

19.

MESSAGE 15

UNCLEANNES FROM CHILDBIRTH AND ITS CLEANSING

Leviticus 12:1-8

Introduction

A second type of uncleanness was from childbirth. All kinds of explanations have been offered as to why giving birth to a child should have made a woman unclean. Pagan superstitions, supposed evil of sex relations, the fall of man, the curse of Eve, and the repulsiveness of after-birth have all been offered as explanations. Some of these are based on false concepts and are dangerous. All of them are unsatisfactory. The only satisfactory explanation is that childbirth was arbitrarily selected by Jehovah, not for anything intrinsically evil or ugly in the act itself, but so that it could be used as a symbol. Perhaps Jehovah deliberately selected conditions that had no explanation in themselves in order to show that many times people are not able to understand why Jehovah says that certain things are sinful. We are to avoid sins not because we always can understand their danger but because Jehovah warned us that they are dangerous. We need to recognize that the wisdom of God defines what is sinful and not our rational understanding. Human reason has been used to justify every kind of sin that exists. We cannot choose to decide what is a sin and what is not. God is the only one wise enough to know. We should accept what He says in His Word.

The same lessons were contained in uncleanness from childbirth as in uncleanness from living creatures. Uncleanness from childbirth was another symbol that Jehovah worshipers need to avoid sin and that, when they do sin, they need to be diligent to remove of sin’s effects from our lives.

Uncleanness from childbirth in Israel was in sharp contrast to the beliefs of the fertility religions of Egypt and Canaan. In fertility cults, procreation was considered to be the highest achievement and power of people and animals. Giving birth was considered to be the means of obtaining everlasting life. It was the secret to the meaning of life. In ancient Israel and in Christianity, human childbirth is a miracle that is the result of cooperation between people and God (Gen. 4:1), but God Himself is the secret to the meaning of life. God is the originator and sustainer of procreation, and every birth of a child is a miracle of God. However, childbirth, like all other gifts from God can be used for good or for evil; and it has been made painful and dangerous by the effects of sin. Therefore, in ancient Israel it could be used as a symbol for sin. This stark contrast between the viewpoints of Jehovah worship and paganism concerning sex and procreation is a striking demonstration of the bold distinctiveness of Jehovah worship from paganism. Jehovah worship is so distinct that it could not have arisen by evolution or development from pagan religions.

This MESSAGE can be outlined as follows:

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Interpretation

CHAPTER 12

Introductory note (12:1)

Verse 1. **And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying,**

This MESSAGE was very likely given during Aaron's days of fillings (see comments on Lev. 8:33-36 in MESSAGE 10 and in Introduction to MESSAGE 14). However, it is not stated that this MESSAGE was spoken to Aaron as well as to Moses, as was the case in MESSAGE 14. No reason is given for Aaron's not being included, and it is useless to speculate as to why.

- a. Uncleaness from the birth of a boy baby and is cleansing by time and bleeding (12:2-4)

Verse 2. **Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If a woman conceives and brings forth a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days, according to the days of her impurity of being ill.**

Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If a woman conceives and brings forth a male child. The MESSAGE was to be taught to all of Israel. It described a practice that contained important teachings for the whole nation, not just for a woman giving birth to a baby. First, Jehovah described how uncleaness was to be practice after the birth of a boy baby.

then she shall be unclean seven days, . If a woman gave birth to a boy, she was to be unclean for seven days.

according to the days of her impurity of being ill. These words have usually been understood to refer to a woman's menstrual period. If that understanding is correct, the statement means that she would be unclean for seven days, as a woman was unclean for seven days during her menstrual period (see Lev. 15:19). This interpretation seems strained, because uncleaness from menstruation was not mentioned until three

chapters later (Lev. 15:25-30). The word translated "impurity" has the same meaning as the word "uncleaness" (see comments on Lev. 8:15 in MESSAGE 10 under the heading and purified the altar). It is an alternate word to refer to ceremonial uncleaness. "Impurity of being ill" seems to refer to the length of time it would take to recover from giving birth to a male child. She would be ceremonially unclean during her recuperation period after giving birth. This MESSAGE does not state that any person touching her during that period would be unclean; however, that had already been made clear in Leviticus 5:3 (see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 2). This requirement was not a great burden, because the woman remained secluded during the recuperation period.

Verse 3. **And on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin must be circumcised.**

On the eighth day, the boy was to be circumcised. Circumcision on the eighth day was the oldest of the symbols of Israel. It began on Abraham's ninety-ninth birthday at the command of Jehovah as a sign of the covenant (Gen. 17:1-14,23-27). No explanation is given in Scripture as to why this sign was chosen. Probably no explanation can be found in the act itself. Like other symbolic ceremonies, it likely was chosen by Jehovah, not because of some intrinsic significance of the surgery or of the resulting condition, but simply to be used as a symbol. Circumcision is also mentioned in the Scripture prior to this point in Genesis 21:4; 34:1-31; and in Exodus 4:24-26; 12:44,48. However; it is not mentioned elsewhere in the MESSAGES of Jehovah at Sinai. Circumcision evidently removed uncleaness that came to the boy from contact with his mother, as well as marking him as one included in the covenant.

Verse 4. **She must continue in blood of her cleansing for 33 days. She must not touch any holy [object], and she must not come into The Holiness until the days of her cleansing are completed.**

She must continue in blood of her cleansing for 33 days. Seven days completed the period of

her uncleanness during recovery from the birth of a male child; however, after the woman recovered from childbirth she still had to perform cleansing ceremonies before returning to normal activities. The woman's ceremonial cleansing was somewhat involved. It required three things. Two are mentioned in this verse: "blood of her cleansing" and "days of her cleansing." The third is described in verses 6-7, which was offering a rededication-offering and a sin offering. The "blood of her cleansing" appears to refer to the blood that flows periodically after childbirth. The flowing of her blood was considered to be a part of the cleansing ceremonies after the birth of a child. It may have symbolized the efforts that a sinner needed to exert to remove the effects of sin from his or her life. It seems to have corresponded to the washing ceremonies in cleansing from contact with an unclean animal (see comments on Lev. 11:25,28,32,40 in MESSAGE 14). The "days of cleansing" were the length of time that was required for cleansing from the child birth. It corresponded to the passing of time until the evening in cleansing from an unclean animal (Lev. 11:24,25,27,28,31,32,39,40; see comments on Lev. 11:25 in MESSAGE 14). It symbolized that it takes time to remove the effects of sin on a person's life. In the case of a boy baby, those days were to be thirty-three. The seven days of uncleanness and the thirty-three days of cleansing totaled forty. Since forty was considered to be a number symbolizing completeness, the forty day period may have symbolized that a sinner should persevere for the complete time that would be necessary to remove the effects of sin from his or her life.

and she must not come into The Holiness until the days of her cleansing are completed. During the period of cleansing, the mother was not to go into The Tabernacle or touch any kind of "holiness," that is, an object set aside for Jehovah's service (see comments on Lev. 2:3 in MESSAGE 1). This prohibition was because she was still involved in the cleansing ceremonies. The passing of time and the flowing of her life blood brought cleansing to the mother. These requirements showed that the passing of time and the effort of the believer were required to remove the effects of sin from a person's life.

The Holiness. This word is the fifth term used in Leviticus to apply to The Tabernacle or to parts of it. It is a noun built on the root that means "to be holy." It was used to refer to objects that were set aside to Jehovah. These included the holy Land (Ex. 15:17), holy furniture of The Tabernacle (Num. 10:21), the holy tithe (Num. 18:29), the holy Tabernacle (Ex. 25:8; Lev. 12:4; 19:30; 20:3; 21:12; 26:2; Num 3:38; 18:1; 19:20), and holy objects in general (Lev. 21:23; 26:31). The difference in meaning between this word and the word explained in comments on Leviticus 4:6 is that the word used in Leviticus 4:6 basically means the quality of holiness but was extended in usage to refer to objects possessing that quality, whereas this word was used only to apply to the objects themselves. Yet, when applied to objects, both were general words applied to a number of different objects. Neither was the name of a particular holy object or place. It is difficult to distinguish the two words in English translations. In this verse, "The Holiness" clearly refers to The Tabernacle.

- b. Uncleanness from the birth of a girl baby and its cleansing by time and bleeding (12:5)

Verse 5. **And if she brings forth a female child, she shall be unclean two weeks, according to her impurity, and she must continue 66 days in the blood of her cleansing.**

And if she brings forth a female child, she shall be unclean two weeks. After the birth of a girl baby, the woman was to be unclean twice as long as after the birth of a boy baby, and the time required for her cleansing was also twice as long. Many explanations have been offered for this requirement, such as, the lesser value of girls and women, the sin of Eve, and the circumcision of the boy on the eighth day. None of these explanations seem to be satisfactory. Israelites may have thought girls and women were of less value, but God certainly did not. These requirements were not set by men but given to Moses by God. Nothing elsewhere in the Bible indicates that, because Eve sinned a few minutes before Adam, all other women were of less worth or had greater guilt than men. Circumcision of the child did not make the mother clean after the birth of a boy baby, and a girl's not needing

circumcision could not be the cause of a longer cleansing period after the birth of a girl. Actually no explanation is given for the extra time of the mother's uncleanness after the birth of a girl baby. It is best for us to accept it as a requirement of God to be observed by the Israelites to show obedience to whatever God commands.

According to her impurity, and she must continue 66 days in the blood of her cleansing. Usually these words have been interpreted to mean that she would remain unclean for the same length of time that she would from uncleanness due to a menstrual period. However, the verse that describes uncleanness from menstruation (Lev. 15:19) only prescribes a seven day period of uncleanness. Nothing is said there about any occasion when a longer two-week period of uncleanness was required in connection with menstruation. The word "impurity" does not refer to menstruation, but to the length of time the mother was to be unclean after the birth of a girl baby. By comparison with verse 2, this expression seems to mean that her period of uncleanness corresponded to her period of recuperation from giving birth (see comments on verse 2 above under the heading according to the days of her impurity of being ill). However, no obvious reason can be found as to why it would take longer to recuperate from giving birth to a girl than from the giving birth to a boy.

- c. Cleansing of uncleanness from all childbirths by fire-offerings (12:6-8)

Verse 6. **And when the days of her cleansing are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she must bring a lamb a year old for a rededication-offering and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin-offering to the entrance of The Tent of Meeting to the priest.**

The third step in the cleansing of the mother is given in this verse. It applied alike to the birth of a boy or a girl. At the end of the period of cleansing, the mother was to go to The Tabernacle and offer a rededication-offering and a sin-offering (see comments on Lev. 8:14 in MESSAGE 10 concerning the order of the offerings). As her uncleanness was a symbol of sin, these offerings were symbols that sin and its effects are removed

from the life of the believer by total surrender of one's self to Jehovah and by repentance. The fact that a lamb was specified for the rededication-offering and a bird for the sin-offering, instead of the more expensive offerings that could have been offered (see comments on Lev. 1:3 in MESSAGE 1 and on Lev. 4:27-28,32 in MESSAGE 2) has no effect on the meaning of the offerings since the value of the offering did not affect its meaning. The only reason that less expensive offerings were specified was so that they would not cause a financial hardship to the families of lesser means (see comments on Lev. 1:10,14 in MESSAGE 1).

Verse 7. **And he shall offer it to Jehovah's face, and he shall cover over her. Then she shall be clean from the flowing of her blood. This is the law for one bringing forth a child, whether a male or a female.**

The two offerings together brought covering for any sins of which she was guilty and also cleansing her from her uncleanness (see comments on Lev. 1:4 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading to cover over him). The required offerings do not imply that either conception or the bearing of children is sinful. Cleansing through these offerings was a symbol that the effects of sin could not be totally removed by the efforts of the sinner and the passing of time. To these human efforts the forgiveness of God had to be added.

It is said that the sin-offering brought cleansing "from the flowing of her blood." These words indicate that bleeding was at least part of the cause of her uncleanness. This statement seems strange in that in verse 4 bleeding brought cleansing. The blood that brought uncleanness was the bleeding that accompanied the birth, whereas the blood that brought cleansing was the periodic bleeding of the recovery period. The fact that the same thing could symbolize such opposite truths in different circumstances strengthens the view that the symbols were not selected because of something intrinsic in their nature but to be reminders of important truths about sin.

Verse 8. **And if her hand does not reach enough for a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves and two young pigeons, one for a rededication-offering and the other for a sin-offering. And the priest shall cover over her, and she shall be clean.**

Even though the offerings to be offered were modest in cost, a provision was made for an even less expensive offering, so that even the poorest would not be excluded. Instead of a lamb and a bird, the mother could offer a pair of turtledoves and a pair of pigeons, according to the provisions already made in Leviticus 5:7-10 (see comments on those verses in MESSAGE 2). The symbolism was

just the same as with the lamb and the bird. The less expensive offerings were just as acceptable and pleasing to God as the more expensive offerings, if they were all the mother could afford and if they were offered with a sincere heart.

When Mary offered these offerings for her cleansing after Jesus' birth, she followed the instructions of this verse, indicating her lack of financial resources (Luke 2:22-24). Mary was not chosen to be Jesus' mother because of her wealth or social standing but because of her commitment to God and living a righteous life.

Application

The birth of children is an important time for parents to remember the need to avoid sin and to receive forgiveness for any sin that they might have committed. If a mother or a father is to carry well the heavy responsibilities of parenthood, both mother and father need to seek to keep their lives free from sin as far as possible. When a believing parent does sin, it requires effort on the part of the sinner, the passing of time, and the grace and forgiveness of God to remove the effects of those sins from his or her life. Believing parents should employ them all and set an example of righteous living before their children.