.”<sup>12</sup> And so, just like we saw with unclean animals that it had less to do with creating a God-ordained diet than it did helping Israel understand the difference between a holy God and an unholy world, so also here. This isn’t about medicine as much as it is things that are the opposite of purity that must dominate the temple.

### *Seven Tests on the Body*

What kinds of skin-conditions would make someone unclean? 13:2-8 give the first test—a shiny mark (eruption)

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<sup>11</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 196.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Heiser, *Notes on Leviticus* 13.

or swelling on the skin (**vs. 2**). What color does it turn, how deep does it appear to be (**3**)? If it appears not to be deep and does not turn the skin white, he is unclean for **seven days** (**4**). He is to be examined at the end of that time and if it hasn't spread, he is shut up for **another seven days** (**5**). If it has faded after that, he is pronounced clean; **“it is only an eruption.”** Notice, this can't possibly be Hansen's Disease, because it goes away. He must wash his clothes and be clean (**6**). If it returns, he is to go back to the priest (**7**), and the priest pronounces him unclean (**8**).

The **second test** (**9-17**) **“hangs on the presence of raw (living) flesh in the affected area.”**<sup>13</sup> Notice the language of **“life.”** If you had a leprous disease, you now had to be brought to the priest (**9**). He looks for a white swelling in the skin that turns the hair white and the flesh **“raw”** (**10**). If that's what he finds, this is a **“chronic”** (old) disease. He is unclean, but not shut up (**11**). If it breaks out and covers all the skin from head to foot (**12**), it is just white, he is clean (**13**), but if raw flesh appears, he is unclean (**14**). **“Raw flesh is unclean, for it is a leprous disease”** (**15**). When the raw flesh turns white, he becomes clean (**16-17**). Here you

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<sup>13</sup> **Wenham**, 198.

probably have things like exfoliative **dermatitis** or early stages of **scarlet fever** in view.

A **third test (18-23)** applies to **boils**. If you got a boil and it healed (**18**), and it turns white or reddish-white, you go to the priest (**19**), and if it is deeper than the skin and turns white, you are unclean because a skin-disease has broken out in the boil (**20**). If there is no white hair in it and is not deeper than the skin, but is faded, you are shut up seven days (**21**). If it spreads, you are pronounced unclean (**22**). If it does not spread, you are clean (**23**).

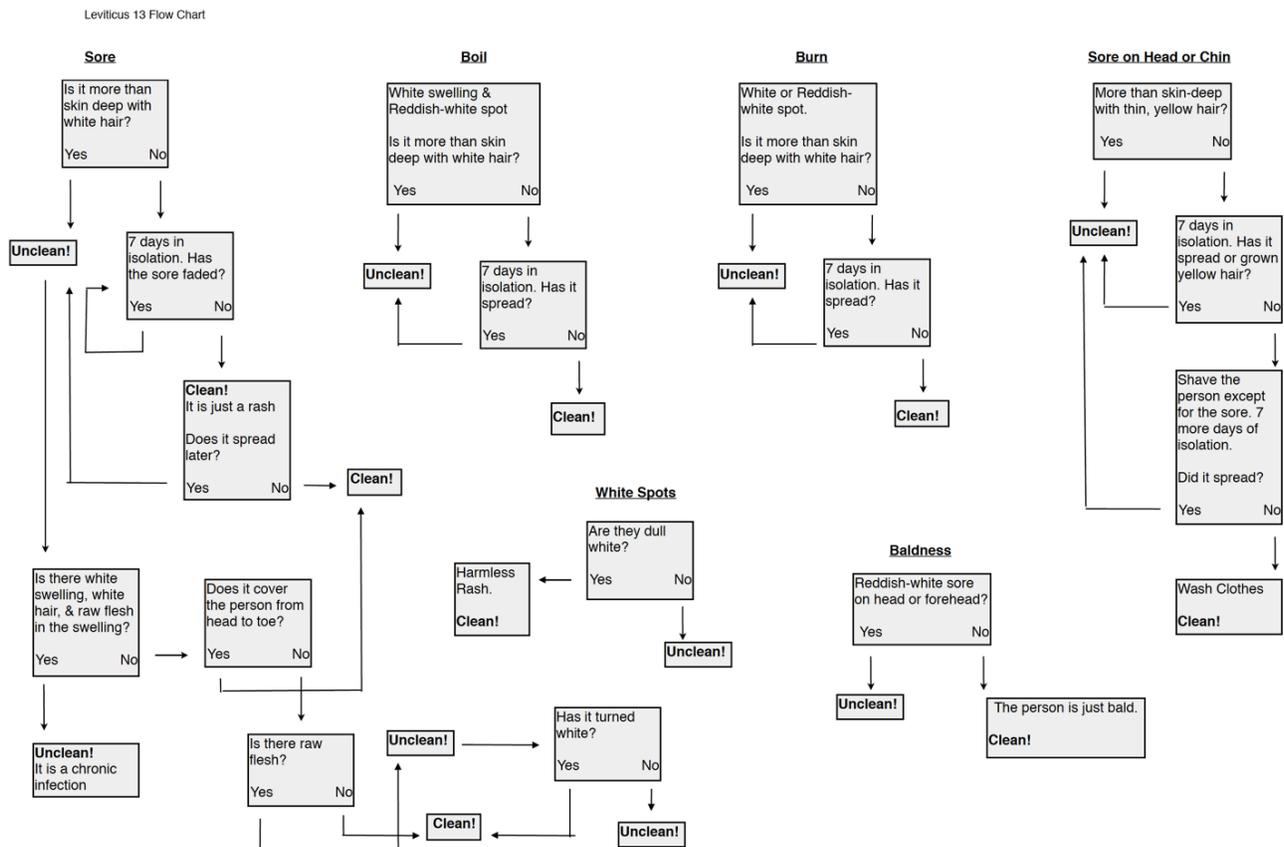
A **fourth test (24-28)** deals with **burns**. Again, it is similar in symptoms. If raw (living) flesh of the burn becomes a spot with reddish-white or white (**24**), the priest examines it. If the hair in the spot turns white and appears deeper than skin, it is a leprous disease that has broken out in the burn and he is unclean (**25**). If there is no white hair and is not deeper than the skin and has faded, he is shut up for **seven days (26)**. On the seventh day he is examined. If it is spreading in the skin, he is pronounced unclean because of the skin-disease (**27**). If the spot remains in one place and has faded, it is just swelling from the burn and he is clean, even though it is scarring (**28**).

A fifth test (29-37) is a disease on the head or beard (29). He is examined by the priest. Deeper than skin with yellow thin hair (which comes from diseases like favus fungus) means he is unclean, because it is an itch of some kind (30). If the itching disease is no deeper than the skin and there is no black hair in it, he is shut up for seven days (31). “On the seventh day” becomes a reoccurring refrain, reminding us of Genesis 1. He is examined and if it has not spread and there is no yellow hair and it is only skin-deep (32), he is to shave himself, except for the itch. He is shut up with an itching disease for another seven days (33). “On the seventh day” he is examined by the priest and if it has not spread and is only skin-deep, he is pronounced clean. He must wash his clothes and be clean (34). If the itch spreads after cleansing (35), he is examined and if it spreads in the skin, he is unclean (36). If the priest determines that it is unchanged and black hair has grown in it, it is healed and he is clean (37).

A sixth test (38-39) deals with white spots on the skin (38). If they are dull white, it is leukoderma (loss of skin color) and he is clean (39). If they are not, he is unclean.

A seventh test (40-44) concerns baldness and alopecia (patches of baldness). If it is just baldness, he is clean (40-41). If it is baldness with reddish-white diseased area, it is a skin-

disease breaking on (42). The priest examines him and if the swelling is like that on the skin of the body, he is unclean (43-44). In all seven tests, there are possibilities to be both clean and unclean.



James Benjamin Emerson, "Leviticus 13: Skin Disease Flow Chart," *The Whole Dang Thing*, <https://thewhole dangthing.wordpress.com/2011/09/26/leviticus-13-skin-disease-flow-chart/>.

This is nasty stuff. So nasty, it is important to emphasize that throughout Scripture, if there is one physical thing that caused people to view others as the modern-day **zombie**, skin diseases is it. As one commentator writes, "Its contamination was likened to that contracted in touching a corpse (Num 12:12). Sufferers were regarded as the living dead (Num 12:12; 2Kg 5:7; Job 18:13)." It constituted a

grave threat against Israel's cultic purity (**Lev 5:3**).<sup>14</sup> Sometimes they were treated humanly; sometimes they were just left alone.

In this way, it seems to me a fitting **type** of the spiritual world where Paul likens all people prior to conversion the same way. “**And you were dead in the trespasses and sin in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience**” (**Eph 2:1-2**). Notice, you “**were dead**” but you “**once walked**.” This is the living dead. It is curious that we naturally get repulsed by many of these skin eruptions. But are you repulsed by **eruptions of sin** in the parallel world of spirit, especially your own sin? Until you are, there is simply no way that you can be saved, for Jesus did not come to call those who are whole, but those who are sick. He is the Great Physician.

But this leads to a question. Throughout most of history, many people have gone out of their way, Jew and Christian alike, to make sure we know that these skin diseases **are the result of sin**.<sup>15</sup> There are some reasons for this. Several high-

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<sup>14</sup> **Rikk E. Watts**, “Mark,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 129.

<sup>15</sup> For a history of its interpretation see **Joel S. Baden, Candida R. Moss**, “The Origin and Interpretation of sara‘at in Leviticus 13-14,” *JBL* 130:4 (2011): 653-61 [643-662].

profile cases of skin-diseases were in fact because of some pretty serious sins (**Num 12:10; 2Kg 5:27; 15:5; 2Chr 26:21**; etc.). When this is the case, the direct parallel between the physical appearance and the invisible spiritual counterpart of sin should be internalized. This is the point, for instance, in the story of Miriam contracting some kind of skin-disease because she defied the authority God had given to Moses.

However, two things should be said. First, **consider Job**. A major theme of the book is that after Job contracts some kind of very serious skin-disease at the hand of the devil (and, by the way, evil spirits are also sometimes said to have been the source of these diseases), the actors of the story slowly come to realize that in fact Job had done nothing deserving of this. He did not get sick because he had sinned! Second, you will **look in vain** in Leviticus 13 for anything even remotely resembling someone contracting these diseases because of sin. It just seems to leave that moral question entirely alone. This is what we have seen previously in the other unclean chapters. The emphasis here is **not on sin**, but **on the temple's holiness** and how anything

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[https://www.academia.edu/368098/The\\_Origin\\_and\\_Interpretation\\_of\\_sara\\_at\\_in\\_Leviticus\\_13-14](https://www.academia.edu/368098/The_Origin_and_Interpretation_of_sara_at_in_Leviticus_13-14).

resembling decay, rot, putrefaction, unwholeness, and death is simply not tolerated there. God is Life. God is Whole. And such things have no business in his presence. They create great danger to the whole assembly if not taken seriously.

### *Disease on Clothing*

You might think that Job acts as a kind of transition to our second of four sections. **Lev 13:45-59** deals with what you are to do when the infection comes into contact with **clothing**. First, the diseased person is to “**wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean’**” (**45**). Curiously, Job tore his robes, but this was after the first disaster when his body was unaffected (**Job 1:20**). There, he also shaved his head. When he was personally afflicted, all it says is that he scraped himself with broken pottery as he sat in the ashes (**Job 2:8**). Job predates the Mosaic legislation. He was not an Israelite.

What’s going on in vs. 45? Essentially, it is **the unclean person warning through his dress, his hair, and his mouth** everyone who might be tempted to come near him. This was for *their* sake, not his. Not necessarily for the sake of getting

ill, but so that they would not become ceremonially unclean. In this state, he was to “live alone ... outside the camp” (46). It was not merely the tabernacle and its precincts that he had to avoid; it was the holy space of the camp of Israel proper. I can only imagine what this kind of shunning would do to a person long-term. This is not “getting away from it all,” like people want to do today. This is going to live in the *tohu* and *bohu*, the waste and void, where there is danger and demons and disaster awaiting. But worse, it was away from the presence of God himself, away from the covenant blessings. It was like Adam who was cast out of the Garden and Cain who was made to wander. It was banishment, the place where wrongdoers were executed.<sup>16</sup> In this way, it is important to see that these same actions of clothes and hair are also associated with mourning for the dead. As we’ve seen, these people are considered the living-dead and death often follows diseases. It itself erupts, as it were, from them.

It then shows that these “leprous diseases” can actually infect garments (47ff). It refers to the “warp or woof” of a linen or wool garment or the skin of something like a deer skin being affected (48). The “warp and woof” probably refers to the different yarning techniques used in the

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<sup>16</sup> This is a summary of Wenham’s excellent discussion.

production of the garment. The idea is that the disease begins to grow on them like a **fungus or mold**.

If you saw a greenish or reddish disease, you brought it to the priest (49). He examined it and locked the thing away for seven days (50). “**On the seventh day**” if it had spread, it was unclean (51). The garment was **burned** in the fire (52). If it didn’t spread (53), then it was to be washed and shut up for another **seven days** (54). If it hadn’t changed appearance, even though it had not spread, it was unclean and was to be burned (55). If it had faded, he was to **tear that part out** of the garment (56). If it reappeared, it was spreading and had to be burned (57). But if the disease went away, they washed it again and it was clean (58). “**This is the law for a case of leprous disease in a garment ... to determine whether it is clean or unclean**” (59).

The **tearing out** a part of the garment may just be the climactic point of the chapter. For in doing this, you no longer have a “whole” garment. And wholeness is the analog of **holiness**, as we have seen. People with such diseases were not whole. They were rotting and festering away with decay and disease and they simply couldn’t be allowed anywhere near a holy God. Neither could their clothes.

# Leviticus 14: Reinstatement

## *The Diseased Person*

The **good news** comes in Ch. 14. But it is a mixed bag. It is divided into two parts. The **first** (**Lev 14:2-31**) deals with the rituals you had to go through after you were healed of a skin disease. These are broken into “**sevens**” again, a **first week** (**2-9**) and a **second week** (**10-20**). And, like the law of the pregnant woman, it also gives alternatives for **the poor** (**21-31**). The second half deals with how you treat **houses** that have the leprous disease (**34-53**).

Understanding that priests were not doctors will help you see that what is happening here is not the curing of a sick person. He is not going to the priest like you go to a pharmacist. This is about being made fit for sacred space again and so it will remind us a lot of the first seven chapters and the sacrifices.

“The LORD [Word of the LORD] spoke to Moses saying...” (**Lev 14:1**). “This shall be the law of the leprous person for the day of his **cleansing**.” He is brought to the priest (**2**), which means the priest would then **go out of the camp and look** and see that the disease was healed (**3**). If it

has, the priest commands them to take for **two live clean birds** and **cedarwood** and **scarlet yarn** and **hyssop** (4).

One of the two birds is **killed** in an earthenware vessel over fresh water (5). The live bird is taken along with the cedarwood, scarlet yarn, and hyssop (all of which can be or are **red**) and **dip them** into the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water (6). There is probably a lot of **symbolism** going on here. Fresh water is the akin to **life** in the Scripture, whereas stagnant water was death. One bird dies while the other lives, perhaps showing the patient that were it not for God's grace, he would have died. **Clean birds** symbolize what he has become in God's sight and the blood and wood and yarn and hyssop (a plant) mix together to "cleans" him.

This is seen in **vs. 7** where "**he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed of the leprous disease.**" Sprinkling is a very specific application of water and/or blood to a thing in the OT that always symbolizes ceremonial purification. It was often **violent**, a throwing of the element upon the object. It differs from dipping or washing which have more to do with ongoing cleansing or ordination. **Christian baptisms** are the antitypes. What do I mean by "baptisms?" When we are saved, we are baptized

by the Holy Spirit. This is regeneration. As predicted in Ezekiel, this is our “**sprinkling**” of a new heart. Our water baptism is then, like the priestly ceremony we saw in Chs. 8-9, our **ordination washing** to serve before God in his temple.

At any rate, the action and symbolism combine here to let the priest pronounce the formerly diseased person **clean** and the living bird is **let go into the open field** (7), just as the newly cleansed person will be let go to return back to the camp. But only after he **washes** his clothes, **shaves** all his hair, and **bathes** himself in water, then he shall be clean (8). Thus, you see how sprinkling serves to ritually cleanse while the immersion seeks to reinstate into the community. He may finally come back into the camp now, but he still has to live outside his tent **seven days** (8). Can you imagine having to undergo these kinds of rituals? That’s why I said this is a mixed bag.

On the **seventh day** (**vs. 9**) he was to **shave** off all his hair from his head, his beard, and his eyebrows. He was to **wash** his clothes and **bathe** his body in water, and he shall be clean. Hebrews refers to “**various washings**” of the old covenant, which is a terrible translation. The word is *baptismos*, baptisms. It is only theological prejudice that keeps

translators from saying what it is. We are seeing just how many of them there were in just this one rite! By my count there are **six** (bird over water, sprinkled bloody water, washing clothes #1, bathing body #1, washing clothes #2, bathing body #2) just to be cleansed in this one ritual.

**Vs. 10** transitions us into the **new week**. This may be the most relevant point for us today. On the **eighth day** he shall take two **male lambs without blemish**, one year old without blemish, a **grain** offering of three tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, and a log of **oil** (10), the priest is to take the man and all of these gifts to the **entrance of the tent of meeting** (11), offering one lamb as a guilt offering and wave the log of oil and offering before the LORD (12). He **kills** the lamb at the place where the sin/purification offering and burnt offering are normally killed and they are for him (presumably to eat), for they belong to him and are most holy (13). **How thankful** the offerer should now be, because he has finally been able to draw near to the holy and most holy things of God again.

Then, as we have seen before, the priest is to take **some of the blood** of the guilt offering and he puts it on the lobe of the **right ear**, **thumb** of the right hand, and **big toe** of his right foot (14), thus symbolizing power (the right side) and

complete restoration (the whole body). Some of the log of oil is poured into the palm of his own left hand (15) and with his right finger dipped into the oil in his left hand he sprinkles some oil with his finger seven times before the LORD (16). More oil is put on the ear, thumb, and toe over the blood (17).

The remaining oil the priest puts on the person's head to "make atonement for him before the LORD" (18). Atonement? For sin? Not necessarily. Like Miriam, maybe. But for a good many people like Job, not at all. Mostly, it is for restoration, for the right to come into the holy space after being unclean. The priest then offers the sin/purification offering, to make atonement "from his uncleanness" and after this he kills the burnt offering (19). The burnt and grain offerings are offered on the altar, the priest makes atonement for him and he is clean (20).

When does all of this take place? On the eighth day! "For seven days the man had to live outside his tent. In other words, his reintegration into the covenant community was not complete, until on the eighth day he was permitted to bring sacrifice in the tabernacle."<sup>17</sup> There is a clear parallel here with circumcision when the infant Israelite is "grafted

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<sup>17</sup> Wenham, 209.

into the church” as Calvin puts it. The eighth day becomes the day of restoration for those who have been cured and are, as it were, born again, brought back from the banishment of the evil wilderness outside the camp near to the covenantal blessings and presence of Almighty God.

Vv. 21ff. continue to show God’s grace to the poor who cannot afford so much (I mean, presumably, some of them have been banished for quite a long time, how could they make a living?). Here, the requirements are one male lamb, some flour and oil (21), two turtledoves or pigeons for the various offerings (22). But it is still to be on the “eighth day” near the entrance of the tent of meeting (23). Everything other than what is offered remains the same (24-31). “This is the law for him in whom is a case of leprous disease, who cannot afford the offerings for his cleansing” (32).

### *The Diseased House*

Finally, our long text reaches its conclusion in, of all things, the cleansing of a leprous house (Lev 14:34-57). It begins with a fascinating introduction. “When you come into the land of Canaan, which I give you for a possession, and I put a case of leprous disease in a house in the land of

your possession ...” (34). It sounds like a test God is giving the people. What will they do? Will they obey or not?

The owner is to tell the priest that there seems to be a disease in the house (35), perhaps mold, mildew, or dry rot, or something. The priest commands the house to be vacated before he goes in so that everything the people do not become unclean (36). Unclean houses are contagious to people, even though you can't catch the common mold (see what I did there?). He examines the disease. If it is in the walls with greenish or reddish spots and appears deeper than the surface (37; recall the same language used of diseases previously), he shuts up the house seven days (38). This is all sounding familiar.

He comes back on the seventh day and if the disease has spread in the walls (39), they are to take out the stones in which the disease is found and throw them into an unclean place outside the city (40). We have returned to something being unwhole, taken apart and brought outside the camp again. The inside of the house is to be scraped, including the plaster, and thrown outside the city. (When I was a boy, my bedroom was right above a damp crawlspace. We have those metal floor heaters and a big black mark used to appear on the outside vent over the paint. I would paint it; it would

come back. Little did I know as a kid it was mold and it was not doing good things to my health. I was sick all the time as a boy).

Other **stones** would be brought in and other **plaster** used on the house to repair it (42). If disease **broke out** again (43), the priest looks and if it has spread in the house, it is a “**persistent leprous disease in the house; it is unclean**” (44). The house is to be **torn down**, the stones and timber and all the plaster carried out of the city to an unclean place (45). Anyone who enters it while it is shut up is **unclean until evening** (46). Whoever sleeps in it must **wash their clothes**. Whoever eats in it must **wash their clothes** (47). When the priest returns, if it has not spread after it was repaired, the house is pronounced clean (48).

But interestingly, just like the person, now **two small birds** with **cedarwood** and **scarlet yarn** and **hyssop** must be brought (49) and the same ritual is now performed ... over the house (50-53)! Instead of the person, the house is sprinkled seven times (51). And this makes “**atonement for the house**” and it shall be clean (53). It’s **not that this is the house of Amityville**, New York that the movie made so famous. It isn’t morally evil. There are not demonic entities inhabiting it. Atonement is not for its sin. It is unclean and

atonement allows it to stay in **the camp where God walks around** (Dt 23:14). This is the law for any case of leprous disease: for an itch (Lev 14:54), a disease in a garment or a house (55), a swelling or eruption or a spot (56). And why? “**To show when it is unclean and when it is clean**” (57).

## Leviticus 14: Reinstatement

What are we to make of these **bodies, clothes, and houses** that get diseased as we think about these chapters in our day? First, note that connection with **the temple**. These same three things were described in great detail in Exodus as he was forming and filling the tabernacle. These chapters are the anti-houses, anti-clothes, and anti-bodies. Their world is like the backwards world of Bizarro-Superman. Where everything is the same, but off, not quite right. And they have no place near the presence of God in his temple.

Perhaps there was something to the idea that issues of **sanitation or physical contagion** were under the surface of intended meaning, but much more, what is in mind is the spiritual sanitation of the holy precincts. If someone was to have these diseases taken away, God provided a way, albeit

an extremely tedious way, for them to be cleansed and restored to the covenant community.

But we **no longer live in the age** where if we have such illnesses on our bodies, our clothing, or our houses, that we have to undergo these kinds of ritual purifications. Yes, go see a doctor, please! Yes, get that rot out of your house and clothing. But we don't go to the pastor and ask him if we are able to stand in church with God's people near the covenant graces of the new covenant.

**Just why is that?** Let me give you several reasons from the NT. **First**, Mark's Gospel has a direct link in the very first chapter, to these chapters. Mark goes out of his way to tell us that at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, he went town to town to **preach** the gospel in Galilee (**Mark 1:38**). This is the place of the unclean **Gentiles**. He was casting out **unclean spirits** (**39**). Then, a **leper** came to him. *A leper came up to the Lord Jesus!* He didn't cry out, "Unclean, unclean!" He came to Jesus. And he begged him, "**If you will, you can make me clean**" (**40**).

Our Lord was "**moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him...**" (**41**). Remember how I said the priest **touching** was a major part of the priest's work in these chapters? Jesus touched him and he was not diagnosed

unclean. He touched him “and he was made clean” (42). Then, Jesus “sternly charged him and sent him away at once, and said to him, ‘See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them’” (43-44).

Jesus’ words here are a direct allusion to **Lev 13:49** and **14:2-4**. The Lord **upholds the law of Moses** by telling the man what he must then do. But Jesus does more. He does the work of a priest in making the man clean, and yet no ordinary priest could do his work. The prophecies were that in the Messianic age, there would be no more uncleanness (**Isa 35:8; Isa 52:1, 11; 64:5; Ezek 14:11; 36:25–29; 43:7; Zech 13:2**). The Jews began to associate the removal of skin-disease with the work of Messiah (cf. 1QS IV, 6; 4Q427 7 II, 6; *Jub* 23:26–30; *1 En* 96:3; *2 Bar* 73:2; *4 Ezra* 8:53; *Gen Rab* 20:5) and **curing leprosy was equivalent to raising the dead** (cf. *b. Ned* 64b; *b. Sanh* 47a; *b. Hul* 7b; cf. *2Kgs* 5:7).<sup>18</sup> In this way, Jesus is showing himself to be the Great High Priest who heals all of our diseases and makes us clean.

A **second story** to have you think about is **Zacchaeus**. We will see this “**wee little man**” in a future chapter, for

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<sup>18</sup> **Rikk E. Watts**, “Mark,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 130.

there is every reason to think that he was not just young, but actually a midget, a dwarf.<sup>19</sup> In the law, no priest could serve with such a condition (**Lev 21:20**). Further, you know Zacchaeus was a tax-collector and that they were much reviled (as they are today). Also, he climbed up a sycamore tree, a tree that everyone stayed away from because its fruit was fed only to cows and pigs! All of this goes into a general idea that everything about this man is unclean. Yet, what does Jesus this great high priest say? “I’m going to your house today” (**Luke 19:5**). Proximity. I’m not saying there is a direct link here to Leviticus 14, but it does seem more than accidental that Jesus would take this sinner and make him clean and that he would go out of his way to go into his house.

In that respect, never forget that Jesus is himself the house of God. He “tabernacled” among us (**John 1:14**). And he promised that he would raise “this temple” in three days (**John 2:19-20**). Before, the tabernacle could become unclean when things came near it. Now, where the tabernacle goes, things are made clean. What’s so amazing here is that, like a

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<sup>19</sup> Amos Yong, “Zacchaeus: Short and Un-Seen,” in *Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics—Disability*, ed. Robert B. Kruschwitz (Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2012), 11-17.  
<https://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/188189.pdf>.

leper being healed being equated with razing the dead, **Jesus rose from the dead** of his own power **on the first day**. In this way, these **eighth day laws** of cleansing and atonement are fulfilled at his resurrection, because the first day is nothing but the eighth day when viewed from the perspective of his triumphal entry the Sunday before.

So why do we no longer worry about these unclean laws? It is because the new Temple has fulfilled the law, is wholly clean, has been raised again on the eighth day, and has brought cleansing salvation to all who were unclean when they trust in him. He makes the sick well. He makes their houses clean. Friend, there is no reason to stay dead in your sins and unclean state. You do not have to stay outside the camp. Come to Christ; be healed by his cleansing touch. We may be living in the zombie apocalypse, but you can come to life by hearing and perceiving by faith that Jesus fulfilled these laws so that you might be free to worship and serve God, coming near to his temple, through his atoning work on your behalf that makes you clean. Therefore, all God's people should now erupt in shouts, **“Clean, clean! In Christ alone I've been made clean!”**<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> An interesting outline giving other applications is Unknown, “Leviticus 13-15: Moses Continues to Give Instruction Regarding Those Who are Considered Ceremonially

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