

Laws Regarding Childbirth and Leprosy (Leviticus 12-14)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Leviticus

I. Introduction to This Lesson

- a. In **Leviticus 1-7**, we discussed the rules and regulations regarding five different types of sacrificial offerings that the priests would make.
- b. In **Leviticus 8-9**, we learned about the process of ordaining Aaron (the high priest) and his four sons (the priests), the beginning of their ministry of service, and the consecration of the tabernacle. This culminated with the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle and fire from the Lord consuming the offerings.
- c. While we are no longer under the Levitical rules (which were abolished at the cross, with the death of Christ), all of these things still have significance for us, since they foreshadowed things that were yet to come.
 - i. The High Priest, Aaron, foreshadowed Jesus, as explained in **Hebrews 8-10**.
 - ii. His sons, the priests, foreshadowed us, the Christians. As Peter stated in **1 Peter 2:1-10**, we have become the new priesthood.
 - iii. The ordination and ministry of the sons of Aaron (**Leviticus 8**) foreshadowed the markings of our own priesthood. We, like they, have been:
 1. *Washed* (foreshadowing baptism),
 2. *Clothed* with special clothing (foreshadowing our being clothed with Christ, with humility, etc.)
 3. *Anointed* (foreshadowing our being anointed with the Holy Spirit);
 - a. The Christ is *the* Anointed One; and we as Christians have become the *anointed ones of God*, as well.
 4. *Offer sacrifices and prayers* to the Lord (foreshadowing how we, as Christians, now offer ourselves as living sacrifices, as Paul said in **Romans 12:1**).
 - iv. In the distinction between clean and unclean animals of **Leviticus 11**, early Christian writers saw spiritual lessons for us.

1. Irenaeus said that the clean animals (which had to *both* chew the cud and have split hooves) pointed to the Christians.
 - a. *Chewing the cud* represented those who were careful to *feed on the word of God* (the Scriptures) and *meditate on it* day and night, as is held up in **Psalm 1:1-3**.
 - b. *Having split hooves* represented those who were more sure-footed spiritually because they *relied on both the Father and the Son* (as opposed to the Jews, who only relied on the Father).
- d. We now turn to laws regarding childbirth and infectious diseases.
 - i. Paul said that the things contained in the Law of Moses were “a shadow of things to come”. Therefore, as we move further into **Leviticus**, let us consider what these requirements may be foreshadowing (things that have now been revealed through Christ).
 1. “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which *are a shadow of things to come*, but the substance is of Christ.” (**Colossians 2:16–17**, NKJV)

II. Purification After Childbirth

- a. Read **Leviticus 12:1-8**.
 - i. When a woman gives birth to a *male* child:
 1. The mother is unclean for *seven* days.
 2. On the eighth day she is to bring her son to be circumcised.
 3. The mother then continues to be unclean for 33 days (cannot come into the temple sanctuary area, etc., during that time).
 - ii. When a woman has a *female* child:
 1. The mother is unclean for *fourteen* days.
 2. The mother continues to be unclean for 66 days.
 - a. Is the period increased to *66 days* because *two females* are involved?
 - b. Note that $2 \times 33 = 66$.
 3. Personally, I have never viewed these differing requirements for male and female children to reflect any denigration of

women. If anything, it seems to me that it is tougher on the young boys, since they have to get circumcised!

- iii. In the case of either a boy or a girl:
 - 1. The mother, after her time of uncleanness has ended, brings to the priest, at the door of the tabernacle (to make atonement for her and to cleanse her from her flow of blood):
 - a. A one-year-old lamb for whole burnt offering; and
 - b. A pigeon or turtle dove as a sin offering.
 - c. HOWEVER, if she is *too poor* to afford a lamb, she may bring *two* pigeons or *two* turtledoves instead.
 - b. This passage sheds some light on a significant passage in the New Testament related to the birth of Jesus.
 - i. Read **Luke 2:2-7, 2:21-24, and 2:36-40**.
 - 1. Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day.
 - 2. After the days of Mary's purification were completed, she and Joseph brought the infant Jesus from Bethlehem to Jerusalem to the temple area. This is in keeping with the Law of Moses as outlined in **Leviticus 12**.
 - 3. They offered the sacrifice required (by those who could not afford a lamb).
 - a. This tells me that Joseph and Mary were *financially poor*.
 - i. It is extraordinary that this is the family setting into which God chose for His Son, the King over His kingdom, to be born.
 - 4. After doing this, they returned to their hometown of Nazareth, in Galilee.
 - c. When Jesus was accused of violating the Sabbath by "working" on the Sabbath to heal people, He uses this passage from **Leviticus 12** to justify His actions.
 - i. "If a man *receives circumcision on the Sabbath*, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath?" (**John 7:23**, NKJV)

- ii. Note that a Jewish baby boy had to be circumcised on the eighth day (with the day of the actual birth being considered 'the first day').
 - iii. Note that if a baby boy was born on a Saturday (the Sabbath), he must be circumcised on the eighth day (which would be on the following Sabbath).
- d. Eusebius, in *Proof of the Gospel*, book 1, chapter 3 (written c. 320 AD), pointed to this part of the Law to explain why the Law of Moses *had to be replaced*.
- i. God's promise to Abraham was that "*all the nations* of the earth shall be blessed" through his seed. (**Genesis 22:18**)
 - 1. This statement showed that God's plan from the beginning, was to bless *all nations, all people*, not just the Jewish nation.
 - ii. God's plan was to bless *all nations* (including the Gentiles) through the one who would be descended from Judah, based on the prophecy of **Genesis 49**.
 - 1. "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from his loins, until Shiloh comes; and to him shall be the expectation of *the nations* [= *the Gentiles*]." (**Genesis 49:10**, LXX, OSB)
 - iii. The *Law of Moses* had rules in it that could only be followed by Jews living fairly close to Jerusalem. They *could never be followed by all the nations of the world*. Examples of rules in the Law that it would be impossible for all the nations to follow, as pointed out by Eusebius:
 - 1. Recall that *all males* were to gather at the temple three times per year: at the Feasts of Unleavened Bread (Passover), Harvest (Weeks) and Ingathering (Tabernacles). See **Exodus 23:17** and **Deuteronomy 16:16**.
 - 2. Also, as we just read in **Leviticus 12:6-8**, a mother had to travel to the temple to make an offering *every time she gave birth to a child!*
 - iv. Eusebius wrote:
 - 1. "That the enactments of Moses, as I said, were only applicable to the Jews, but not to all of them, and certainly not to the dispersed (among the Gentiles), only in fact to the inhabitants of Palestine, will be plain to you if you reflect thus. For the law of Moses says:

2. "Three times per year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God.' (**Exodus 23:17, 34:23; Deuteronomy 16:16**)
 3. "And it defines more exactly at what place they should all meet, when it says: "Three times in the year shall thy males appear before the Lord, thy God, in the place which the Lord shall choose.' (**Deuteronomy 16:16**)
 4. "You see that it does not bid them meet in each city, or in any indefinite place, but "in the place which the Lord thy God shall choose." There thrice a year it enacts that they must assemble together, and it determines the times, when they must meet at the place where the rites of the worship there are to be celebrated. One season is that of the Passover; the second, fifty days later, is called the Feast of Pentecost; and the third is in the seventh month after the Passover, on the Day of Atonement, when all the Jews still perform their fast.
 5. "And a curse is laid on all who do not obey what is enacted. It is plain that all who were to meet at Jerusalem three times in the year and perform their rites would not be able to live far from Judea: but they live all round its boundaries. If then it would be impossible even for the Jews whose home is the farthest from Palestine to obey their law, it would be absurd to hold that it could be applicable to all nations and to men in the uttermost parts of the earth."
 - a. (Source: Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel*, book 1, chapter 3)
- v. Eusebius then continued, regarding the offering to be made by every mother after childbirth:
1. "What, then, must be our conclusion from all this, when, as we have said, we find Moses summing up his whole system with a curse, where he says: 'Cursed is everyone, who shall not remain in all the things written in this law, to do them '?
 2. "Was it, then, meant that Moses' future disciples from the ends of the earth must do all these things, if they were to escape the curse and receive the blessing promised to Abraham? Were they to go thrice a year to Jerusalem, and were the female worshippers of all nations, fresh from the pangs of childbirth, to undertake so long a journey, to offer the sacrifice ordained by Moses for each one of their children? Were those who had touched a dead body, or had forsworn themselves, or had sinned against their will, to come from the ends of the earth, to

run and hasten to the purification that was required by the law, in order to escape the visitation of the curse?

3. “Of course, it is clear to you that it was hard enough to follow Moses' rule of life for those who lived round Jerusalem, or only inhabited Judaea, and that it was quite out of the question for the other nations to fulfil it.”
 - a. (Source: Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel*, book 1, chapter 3)
- vi. In the same work, Eusebius also pointed out that God’s plan to replace the old covenant with a new set of laws was prophesied in the Jewish Scriptures.
 1. Jeremiah had promised that the old covenant would be replaced by a new one. (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**, designated **Jeremiah 38:31-34** in the LXX)
 2. Moses himself told us that the Lord would raise up a prophet “like him” from among their brothers, one whose words must be heeded. (**Deuteronomy 18:15-19**)
 - a. The distinctive characteristic of Moses, different from all the other prophets, was that *he brought laws from God*. All the prophets after Moses (until Jesus) just told the people to *follow the Law of Moses*.
 - i. None of the other prophets brought new laws.
 - b. Therefore, to be a prophet who was “like Moses”, the one to come prophesied in **Deuteronomy 18** would have to be *a prophet who brought new laws*.
- vii. Eusebius explained that this is why Christians believe in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Jewish prophets, yet do not keep the requirements of the Law of Moses.

III. Rules Regarding Leprosy

- a. In **Leviticus 13-14**, the focus now turns to rules regarding leprosy.
 - i. Paul said in **Colossians 2:16** that the Law of Moses was filled with rules that were “a shadow of things to come”. We have seen plenty of examples of that thus far in **Leviticus 1-11**.
 - ii. **Question:** What is foreshadowed by leprosy, and the unusual rules associated with that, in **Leviticus 13-14**?

- b. The term “leprosy” here is a general term for an infectious, spreading condition that requires quarantining to stop the spread. The things that can be affected by some form of “leprosy” as described in **Leviticus 13-14** include:
 - i. The skin of a person’s body;
 - ii. Leather or woven cloth garments; or
 - iii. The interior walls of a house.
- c. Regarding leprosy of the skin:
 - i. Read **Leviticus 13:1-11** and **13:38-46**.
 - 1. The priest served as the public health officer regarding infectious skin diseases. He was responsible for inspecting someone with a skin disease to determine whether it was “leprosy”.
 - a. They had the authority to quarantine someone and the authority to declare them clean.
 - 2. Those declared unclean from leprosy of the skin:
 - a. Were to tear their clothes, and cover their mouths;
 - b. Were to be called ‘unclean’; and
 - c. Were to dwell apart from everyone else, “*outside the camp*”.
 - i. **Question:** Is this possibly being alluded to in the passage from **Hebrews 13** about our being willing to bear disgrace by approaching Christ “outside the camp” and dwelling there?
 - ii. Consider the following statement: “Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, *outside the camp, bearing His reproach*. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.” (**Hebrews 13:12-14**, NKJV)
 - 3. Based on the characteristics of the disease described in the text here, this disease does not appear to match the symptoms of *modern leprosy*. Some Jews have made the same point over the past few hundred years.

- a. The characteristics of modern leprosy, which also is called 'Hansen's Disease' that do not appear to match what the priests were dealing with in **Leviticus 13** include:
 - i. Modern leprosy tends to develop very slowly (it can take 3-5 years for symptoms to appear).
 - ii. It does not turn the skin nor the hair of the skin white.
 - iii. Modern leprosy (Hansen's disease) typically is not very contagious through casual contact.
 - b. Note that about 2 million people suffer from modern leprosy today (especially in India, Southeast Asia, Africa, Brazil). There are about 200,000 new cases each year, including about 100 in the U.S.
 - i. Modern leprosy causes damage to the victim's peripheral nerves, leading to many other problems.
4. Perhaps "leprosy" in the Bible referred to more than one infectious disease.
- ii. Prominent stories of leprosy in the Old Testament.
 1. The miraculous sign of Moses' hand (**Exodus 4:6-7**).
 2. Miriam, sister of Moses, was cursed for complaining about Moses and his wife (**Numbers 12**).
 3. Naaman the Syrian, who was healed by dipping seven times in the Jordan River, at the instruction of Elisha.
 - a. Read **2 Kings 5:1-16** and **5:20-27** (designated **4 Kingdoms 5:1-16** and **5:20-27** in the Septuagint).
 - b. Perhaps the reason that the prophet was unwilling to meet with Naaman in person was that Naaman, having leprosy, was unclean according to the Law of Moses.
 - c. Note also that his leprosy was transferred to Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, as a result of his greed and deceit.
 4. King Uzziah, generally described as one of the better kings, is struck with leprosy for his arrogance.

- a. Read **2 Chronicles 26:1-5** and **26:16-23**.
- iii. Things I notice regarding these Old Testament examples of leprosy:
 1. Leprosy was closely associated with sin.
 - a. Miriam's sin involved rebellion and complaining against the leadership of Moses.
 - b. Gehazi's sin included greed and deceit, desiring some of the wealth of Naaman.
 - c. Uzziah's sin involved pride and arrogance, in wanting to usurp the role reserved for the priests.
 2. In all of the Old Testament, I can only think of two examples of men having access to the power to *heal leprosy*. (Note that even the priests could not heal it; only diagnose and quarantine or confirm a healing).
 - a. Moses: his ability to heal leprosy was manifested by the miraculous sign of his hand and in his prayer to heal the leprosy of his sister, Miriam.
 - b. Elisha: he gave instruction to Naaman that led to his being miraculously cured of leprosy in the Jordan River.
- d. Regarding leprosy of garments:
 - i. Read **Leviticus 13:47-59**.
 1. Wool, linen and leather garments could have "leprosy".
 2. This sounds like a mold or mildew that can grow on leather or on fabrics.
- e. Regarding leprosy of houses:
 - i. Read **Leviticus 14:33-48**.
 1. This sounds like mold (which can be destructive to breathing, toxic, dangerous).
 - ii. My own experiences with 'house leprosy' (mold or mildew on the walls of a home):
 1. Years ago, in a bathroom in our home that (at the time) had no ventilation fan, greenish-black mold or mildew was growing on the plaster walls, due to chronic dampness in that room.

2. At the time, I hired a contractor to fix the problem.
 - a. The contractor installed a ventilation fan in the ceiling of the bathroom, to quickly remove moisture after someone took a shower or bath.
 - b. The contractor also *plastered over* the existing mold or mildew, and then painted over the new plaster.
 - i. Sure enough, within a few months, the mold or mildew had spread through the new plaster and reappeared on the walls of the bathroom!
 - ii. The only way I could fix the problem (since mold and mildew are extremely hard to kill) was to manually dig out the contaminated plaster and redo the wall!
 - iii. Lesson learned: They should have done it right the first time. When you encounter mold or mildew (house leprosy), you need to get radical and dig it all out! Remove it all, so that it does not come back and spread!
3. Very recently, I was doing some minor repair work in the downstairs (rental) apartment of our 2-family house and noticed some black mold or mildew growing on the caulking around the tub. It was disgusting looking and potentially dangerous (to breathe) as well.
 - a. Due to the nature of the problem (spreading and potentially toxic to breathe), I put aside other house projects I had been working on and addressed this problem immediately.
 - b. I applied the lesson I had learned years earlier and took the time to *rip out and completely replace all the contaminated materials!*

IV. The Spiritual Significance of Leprosy

- a. It is a physical representation of a spiritual danger: sin. Similarities between leprosy and sin include:
 - i. They naturally *grow and spread* if not addressed (also like yeast).
 - ii. They make us unclean.

- iii. They are dangerous and must be eradicated. We must be prepared to *take radical steps to remove* them from our lives and homes.
- iv. Those infected *must be quarantined* until they become clean again, to *protect* the rest of the community.
 - 1. Read **1 Corinthians 5:1-13**.
 - 2. Church leaders are responsible for protecting the flock.
 - 3. Sins such as sexual immorality, greed, marrying those who have been divorced (**Matthew 5:32**) will spread and take over like mold or infectious disease if we do not apply loving discipline within the church.
 - 4. The discipline must be applied out of *compassion* for *everyone who could be impacted!*
- b. Consider how a person could be declared clean again. *Pay attention to the details.*
 - i. Read **Leviticus 14:1-8** and/or **14:48-56**.
 - 1. Wood, water, scarlet and hyssop all are involved.
 - 2. The living bird is dipped in water in which is blood of the other (just-killed) bird. Then the living bird is released, set free.
 - 3. Blood of the slain bird and water sprinkle the house.
- c. **Question:** Does this remind you of anything?
 - i. Early Christian writer Justin Martyr, writing c. 160 AD, commented on the significance of these things:
 - 1. “By the two birds Christ is denoted, both dead as man, and living as God. He is likened to a bird, because He is understood and declared to be from above, and from heaven. And the living bird, having been dipped in the blood of the dead one, was afterwards let go. For the living and divine Word was in the crucified and dead temple [of the body], as being a partaker of the passion, and yet impossible to God.
 - 2. “By that which took place in the running water, in which the wood and the hyssop and the scarlet were dipped, is set forth the bloody passion of Christ on the cross for the salvation of those who are sprinkled with the Spirit, and the water, and the blood. Wherefore the material for purification was not provided chiefly with reference to leprosy, but with regard to

the forgiveness of sins, that both leprosy might be understood to be an emblem of sin, and the things which were sacrificed an emblem of Him who was to be sacrificed for sins.

3. “For this reason, consequently, he ordered that the scarlet should be dipped at the same time in the water, thus predicting that the flesh should no longer possess its natural [evil] properties. For this reason, also, were there the two birds, the one being sacrificed in the water, and the other dipped both in the blood and in the water, and then sent away, just as is narrated also respecting the goats.
4. “The goat that was sent away presented a type of Him who taketh away the sins of men. But the two contained a representation of the one economy of God incarnate. For He was wounded for our transgressions, and He bare the sins of many, and He was delivered for our iniquities.”
 - a. (Source: Justin Martyr, *Other Fragments from the Lost Writings of Justin*, section 10; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 301)
 - b. Notice how Justin saw the details associated with the cleansing from leprosy as pointing to the passion and death of Jesus on the cross.
- d. Now, let us take another look at the story of Naaman being healed of leprosy.
 - i. The leper was told to dip in the water in order to be cleansed of his disease.
 - ii. He objected initially, thinking that was not the right way to be healed. However, this was the only way he could be healed.
 1. In **2 Kings 5:14** in the LXX, it says Naaman “went down and *was baptized* in the Jordan River...” (using the same Greek word as we find for “baptize” in the New Testament).
 2. This is the way we are to be healed of our own spiritual leprosy (sin). Consider **John 3:3-5**, **Acts 2:38** and **Acts 22:16**.
 3. Early Christian writer Irenaeus, writing c. 180 AD, commented on the significance of Naaman’s healing in foreshadowing Christian baptism:
 - a. “‘And dipped himself,’ says [the Scripture], ‘seven times in Jordan.’ (**2 Kings 5:14**) It was not for nothing that

Naaman of old, when suffering from leprosy, was purified upon his being baptized, but [it served] as an indication to us. For as we are lepers in sin, we are made clean, by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord, from our old transgressions; being spiritually regenerated as new-born babes, even as the Lord has declared: 'Except a man be born again through water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.' (**John 3:3-5**)"

- i. (Source: Irenaeus, *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenaeus*, section 34; found in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol. 1, p. 574)

- 4. For more information regarding early Christian understanding of the significance of baptism, see *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot, article on: "Baptism, I. Meaning of Baptism".
- e. Jesus pointed to his miraculous healing of lepers as a sign to John the Baptist that He was the Christ.
 - i. "Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, 'If You are willing, You can make me clean.' Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed. And He strictly warned him and sent him away at once, and said to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.'" (**Mark 1:40-44**, NKJV)
 - ii. "And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.'" (**Matthew 11:2-6**, NKJV)
 - iii. "Now when Jesus had come into Peter's house, He saw his wife's mother lying sick with a fever. So He touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and served them. When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: 'He Himself took our

infirmities And bore our sicknesses.” (Matthew 8:14–17, NKJV; quoting from Isaiah 53)

1. The Christ would take up our diseases.
 2. Like Moses and Elisha, He would be able to heal leprosy.
 3. As Elisha succeeded Elijah, Jesus came after John the Baptist.
 - a. Like the successor to Elijah, Jesus would give the instructions regarding how to have our leprosy washed away, so that we can be restored like new.
 - b. This cleansing would come through the wood, dipping in the water, being sprinkled by blood and being set free.
- f. Lessons for us
- i. Like the Jews were commanded in Leviticus when they discovered house leprosy, let us be radical when we discover sin in our lives and in the Church. May we rip it, even if we have to tear the whole house down. Otherwise, it will spread and destroy us and the church.
 - ii. Let us rejoice that we have can have our spiritual leprosy cleansed in the waters of baptism, being washed in the water and blood of Jesus.