



Parashah 27: Tazria

Leviticus 12:1 - 13:59

“She conceives”

“. . . .and the priest shall pronounce him clean.”

Leviticus 13:23 b

1. Purification after Childbirth - 12:1-8

- a) Why do you think a woman was considered ceremonially unclean after giving birth? What was the length of the period of purification if the baby was a boy? What about a baby girl? Why do you think it was different?

It is important to realize that the uncleanness defined here is ritual or ceremonial uncleanness. This does not necessarily imply physical uncleanness. As blood clearly has significant spiritual meaning to God, perhaps it is the issue of blood that God considers unclean. (This is consistent with the laws of Niddah in Lev. 15:19-30.) The total period of purification for a boy was 40 days (he was to be circumcised on day 8) and for a girl was 80 days. From today's perspective, there is no reason for the difference. However, it is true that ancient Middle Eastern society valued male offspring more than female.

- b) What process was to be followed at the end of the purification period for her to be ceremonially clean? What if the woman was particularly poor? What was the purpose for this process and what was the result?

*After the prescribed period had elapsed, the mother was to bring a year old lamb (as a burnt offering) and a young pigeon or dove (as a sin offering) to the priest at the entrance of the tabernacle. If the woman could not afford a lamb, she could substitute a pigeon or a dove for the lamb. The sin offering made atonement for the uncleanness and the burnt offering symbolized renewed commitment and thankfulness to God for the birth of their offspring. After the sacrifices were made, the woman was ritually or ceremonially clean. (See **Luke 2:22-24** where Mary and Joseph did this for Yeshua. Also Exodus 13:2-23 speaks of the consecration of the first born, Yeshua in this case.)*

2. Regulations about Infectious Skin Diseases - 13:1-46

NOTE: In these verses, the word tzara'a has typically been translated as leprosy. Today, the word leprosy describes a very specific disease known also as Hansen's disease. The word tzara'a is more appropriately translated as infectious skin disease.

- a) Whose job was it to determine if a person had an infectious skin disease? What specifically did he look for? What were the possible outcomes after examination?

It was the priest's job to examine a person and determine if a skin blemish was a tzara'a. If it was more than skin deep and had a discolored hair in it, then it was a tzara'a and the person was pronounced unclean. If it was questionable, then the person was to be isolated for 7 days and checked again. If the condition had cleared up, the person would wash his clothes and would be clean. If it had spread, then the person was pronounced unclean.

- b) What happened to a person if a skin disease covered his entire body?

If a skin disease covered his entire body, then as long as there was no raw flesh, the priest was to pronounce him clean. This seems to describe a case where a skin disease has spread but then healed.

- c) When does a skin boil qualify as an infectious skin disease? What about a burn?

Both a boil and a burn are treated similarly. If in the process of healing, a spot turns white and produces discolored hair (perhaps gotten infected?), then the priest pronounces him unclean. If there is doubt, a 7 day isolation period is prescribed. If the spot clears up or remains unchanged, then he is clean.

- d) How are skin lesions on the head to be treated? When is baldness considered an infectious skin disease?

If sores on the head or scalp are more than skin deep and result in discolored hair, then the person is isolated for 7 days and re-examined. If it hasn't spread, then the person is shaved and waits another 7 days. If it still hasn't spread, then he is clean. If a man loses his hair naturally, he is still clean. If he loses it because of a skin disease, then he is unclean.

- e) What role did the priest play in this entire process? What were the requirements of a person who was pronounced unclean?

The priest played only the part of judge. Any healing was up to God. If a person was pronounced unclean, then he must wear torn clothes, leave his hair unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out "Unclean! Unclean!" He must also live alone outside the camp.

3. Regulations about Fungus or Mildew - 13:47-59

What was to be done with an article of clothing that had a visible fungus or mildew? Describe the process that was followed. What were the possible outcomes for such an article of clothing?

If an article of clothing had a fungus or mildew, it was taken to the priest who examined it and kept it isolated for 7 days. If the fungus spread, then the article was unclean and burned. If it didn't spread, then the article was washed and reexamined. If it still hadn't spread, the discoloration was cut out and the remainder could be used.

Digging deeper

1. It has been suggested that God's purpose for these laws was to guard the Israelites against the spread of infectious diseases. List the arguments for and against this idea. What is your opinion? What other reasons do you suppose God may have had for giving us these laws?

While following these laws may limit the spread of infectious skin diseases, it would not help limit the spread of other diseases. It could be that these infectious skin diseases were judgements upon individuals by God. (Some Jews associate these laws with spreading slander.) In any case, God is very concerned that one's body be in a ceremonially clean state before He can fellowship with Him. It reinforces the requirement for holiness in his people.

2. The Haftarah for this week tells the story of Naaman and how he was healed of leprosy (II Kings 4:42 - 5:19). In addition, II Chronicles 26:16-23 tells the story of how Uzziah, King of Judah during the time Isaiah's prophecy, contracted leprosy. See if these stories help with your understanding of this issue.