

Leprosy

Contents

Leviticus 14	4
------------------------	---

Commentary on Leviticus 13 and 14, from *Commentary on the Old Testament*, C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch

Leviticus 13

Leviticus 13 and 14. Leprosy.—The law for leprosy, the observance of which is urged upon the people again in Deut. 24:8, 9, treats, in the *first* place, of leprosy in men: (*a*) in its dangerous forms when appearing either on the skin (vv. 2–28), or on the head and beard (vv. 29–37); (*b*) in harmless forms (vv. 38 and 39); and (*c*) when appearing on a bald head (vv. 40–44). To this there are added instructions for the removal of the leper from the society of other men (vv. 45 and 46). It treats, *secondly*, of leprosy in linen, woollen, and leather articles, and the way to treat them (vv. 47–59); *thirdly*, of the purification of persons recovered from leprosy (Leviticus 14:1–32); and *fourthly*, of leprosy in houses and the way to remove it (vv. 33–53).—The laws for leprosy in man relate exclusively to the so-called white leprosy, *lepra*, which probably existed at that time in hither Asia alone, not only among the Israelites and Jews (Num. 12:10ff.; 2 Sam. 3:29; 2 Kings 5:27; 7:3; 15:5; Matt. 8:2, 3; 10:8; 11:5; 26:6, etc.), but also among the Syrians (2 Kings 5:1ff.), and which is still found in that part of the world, most frequently in the countries of the Lebanon and Jordan and in the neighbourhood of Damascus, in which city there are three hospitals for lepers (*Seetzen*, pp. 277, 278), and occasionally in Arabia (*Niebuhr, Arab.* pp. 135ff.) and Egypt; though at the present time the pimply leprosy, *lepra tuberosa s. articularum* (the leprosy of the joints), is more prevalent in the East, and frequently occurs in Egypt in the lower extremities in the form of elephantiasis. Of the white leprosy

(called *Lepra Mosaica*), which is still met with in Arabia sometimes, where it is called *Baras*, *Trusen* gives the following description: “Very frequently, even for years before the actual outbreak of the disease itself, white, yellowish spots are seen lying deep in the skin, particularly on the genitals, in the face, on the forehead, or in the joints. They are without feeling, and sometimes cause the hair to assume the same colour as the spots. These spots afterwards pierce through the cellular tissue, and reach the muscles and bones. The hair becomes white and woolly, and at length falls off; hard gelatinous swellings are formed in the cellular tissue; the skin gets hard, rough, and seamy, lymph exudes from it, and forms large scabs, which fall off from time to time, and under these there are often offensive running sores. The nails then swell, curl up, and fall off; *entropium* is formed, with bleeding gums, the nose stopped up, and a considerable flow of saliva ... The senses become dull, the patient gets thin and weak, colliquative diarrhea sets in, and incessant thirst and burning fever terminate his sufferings” (*Krankheiten d. alten Hebr.* p. 165).

Leviticus 13:2–28. *The symptoms of leprosy, whether proceeding directly from eruptions in the skin, or caused by a boil or burn.*—Vv. 2–8. *The first case:* “When a man shall have in the skin of his flesh (body) a raised spot or scab, or a bright spot.” *אֲרֵב*, a lifting up (Gen. 4:7, etc.), signifies here an elevation of the skin in some part of the body, a raised spot like a pimple. *אֲרֵב*, an eruption, scurf, or scab, from *אֲרָב* to pour out, “a pouring out as it were from the flesh or skin” (*Knobel*). *אֲרֵב*, from *אֲרָב*, in the Arabic and Chaldee to shine, is a bright swollen spot in the skin. If either of these signs became “a spot of leprosy,” the person affected was to be brought to the priest, that he might examine the complaint.

The term *zaraath*, from an Arabic word signifying to strike down or scourge, is applied to leprosy as a scourge of God, and in the case of men it always denotes the white leprosy, which the Arabs call *baras*. , a stroke (lit., “stroke of leprosy”), is applied not only to the spot attacked by the leprosy, the leprous mole (vv. 3, 29–32, 42, etc.), but to the persons and even to things affected with leprosy (vv. 4, 12, 13, 31, 50, 55).

Leviticus 13:3. A person so diseased was to be pronounced unclean, (a) if the hair of his head had turned white on the mole, i.e., if the dark hair which distinguished the Israelites had become white; and (b) if the appearance of the mole was deeper than the skin of the flesh, i.e., if the spot, where the mole was, appeared depressed in comparison with the rest of the skin. In that case it was leprosy. These signs are recognised by modern observers (e.g., *Hensler*); and among the Arabs leprosy is regarded as curable if the hair remains black upon the white spots, but incurable if it becomes whitish in colour.

Leviticus 13:4–6. But if the bright spot was white upon the skin, and its appearance was not deeper than the skin, and the place therefore was not sunken, nor the hair turned white, the priest was to shut up the leper, i.e., preclude him from intercourse with other men, for seven days, and on the seventh day examine him again. If he then found that the mole still stood, i.e., remained unaltered, “in his eyes,” or in his view, that it had not spread any further, he was to shut him up for seven days more. And if, on further examination upon the seventh day, he found that the mole had become paler, had lost its brilliant whiteness, and had not spread, he was to declare him clean, for it was a scurf, i.e., a mere skin eruption, and not true leprosy. The person who had been pronounced clean, however, was to wash his clothes, to change himself from even the appearance of leprosy, and then to be clean.

Leviticus 13:7, 8. But if the scurf had spread upon the skin “after his (first) appearance before the priest with reference to his cleansing,” i.e., to be examined concerning his purification; and if the priest notice this on his second appearance, he was to declare him unclean, for in that case it was leprosy.

Leviticus 13:9–17. The *second case* (vv. 9–17): if the leprosy broke out without previous eruptions.

Leviticus 13:9ff. “If a mole of leprosy is in a man, and the priest to whom he is brought sees

that there is a white rising in the skin, and this has turned the hair white, and there is raw (proud) flesh upon the elevation, it is an old leprosy.” The apodosis to vv. 9 and 10 commences with v. 11.

living, i.e., raw, proud flesh. the preservation of life (Gen. 45:5), sustenance (Judg. 6:4); here, in vv. 10 and 24, it signifies life in the sense of that which shows life, not a blow or spot ,) from to strike), as it is only in a geographical sense that the verb has this signification, viz., to strike against, or reach as far as (Num. 34:11). If the priest found that the evil was an old, long-standing leprosy, he was to pronounce the man unclean, and not first of all to shut him up, as there was no longer any doubt about the matter.

Leviticus 13:12, 13. If, on the other hand, the leprosy broke out blooming on the skin, and covered the whole of the skin from head to foot “with regard to the whole sight of the eyes of the priest,” i.e., as far as his eyes could see, the priest was to pronounce the person clean. “He has turned quite white,” i.e., his dark body has all become white. The breaking out of the leprous matter in this complete and rapid way upon the surface of the whole body was the crisis of the disease; the diseased matter turned into a scurf, which died away and then fell off.

Leviticus 13:14. “But in the day when proud flesh appears upon him, he is unclean, ... the proud flesh is unclean; it is leprosy.” That is to say, if proud flesh appeared after the body had been covered with a white scurf, with which the diseased matter had apparently exhausted itself, the disease was not removed, and the person affected with it was to be pronounced unclean.

The *third case*: if the leprosy proceeded from an abscess which had been cured. In v. 18 is first of all used absolutely, and then resumed with , and the latter again is more closely defined in : “if there arises in the flesh, in him, in his skin, an abscess, and (it) is healed, and there arises in the place of the abscess a white elevation, or a spot of a reddish white, he (the person so affected) shall appear at the priest’s.”

Leviticus 13:20. If the priest found the appearance of the diseased spot lower than the surrounding skin, and the hair upon it turned white, he was to pronounce the person unclean. “It is a mole of leprosy: it has broken out upon the abscess.”

Leviticus 13:21ff. But if the hair had not turned white upon the spot, and there was no depression on the skin, and it (the spot) was pale, the priest

was to shut him up for seven days. If the mole spread upon the skin during this period, it was leprosy; but if the spot stood in its place, and had not spread, it was , “the closing of the abscess:” literally “the burning;” here, that part of the skin or flesh which has been burnt up or killed by the inflammation or abscess, and gradually falls off as scurf (*Knobel*).

Leviticus 13:24–28. The *fourth case* (vv. 24–28): if there was a burnt place upon the skin of the flesh , () a spot where he had burnt himself with fire, the scar of a burn), and the “life of the scar”—i.e., the skin growing or forming upon the scar (see v. 10)—“becomes a whitish red, or white spot,” i.e., if it formed itself into a bright swollen spot. This was to be treated exactly like the previous case.

(v. 28), rising of the scar of the burn, i.e., a rising of the flesh and skin growing out of the scar of the burn.

Leviticus 13:29–37. *Leprosy upon the head or chin.*—If the priest saw a mole upon the head or chin of a man or woman, the appearance of which was deeper than the skin, and on which the hair was yellow () golden, reddish, fox-colour) and thin, he was to regard it as . Leprosy on the head or chin is called , probably from to pluck or tear, from its plucking out the hair, or causing it to fall off; like , the itch, from , to itch or scratch, and *scabies*, from *scabere*. But if he did not observe these two symptoms, if there was no depression of the skin, and the hair was black and not yellow, he was to shut up the person affected for seven days. In (v. 31) there is certainly an error of the text: either must be retained and dropped, or must be altered into , according to v. 37. The latter is probably the better of the two.

Leviticus 13:32ff. If the mole had not spread by that time, and the two signs mentioned were not discernible, the person affected was to shave himself, but not to shave the *nethek*, the eruption or scurfy place, and the priest was to shut him up for seven days more, and then to look whether any alteration had taken place; and if not, to pronounce him clean, whereupon he was to wash his clothes (see v. 6).

Leviticus 13:35, 36. But if the eruption spread even after his purification, the priest, on seeing this, was not to look for yellow hair. “He is unclean:” that is to say, he was to pronounce him unclean without searching for yellow hairs; the spread of the eruption was a sufficient proof of the leprosy.

Leviticus 13:37. But if, on the contrary, the erup-

tion stood (see v. 5), and black hair grew out of it, he was healed, and the person affected was to be declared clean.

Leviticus 13:38, 39. *Harmless leprosy.*—This broke out upon the skin of the body in plaits, “white rings.” If these were dull or a pale white, it was the harmless *bohak*, (LXX), which did not defile, and which even the Arabs, who still call it *bahak*, consider harmless. It is an eruption upon the skin, appearing in somewhat elevated spots or rings of unequal sizes and a pale white colour, which do not change the hair; it causes no inconvenience, and lasts from two months to two years.

Leviticus 13:40–44. *The leprosy of bald heads.*— is a head bald behind; , in front, “bald from the side, or edge of his face, i.e., from the forehead and temples.” Bald heads of both kinds were naturally clean.

Leviticus 13:42ff. But if a white reddish mole was formed upon the bald place before or behind, it was leprosy breaking out upon it, and was to be recognised by the fact that the rising of the mole had the appearance of leprosy on the skin of the body. In that case the person was unclean, and to be pronounced so by the priest. “On his head is his plague of leprosy,” i.e., he has it in his head.

Leviticus 13:45,46. With regard to *the treatment of lepers*, the lawgiver prescribed that they should wear mourning costume, rend their clothes, leave the hair of their head in disorder (see at Leviticus 10:6), keep the beard covered (Ezek. 24:17, 22), and cry “Unclean, unclean,” that every one might avoid them for fear of being defiled (Lam. 4:15); and as long as the disease lasted they were to dwell apart outside the camp (Num. 5:2ff., 12:10ff., cf. 2 Kings 15:5; 7:3),³³ a rule which implies that the leper rendered others unclean by contact. From this the Rabbins taught, that by merely entering a house, a leper polluted everything within it (*Mishnah*, *Kelim* i. 4; *Negaim* xiii. 11).

Leviticus 13:47–59. *Leprosy in linen, woollen, and leather fabrics and clothes.*—The only wearing apparel mentioned in v. 47 is either woollen or linen, as in Deut. 22:11, Hos. 2:7, Prov. 31:13; and among the ancient Egyptians and ancient Greeks these were the materials usually worn. In vv. 48ff. and , “the flax and the wool,” i.e., for linen and woollen fabrics, are distinguished from clothes of wool or flax. The rendering given to these words by the early translators is and , *stamen et subtegmen* (LXX, *Vulg.*), i.e., warp and weft. The objection offered to this rendering, that warp and

weft could not be kept so separate from one another, that the one could be touched and rendered leprous without the other, has been met by *Gussetius* by the simple but correct remark, that the reference is to the yarn prepared for the warp and weft, and not to the woven fabrics themselves. So long as the yarn was not woven into a fabric, the warp-yarn and weft-yarn might very easily be separated and lie in different places, so that the one could be injured without the other. In this case the yarn intended for weaving is distinguished from the woven material, just as the leather is afterwards distinguished from leather-work (v. 49). The signs of leprosy were, if the mole in the fabric was greenish or reddish. In that case the priest was to shut up the thing affected with leprosy for seven days, and then examine it. If the mole had spread in the meantime, it was a "grievous leprosy," from *irritavit, recruduit* (*vulnus*), is to be explained, as it is by *Bochart*, as signifying *lepra exasperata*.

making the mole bad or angry; not, as *Gesenius* maintains, from = *acerbum faciens*, i.e., *dolorem acerbum excitans*, which would not apply to leprosy in fabrics and houses (Leviticus 14:44), and is not required by Ezek. 28:24. All such fabrics were to be burned as unclean.

Leviticus 13:53ff. If the mole had not spread during the seven days, the priest was to cause the fabric in which the mole appeared to be washed, and then shut it up for seven days more. If the mole did not alter its appearance after being washed, even though it had not spread, the fabric was unclean, and was therefore to be burned. "It is a corroding in the back and front" (of the fabric of leather). , from , in Syriac *fodit*, from which comes a pit, lit., a digging: here a corroding depression. a bald place in the front or right side, a bald place in the back or left side of the fabric or leather.

Leviticus 13:56. But if the mole had turned pale by the seventh day after the washing, it (the place of the mole) was to be separated (torn off) from the clothes, leather or yarn, and then (as is added afterwards in v. 58) the garment or fabric from which the mole had disappeared was to be washed a second time, and would then be clean.

Leviticus 13:57. But if the mole appeared *again* in any such garment or cloth, i.e., if it appeared again after this, it was a leprosy bursting forth afresh, and the thing affected with it was to be burned. Leprosy in linen and woollen fabrics or clothes, and in leather, consisted in all probability in nothing but so-called mildew, which commonly arises from damp and want of air, and consists, in

the case of linen, of round, partially coloured spots, which spread, and gradually eat up the fabric, until it falls to pieces like mould. In leather the mildew consists most strictly of "holes eaten in," and is of a "greenish, reddish, or whitish colour, according to the species of the delicate cryptogami by which it has been formed."

Leviticus 14

Leviticus 14:1–32. *Purification of the leper*, after his recovery from his disease. As leprosy, regarded as a decomposition of the vital juices, and as putrefaction in a living body, was an image of death, and like this introduced the same dissolution and destruction of life into the corporeal sphere which sin introduced into the spiritual; and as the leper for this very reason as not only excluded from the fellowship of the sanctuary, but cut off from intercourse with the covenant nation which was called to sanctification: the man, when recovered from leprosy, was first of all to be received into the fellowship of the covenant nation by a significant rite of purification, and then again to be still further inducted into living fellowship with Jehovah in His sanctuary. Hence the purification prescribed was divided into two acts, separated from one another by an interval of seven days.

Leviticus 14:2–8. The first act (vv. 2–8) set forth the restoration of the man, who had been regarded as dead, into the fellowship of the living members of the covenant nation, and was therefore performed by the priest outside the camp.

Leviticus 14:2ff. On the day of his purification the priest was to examine the leper outside the camp; and if he found the leprosy cured and gone) , *const. praegnans*, healed away from, i.e., healed and gone away from), he was to send for (lit., order them to fetch or bring) two living ,) with all the fulness of their vital power) birds (without any precise direction as to the kind, not merely sparrows), and (a piece of) cedar-wood and coccus (probably scarlet wool, or a little piece of scarlet cloth), and hyssop (see at Ex. 12:22).

Leviticus 14:5ff. The priest was to have one of the birds killed *into* an earthen vessel upon fresh water (water drawn from a fountain or brook, Leviticus 15:13, Gen. 26:19), that is to say, slain in such a manner that its blood should flow into the fresh water which was in a vessel, and should mix with it. He was then to take the (other) live bird, together with the cedar-wood, scarlet, and hyssop,

and dip them (these accompaniments) along with the bird into the blood of the one which had been killed over the water. With this the person cured of leprosy was to be sprinkled seven times (see Leviticus 4:6) and purified; after which the living bird was to be “let loose upon the face of the field,” i.e., to be allowed to fly away into the open country. The two birds were symbols of the person to be cleansed. The one let loose into the open country is regarded by all the commentators as a symbolical representation of the fact, that the former leper was now imbued with new vital energy, and released from the fetters of his disease, and could now return in liberty again into the fellowship of his countrymen. But if this is established, the other must also be a symbol of the leper; and just as in the second the essential point in the symbol was its escape to the open country, in the first the main point must have been its death. Not, however, in this sense, that it was a figurative representation of the previous condition of the leper; but that, although it was no true sacrifice, since there was no sprinkling of blood in connection with it, its bloody death was intended to show that the leper would necessarily have suffered death on account of his uncleanness, which reached to the very foundation of his life, if the mercy of God had not delivered him from this punishment of sin, and restored to him the full power and vigour of life again. The restitution of this full and vigorous life was secured to him symbolically, by his being sprinkled with the blood of the bird which was killed in its stead. But because his liability to death had assumed a bodily form in the uncleanness of leprosy, he was sprinkled not only with blood, but with the flowing water of purification into which the blood had flowed, and was thus purified from his mortal uncleanness. Whereas one of the birds, however, had to lay down its life, and shed its blood for the person to be cleansed, the other was made into a symbol of the person to be cleansed by being bathed in the mixture of blood and water; and its release, to return to its fellows and into its nest, represented his deliverance from the ban of death which rested upon leprosy, and his return to the fellowship of his own nation. This signification of the rite serves to explain not only the appointment of birds for the purpose, since free unfettered movement in all directions could not be more fittingly represented by anything than by birds, which are distinguished from all other animals by their freedom and rapidity of motion, but also the necessity for their being alive and clean, viz., to set forth the renewal of life and purification; also the addition of cedar-wood,

scarlet wool, and hyssop, by which the life-giving power of the blood mixed with living (spring) water was to be still further strengthened. The cedar-wood, on account of its antiseptic qualities (

, *Theodor.* on Ezek. 17:22), was a symbol of the continuance of life; the coccus colour, a symbol of freshness of life, or fulness of vital energy; and the hyssop (, *herba humilis, medicinalis, purgandis pulmonibus apta: August.* on Ps. 51), a symbol of purification from the corruption of death. The sprinkling was performed seven times, because it referred to a readmission into the covenant, the stamp of which was seven; and it was made with a mixture of blood and fresh water, the blood signifying life, the water purification.

Leviticus 14:8. After this symbolical purification from the mortal ban of leprosy, the person cleansed had to purify himself bodily, by washing his clothes, shaving off all his hair—i.e., not merely the hair of his head and beard, but that of his whole body (cf. v. 9),—and bathing in water; and he could then enter into the camp. But he had still to remain outside his tent for seven days, not only because he did not yet feel himself at home in the congregation, or because he was still to retain the consciousness that something else was wanting before he could be fully restored, but, as the Chaldee has explained it by adding the clause, *et non accedat ad latus uxoris suae*, that he might not defile himself again by conjugal rights, and so interrupt his preparation for readmission into fellowship with Jehovah.

Leviticus 14:9–20. The *second act* (vv. 9–20) effected his restoration to fellowship with Jehovah, and his admission to the sanctuary. It commenced on the seventh day after the first with a fresh purification; viz., shaving off all the hair from the head, the beard, the eyebrows—in fact, the whole body,—washing the clothes, and bathing the body. On the eighth day there followed a sacrificial expiation; and for this the person to be expiated was to bring two sheep without blemish, a ewe-lamb of a year old, three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a meat-offering, and a log (or one-twelfth of a hin, i.e., as much as six hens’ eggs, or 15 62 Rhenish cubic inches) of oil; and the priest was to present him, together with these gifts, before Jehovah, i.e., before the altar of burnt-offering. The one lamb was then offered by the priest as a trespass-offering, together with the log of oil; and both of these were waved by him. By the waving, which did not take place on other occasions in connection with sin-offerings and trespass-offerings, the

lamb and oil were transferred symbolically to the Lord; and by the fat that these sacrificial gifts represented the offerer, the person to be consecrated to the Lord by means of them was dedicated to His service again, just as the Levites were dedicated to the Lord by the ceremony of waving (Num. 8:11, 15). But a trespass-offering was required as the consecration-offering, because the consecration itself served as a restoration to all the rights of the priestly covenant nation, which had been lost by the mortal ban of leprosy.³⁴

Leviticus 14:13, 14. After the slaying of the lamb in the holy place, as the trespass-offering, like the sin-offering, was most holy and belonged to the priest (see at Leviticus 7:6), the priest put some of its blood upon the tip of the right ear, the right thumb, and the great toe of the right foot of the person to be consecrated, in order that the organ of hearing, with which he hearkened to the word of the Lord, and those used in acting and walking according to His commandments, might thereby be sanctified through the power of the atoning blood of the sacrifice; just as in the dedication of the priests (Leviticus 8:24).

Leviticus 14:15–18. The priest then poured some oil out of the log into the hollow of his left hand, and dipping the finger of his right hand in the oil, sprinkled it seven times before Jehovah, i.e., before the altar of burnt-offering, to consecrate the oil to God, and sanctify it for further use. With the rest of the oil he smeared the same organs of the person to be consecrated which he had already smeared with blood, placing it, in fact, “*upon the blood of the trespass-offering*,” i.e., upon the spots already touched with blood; he then poured the remainder upon the head of the person to be consecrated, and so made atonement for him before Jehovah. The priests were also anointed at their consecration, not only by the pouring of oil upon their head, but by the sprinkling of oil upon their garments (Leviticus 8:12, 30). But in their case the anointing of their head preceded the consecration-offering, and holy anointing oil was used for the purpose. Here, on the contrary, it was ordinary oil, which the person to be consecrated had offered as a sacrificial gift; and this was first of all sanctified, therefore, by being sprinkled and poured upon the organs with which he was to serve the Lord, and then upon the head, which represented his personality. Just as the anointing oil, prepared according to divine directions, shadowed forth the power and gifts of the Spirit, with which God endowed the priests for their peculiar office in His kingdom; so

the oil, which the leper about to be consecrated presented as a sacrifice out of his own resources, represented the spirit of life which he had received from God, and now possessed as his own. This property of his spirit was presented to the Lord by the priestly waving and sprinkling of the oil before Jehovah, to be pervaded and revived by His spirit of grace, and when so strengthened, to be not only applied to those organs of the person to be consecrated, with which he fulfilled the duties of his vocation as a member of the priestly nation of God, but also poured upon his head, to be fully appropriated to his person. And just as in the sacrifice the blood was the symbol of the soul, so in the anointing the oil was the symbol of the spirit. If, therefore, the soul was established in gracious fellowship with the Lord by being sprinkled with the atoning blood of sacrifice, the anointing with oil had reference to the spirit, which gives life to soul and body, and which was thereby endowed with the power of the Spirit of God. In this way the man cleansed from leprosy was reconciled to Jehovah, and reinstated in the covenant privileges and covenant grace.

Leviticus 14:19, 20. It was not till all this had been done, that the priest could proceed to make expiation for him with the sin-offering, for which the ewe-lamb was brought, “on account of his uncleanness,” i.e., on account of the sin which still adhered to him as well as to all the other members of the covenant nation, and which had come outwardly to light in the uncleanness of his leprosy; after which he presented his burnt-offering and meat-offering, which embodied the sanctification of all his members to the service of the Lord, and the performance of works well-pleasing to Him. The sin-offering, burnt-offering, and meat-offering were therefore presented according to the general instructions, with this exception, that, as a representation of diligence in good works, a larger quantity of meal and oil was brought than the later law in Num. 15:4 prescribed for the burnt-offering.

Leviticus 14:21–32. In cases of poverty on the part of the person to be consecrated, the burnt-offering and sin-offering were reduced to a pair of turtle-doves or young pigeons, and the meat-offering to a tenth of an ephah of meal and oil; but no diminution was allowed in the trespass-offering as the consecration-offering, since this was the *conditio sine qua non* of reinstatement in full covenant rights. On account of the importance of all the details of this law, every point is repeated a second time in vv. 21–32.

Leviticus 14:33–53. *The law concerning the*

leprosy of houses was made known to Moses and Aaron, as intended for the time when Israel should have taken possession of Canaan and dwell in houses. As it was Jehovah who gave His people the land for a possession, so “putting the plague of leprosy in a house of the land of their possession” is also ascribed to Him (v. 34), inasmuch as He held it over them, to remind the inhabitants of the house that they owed not only their bodies but also their dwelling-places to the Lord, and that they were to sanctify these to Him. By this expression, “*I put*,” the view which *Knobel* still regards as probable, viz., that the house-leprosy was only the transmission of human leprosy to the walls of the houses, is completely overthrown; not to mention the fact, that throughout the whole description there is not the slightest hint of any such transmission, but the inhabitants, on the contrary, are spoken of as clean, i.e., free from leprosy, and only those who went into the house, or slept in the house after it had been shut up as suspicious, are pronounced unclean (vv. 46, 47), though even they are not said to have been affected with leprosy. The only thing that can be gathered from the signs mentioned in v. 37 is, that the house-leprosy was an evil which calls to mind “the vegetable formations and braid-like structures that are found on mouldering walls and decaying walls, and which eat into them so as to produce a slight depression in the surface.”³⁵

Leviticus 14:35, 36. When the evil showed itself in a house, the owner was to send this message to the priest, “*A leprous evil has appeared in my house*,” and the priest, before entering to examine it, was to have the house cleared, lest everything in it should become unclean. Consequently, as what was in the house became unclean only when the priest had declared the house affected with leprosy, the reason for the defilement is not to be sought for in physical infection, but must have been of an ideal or symbolical kind.

Leviticus 14:37ff. If the leprous spot appeared in “*greenish or reddish depressions, which looked deeper than the wall*,” the priest was to shut up the house for seven days. If after that time he found

that the mole had spread on the walls, he was to break out the stones upon which it appeared, and remove them to an unclean place outside the town, and to scrape the house all round inside, and throw the dust that was scraped off into an unclean place outside the town. He was then to put other stones in their place, and plaster the house with fresh mortar.

Leviticus 14:43ff. If the mole broke out again after this had taken place, it was a malicious leprosy, and the house was to be pulled down as unclean, whilst the stones, the wood, and the mortar were to be taken to an unclean place outside the town.

Leviticus 14:46, 47. Whoever went into the house during the time that it was closed, became unclean till the evening and had to wash himself; but whoever slept or ate therein during this time, was to wash his clothes, and of course was unclean till the evening. (v. 46) may be a perfect tense, and a relative clause dependent upon , or it may be an infinitive for as in v. 43.

Leviticus 14:48. If the priest should find, however, that after the fresh plastering the mole had not appeared again, or spread (to other places), he was to pronounce the house clean, because the evil was cured, and (vv. 49–53) to perform the same rite of purification as was prescribed for the restoration of a man, who had been cured of leprosy, to the national community (vv. 4–7). The purpose was also the same, namely, to cleanse () cleanse from sin) and make atonement for the house, i.e., to purify it from the uncleanness of sin which had appeared in the leprosy. For, although it is primarily in the human body that sin manifests itself, it spreads from man to the things which he touches, uses, inhabits, though without our being able to represent this spread as a physical contagion.

Leviticus 14:54–57 Vv. 54–57 contain the concluding formula to Leviticus 13 and 14. The law of leprosy was given “to teach in the day of the unclean and the clean,” i.e., to give directions for the time when they would have to do with the clean and unclean.