

## **WHEN A CHILD IS BORN**

### **Leviticus 12**

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We are in the third major section of the Book of Leviticus. The first major section had to do with sacrifices, chapters 1–7. The second had to do with the ordination of the Old Testament priesthood, chapters 8–10. And chapters 11–15 have to do with various laws of purification. Chapter 11 had to do with clean and unclean foods. And Leviticus 12 has to do with the matter of childbirth and the uncleanness of a woman following childbirth.

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites: “A woman who becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son will be ceremonially unclean for seven days, just as she is unclean during her monthly period. On the eighth day the boy is to be circumcised. Then the woman must wait thirty-three days to be purified from her bleeding. She must not touch anything sacred or go to the sanctuary until the days of her purification are over. If she gives birth to a daughter, for two weeks the woman will be unclean, as during her period. Then she must wait sixty-six days to be purified from her bleeding. When the days of her purification for a son or a daughter are over, she is to bring to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a dove for a sin offering. He shall offer them before the LORD to make atonement for her, and then she will be ceremonially clean from her flow of blood. These are the regulations for the woman who gives birth to a boy or a girl. If she cannot afford a lamb, she is to bring two doves or two young pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for her, and she will be clean”” (Leviticus 12:1–8, NIV).

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The Scripture for today sounds very strange to our western ears. Here we have in this Scripture a ritual that is prescribed for the birth of a child and its first weeks in the world, especially how the mother ought to be living in those first weeks.

Of course our ritual of birth is so totally different than the ritual of birth we have in these verses.

Most babies today are born in hospitals. Even from the time of the mid-sixties until now the rituals have changed. When my children were born the father was not allowed to be in the delivery room. That's changing now.

A child coming into the world is a very poignant matter. Leviticus 12 is telling us that God is intersecting our lives in those key moments. There are some lessons I think that can be learned from Leviticus 12.

#### **I. The first is simply is that God provides special care for those who have come through great crises.**

The mother in this particular case has just come through the great crisis of childbirth. There are laws that make her unclean for a week or two weeks and then provide an additional time of isolation. Obviously the main reason for this isolation had something to do with atonement. But one of the side benefits is that the laws of uncleanness resulted in the woman having time shortly after childbirth when she is able to rest and enjoy special care.

Giving birth then was far more dangerous than it is now. Then there were no doctor visits during pregnancy. At the time of birth there was no hospital for the mothers to go to. There were no painkillers. There were no surgical procedures, C-sections. There was no anesthesia. No blood transfusions. The baby wasn't taken and put into an incubator for a while. Everything was done without the diminution of pain. Childbirth was a terribly dangerous and difficult time. It was

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literally, as I hear the old timers say, “Giving birth to a child is going down to death’s door.”

Down to death’s door in order to usher in a new life.

The Lord knew that a new mother needed a time of physical and emotional rest. A time when there was no cooking. She was unclean. That meant anything she touched, if anyone else touched it, they’d become unclean. So nobody would want to eat her cooking because they would not want to become ceremonially unclean. There was no cooking.

There was no sweeping the tent out. There was no washing clothes, baking bread. It was just a time off. No even needing to entertain relatives and friends.

For the birth of a baby boy it was one week of uncleanness. For the birth of a baby girl it was two weeks. The reason for that may have been that in that culture the boy was more highly prized, since they carried on the family name, but I wonder if God didn’t have double motive involved in letting the woman have two weeks off, because perhaps she would have been disappointed because she didn’t have boy and fulfill some of the expectations in the culture. The way to cushion that disappointment was she got two weeks off for having a girl instead of boy. During this time too of separation and isolation there was the chance for the mother and child to develop bonding, something that is now being talked about seriously. God knew about that process way back then and provided a period of time and isolation and special care for the mother to develop special identity between her and her new baby.

I think this giving childbirth may be representative for us going through any grave time of crisis or stress in our life. There must be spiritual application for this passage beyond childbirth. I think it relates to the fact that when we go through times of great stress and crisis in our lives we need to be aware that God will be showing special care and providence toward us. And it’s ok with

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Him when we've gone through a great crisis and stress to rest. In fact, He will want us to have a time of rest. When we are overburdened or when we come through danger we need rest.

Genesis tells us that the pain of childbirth and the sweat of a man's physical toil was not something that God wanted for us in the beginning. But because of sin, pain came to childbirth and the toil of physical labor entered into man's experience. But in His mercy God has made provisions of rest from stress.

The literal law of uncleanness is lifted from us today. That no longer pertains. But the underlying spiritual truth that God is getting at, that times of stress require times of rest, is still a fundamental principle. If you're overloading all your circuits maybe the Lord has you here this morning to simply tell you that He wants you to be enveloped with His rest and with His comfort. Rest is not only something that's physical. Rest is also spiritual. There is great rest in opening our lives to the Lord in worship and meditation and in prayer.

**II. A second lesson that seems to me to come out of Leviticus 12 is that God's foremost concern for a baby is that he or she become member of the household of faith.**

That's the whole law regarding circumcision that is here. God had made a covenant with Abraham. He promised to make Abraham the father of many nations. He promised to be his God. And the God of his descendants. He promised to give Abraham and his descendants the land of Canaan.

In the Old Testament times when a covenant was ratified it involved cutting. It involved on occasion an animal sacrifice. We have an occasion of this in Genesis where an animal is literally cut in two. There is sense in which if you break this covenant so may also you be broken.

Literally the word "covenant" means "to cut." The idea of God's bonding Himself to us in an agreement is represented in the Old Testament by circumcision. At eight days of age each boy

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was placed on the road to identifying with Abraham's faith. As he grew he came to realize that in the most intimate part of his anatomy he belonged to God. That God's stamp of ownership was upon his life. Sadly later circumcision only became an outer ceremony and the prophets as well as Jesus and the apostles will protest that the outward sign of circumcision was to teach us the inward sign of circumcisions of the heart. True circumcision is a matter of the heart and not of the flesh. That we are to cut off the old nature and put on the new. That in our deep identity within, we are to bear the marks of Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament required that a boy, when he was circumcised, be circumcised on the eighth day. The eighth day was the ideal day in all of the boy's life for circumcision. Vitamin K, an important blood clotting ingredient, is not manufactured until the fifth to seventh day. The eighth day is his first safe day. Also the blood-clotting element on the eighth day is higher than it will ever be in the boy's life—110 percent. God also was caring for the child medically.

When a child was circumcised he was also named. John was named on the eighth day. Jesus was also given His name on the eighth day.

The outer act of circumcision has been done away with in the New Testament. But the inner reality stands. That is for Christian parents their responsibility is to know why this child has come into the world. This boy or girl might be stamped and marked with the identity of belonging to God. Abraham's children by faith.

This child, in other words, is not here for wrong reasons. This child is not here by accident.

Many people have the false idea that they're here by accident because they were unplanned.

There is no unplanned child in God's point of view. All of us fit into His plan. His plan is that we might be His children of faith. A child is not here to carry on the family name. A child is not here to simply fulfill our need as adults to be loved so people have a baby in order to have a child love

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them. Our goal for having a child is not to have the child achieve what we could not. How many parents push their child to achieve something they couldn't reach for? Our goal for having a child is not even so they could simply do something great in the world. The goal for this child is that we might care for this child and help this boy or girl become an eternal son or daughter of God, that deep in their identity they might be marked by the character of Jesus Christ.

The most important thing in a parent's life is to be able to say, "I shared Jesus Christ with my child and I taught that child to walk in the steps of Christ."

### **III. A third beautiful lesson that comes out of Leviticus 12 is that God takes pleasure when we conclude our times of perilous passage with rededication and with cleansing.**

There were three significant aspects of the afterbirth experience for mothers described in Leviticus 12.

The first aspect was the seven days or the fourteen days of uncleanness. The second aspect was the thirty-three days or the sixty-six days of not touching the sacred or going to the sanctuary.

The third phase was the forty-first or the eighty-first day depending on a boy or girl where the woman presented herself at the sanctuary to offer up a sacrifice of burnt offering and a sacrifice of sin offering.

In the Old Testament the woman was required after childbirth to go through this time called purification. It was not the baby that made her unclean. Many persons in the older commentaries get it all goofed up. She is unclean because of the discharge that flows after childbirth. The bleeding and the like.

Very simply what is happening is the Old Testament had this concept of death and life. Things are moving toward death or things are moving toward life. After birth there was a loss of blood. A loss of blood could lead to death. It was the opposite of a normal healthy life. Therefore any

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time in the Old Testament that for any reason a person develops an unusual discharge or a flow of bleeding that person was immediately rendered unclean. There was a condition that if left unchecked would tend toward death, would lead to death. And only when the condition was checked and the discharge completely over could there then be a return to a condition of cleanness. Sufficient time had to elapse to ensure that the perilous time was over, that the time tending toward death was at an end, in the case of childbirth that time of bleeding was completely over and it was sure that all the after effects of childbirth that could tend toward death were gone and the mother would indeed live.

Then at that moment on the forty-first day or the eighty-first day the mother would come and she would present two offerings. She would present a burnt offering and she'd present a sin offering. A burnt offering to symbolize the rededication of their life to God. That's what the burnt offering meant. It simply means the presentation of my whole life to God. God has provided an animal to bear punishment for my mortality, for my sin, for my human nature. Because that animal has been slain I walk away free. I walk away presented to God. And the sin offering was a sign that the thing that led us away from purification, the thing that had polluted us, has also been taken care of and an offering has been made for it. So it meant a presentation of the mother's life to God and a cleansing of that life before God.

We're indebted to Leviticus 12 for knowing something about Jesus we otherwise might not have known. That is that Jesus' mother on the time of her purification, on the forty-first day came also to present Him to God in the temple, to offer the sacrifice that was necessary. The Scripture says in Luke that she offered two doves. That meant that she had the offering of the poor person. The more wealthy mother would offer the lamb. But she offered the two doves for her burnt offering

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and her purification offering. That Old Testament law which forced her to come to the temple also meant that the condition could be created with Simeon and Anna who were looking.

You get a picture of these old saints from the Scripture. There must have been a special place for mothers to line up, a kind of special line of women who had been through childbirth. There Simeon and Anna were every day, looking down the line of mothers holding their babies saying, "Is this the one?" When they came to Jesus, He was the one!

How do we take that and put it to our life? Maybe we don't have the experience of childbirth to relate to it as well. It seems to me that in this life we pass through times of great spiritual, emotional, and even physical danger. You may even in your own life come through a time of real emotional danger. Or real spiritual danger. Or perhaps even genuine physical danger. This Scripture is just laying a little premise before us that when you come through a time of great danger it is well that you represent yourself to God, that you offer yourself up again to God. That the new life which He has made possible for you may be a life wholly presented to Him, completely given.

One of the things that happens when we go through a time of danger is that we withdraw from God and think that God has left us alone in our danger and we're not sure that we can trust Him again. So when we've come through a time of danger the Lord is saying, "Now come back to Me and re-present yourself a living sacrifice to Me and be cleansed. If in that time of emotional danger, if in that time of spiritual danger you have picked up defilement in your life then be cleansed. Be free from it. And come back. Start with Me once more in the path of normalcy in life." A lot of our life is normalcy. Sometimes there are great jagged periods when we are going through tremendous stress and danger. Much of our life is lived on a normal plain and the Lord is saying after the big times, "Re-establish, re-dedicate, re-cleansed. Come to Me."

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There may be someone here today not known to me that has recently come through a tremendous hurtful divorce. You've come to church today and you've come through a time when everything that is in you that could be in you has been taken out of you. The Lord for you especially has this message today to tell you that after this time of great stress and danger in your life He is now here to meet you and to completely restore you. And that beautiful green of your life which the locusts have devoured and ravaged by this emotional experience is being healed by the Lord. He wants you after this day to know for certain that He's met you here in this place through this message. He's telling you that He has a special care for you. You've gone through a time of stress. He knows it and He purposes now to let you enter His rest. He purposes to be your Good Shepherd and restore your soul.

### **Closing Prayer**

Lord, we receive now this word to our lives. There are persons in this room who have been going through great stress in their jobs, great stress in their time of employment. Maybe there's been unemployment or maybe the work situation has been tense, filled with insecurity. It has brought sleepless nights. Worries over the balancing of their checkbook. It has brought concern over payment of rent or house payment or taxes coming due. It seems like the financial pressures and the job pressures couldn't get any worse than they are now.

I pray for each person in this place that you would begin their return to normalcy. That you would help them to come to You and to offer those places in their lives that have been devastated by sin, by circumstances, and by others. Help each one to receive your forgiveness and healing and to return to an unbroken walk with you. In Christ's name, Amen.