

NINETEENTH MESSAGE:  
UNCLEANNES FROM BODILY DISCHARGES AND ITS CLEANISING  
Leviticus 15:1-33

Introduction

A fifth type of uncleanness was from bodily discharges. The discharges in question were all from the genital organs of the body. (1) abnormal discharges of fluid (vs. 2-15); (2) discharges of semen (vs. 16-18); and (3) discharges of menstrual blood (vs. 19-31).

It is wrong to immediately assume that the first type of discharge was gonorrhea or some other kind of sexually transmitted disease, as many have done. Many conditions can cause abnormal discharges from the genital organs. Nothing in the chapter indicates that the discharge was a result of sin or wrongdoing. It is also wrong to state that these discharges were “foul” or “repulsive.” The first type of discharge might have been distasteful, but it is not so stated in the text. To make the charge that the second and third types are repulsive reveals a negative, even unhealthy attitude toward the normal, God-given processes of reproduction. Like the unclean conditions described in previous chapters, these discharges did not cause uncleanness because of some inherently evil or ugly quality in them but because Jehovah chose them in His holy will as symbols of sin.

The most striking fact about uncleanness caused by semen and menstrual blood is its contrast with the attitude of other Semitic peoples of that day, especially devotees to fertility cults. Those cults glorified, even deified, sexual functions. For them, sexual functions were the highest flowering of man’s abilities and the secret to health, strength, and eternal life. The pagans found in sex the mystical solution to the riddle of life. To Jehovah worshipers, Jehovah Himself was the giver of life and the secret to meaning in life. Jehovah did not dishonor sex and its normal functions, such as the production of semen and menstruation. Neither did He deify sex beyond its intended purposes. In Jehovah worship in Israel, sexual functions were accepted as normal processes of life. They could be used unworthily, or they could be used worthily; but in themselves they were normal parts of life. They were more honored than dishonored when Jehovah chose to use them as symbols to teach spiritual truths; but they were not honored by exalting them beyond measure in the manner that the pagans did. Jehovah made some sexual functions to be symbols of sin. In so doing, He neither condemned those functions as evil nor honored them as glorious. He chose them as symbols of truth, just as he chose for the same purpose some living creatures (MESSAGE 14 in Lev. 11), childbirth (MESSAGE 15 in Lev. 12), and some diseases (MESSAGES 16-18 in LEV. 13-14).

This message may be outlined as follows:

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## CHAPTER 15

## Introductory note (15:1)

**Verse 1. Then Jehovah spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying,**

This verse introduces a new message from Jehovah. It was addressed to Moses and Aaron, probably on the last of the days of fillings as a part of the hallowing ceremonies for the new priests (see Introduction to MESSAGE 14 and comments on Lev. 8:33-36 in MESSAGE 10 and on Lev. 11:1 in MESSAGE 14).

## A. From bodily discharges (15:2-15)

## 1. From an abnormal discharge (15:2-3)

**Verse 2. Speak to the sons of Israel, and you shall say to them, A man who is discharging from his body, [because of] his discharge he [is] unclean.**

Speak to the sons of Israel, and you shall say to them, Moses and Aaron were told to relate this message to all the sons of Israel, women as well as men. It concerned a practice that was to be observed by everyone in the nation.

A man who. The use of the word “man” in this verse was used in the generic sense. It applies to men and women (Ex. 34:3,24; Eze. 14:4,7). This type of discharge could be experienced by a man or a woman (see comments on v. 33 below).

is discharging from his body. Since the other discharges mentioned in this chapter were from the genital organs, and since the menstrual discharge was said to be “in her body” (v. 19), it must be assumed that the discharge in question here also came out of the genital organs. However, it does not necessarily follow that “his body” was a euphemism for “genital organ,” as some have supposed. The discharge came from the body through the genital organs. Since semen and menstrual flow are mentioned later, they could not have been included in the discharge mentioned in this verse. The discharge mentioned in this verse

also could scarcely include the discharge of waste materials from the body. In that case, every person would have been unclean all the time. It seems necessary to conclude that this discharge was an abnormal one. Evidently it could be any kind of abnormal discharge. It could be caused by an infection or an injury that caused bleeding. However, it is going quite beyond the evidence to assume that the discharge always was caused by a sexually transmitted disease. Any kind of unusual discharge from the genital organs is what is referred to here.

[because of] his issue he [is] unclean. The discharge made the person “unclean,” not “foul,” “loathsome,” or “repulsive.” Its effect was ceremonial, not spiritual or moral.

**Verse 3. And this is his uncleanness during his discharge: [if] his body secretes his discharge or [if] his body seals up his discharge, t is uncleanness to him.**

An intermittent discharge made a person unclean until it completely stopped. The person was unclean even in the periods of time between discharges. Until the discharge stopped altogether, the person remained unclean.

Unlike uncleanness from tsaraath, uncleanness from bodily discharges did not have to be examined by a priest. The person was to recognize his uncleanness and act accordingly.

## 2. From touching someone with an abnormal discharge (15:4-12)

Verses 4-12. **4 Every bed on which one who is discharging lies will be unclean, and everything on which he sits will be unclean.**

**5 And whoever touches his bed must wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening.**

**6 And whoever sits on anything on which the one who is discharging sat must wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening.**

**7 And one who touches the body of one who is discharging must wash his clothes and**

**bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening.**

**8 And if the one discharging spits on one who is clean, then he shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening.**

**9 And any saddle on which the one discharging rides will be unclean.**

**10 And anyone touching anything that is under him will be unclean until the evening; and one carrying them must wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening.**

Anything or anyone who touched a person with an abnormal discharge was made unclean. This requirement represented the damaging effects that come from closely associating with sinners, even if the person did not participate in the sinning himself. Passing of uncleanness onto objects symbolized that a person's possessions could be damaged if the owner allowed them to be used for sinful purposes. It could be used by others to conclude that the person was tolerant toward sinful actions. Objects that are specifically mentioned as being made unclean by touching a person with an abnormal discharge are: the bed on which he lay (v. 4a), the seat on which he sat (v. 4b), the saddle on which he rode (v. 9), and the vessel he touched (v. 12). Persons specifically mentioned are: anyone touching his bed (v. 5), anyone sitting on anything on which he sat (vs. 6), anyone touching his flesh (vs. 7), anyone on whom he spat (vs. 8), anyone touching anything on which he stood, sat, or lay (v. 10), and anyone he touched without having rinsed his hands (v.11).

3. Cleansing persons or objects touched by a person with an abnormal discharge (15:11-12)

**11 And anyone whom the discharging one touches when he has not rinsed his hands in water shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening.**

**12 And a clay vessel that the discharging one touches must be broken, and every wooden vessel must be rinsed in water.**

Three actions were required to cleanse a person made unclean by this contact: washing the clothes, bathing the body, and waiting until the evening. Those requirements are not mentioned only in verse 11 but also in verses 5,6,7,8,and 10). Those requirements are similar to those required for cleansing from contact with an unclean creature (see comments on Lev. 11:24-28,31-32,39-40 in MESSAGE 14) or from contact with a house infected with tsaraath (see comments on Lev. 14:46-47 in MESSAGE 18). The difference is that only washing the clothes and not bathing was required in those cases. The lesson in the difference is that some sins are of such seriousness that additional effort is required to remove their effects from the person's life. Washing and waiting until the evening symbolized that it takes human effort and the passing of time to erase the effects of sin on a believer's life (see comments on Lev. 11:24 in MESSAGE 14).

Verse 12 describes cleansing ceremonies for object made unclean by touching a person with an abnormal discharge. It specifically mentions only vessels, but it must be assumed that the same requirement applied to other objects the person touched, such as beds (v. 4a), chairs (v. 4b), and saddles (v. 9). A pottery vessel that became unclean was to be broken, whereas a wooden vessel was to be rinsed. This requirement was in accord with similar instructions given previously. The reason was that clay vessels were porous, and the uncleanness could penetrate into them (see comments on Lev. 11:32,33,35 in MESSAGE 14). A wooden vessel, which uncleanness would not penetrate, was to be washed in water. No mention was made of a waiting period for the cleansing of vessels, though it possibly was implied. Washing of objects made unclean by touching a person with an abnormal discharge symbolized that a person who had allowed one of his possessions to be used for a sinful purpose needed to take some action to dispel the wrong impression that had been given by his action.

4. Cleansing a person healed of an abnormal discharge (15:13-15)

Verse 13. **And when someone discharging is cleansed of his discharge, then he shall count for himself seven days for his cleansing, and he shall wash his clothes and shall bathe his body in running water; and she shall be clean.**

This verse describes cleansing ceremonies for the person who had the discharge, in contrast to people or objects that touched that person. "Cleansed of his discharge" refers to the cessation of the discharge, that is, to healing the cause of the discharge. Even after the person was cleansed by the healing of the discharge, a cleansing ceremony was required. The cessation of the discharge represented a believer who ceased to sin, certainly making him cleaner. The cleansing ceremony represented a different and equally valid concept, which was removing the effects left by sin even after he stopped the sinful practice. The cleansing ceremony was different in detail from previous cleansing ceremonies, but it contained the same elements. First, the healed person was to wait seven days. Then, he was to wash his clothes and bathe himself in water from a spring or running stream. The elements of time and personal effort are again portrayed by these cleansing ceremonies. A longer period of time was required for cleansing the person who had the discharge than for the person who touched him, showing that the effects are deeper and more difficult to remove from the life of the sinner than from the life of one who simply associated closely with sinners.

Verses 14-15. **14 And on the eighth day, he shall take for himself two turtledoves or two young pigeons, and he shall come to Jehovah's face at the entrance of The Tent of Meeting, and he shall give them to the priest.**

**15 And the priest shall offer them, one for a sin-offering and the other for a rededication-offering. And the priest shall cover over him before Jehovah for his discharge.**

On the eighth day, the man was to go to The Tabernacle and offer two turtledoves or two young pigeons, one pair for a sin-offering in the manner

described in Leviticus 5:7-10 (see comments on those verses in MESSAGE 2), and the other pair for a rededication-offering, in the manner described in Leviticus 1:14-17 (see comments on those verses in MESSAGE 1). Inexpensive forms of these offerings are prescribed here, so that the ceremonies would not be beyond the financial reach of any person. Offering these offerings showed that more than time and human effort were required to remove the effects of sin from a person's life. The forgiveness and grace of Jehovah were also required. The sinner also had to repent of his sins and commitment himself completely to God for the marks of sin to be completely removed. When a sinner made the commitments symbolized by those offerings, the functions of the priest in the offerings symbolized that the sinner was covered or protected by God from the effects of his sins (see comments on Lev. 1:4 under the heading to cover over him).

- B. From a discharge of semen and its cleansing (15:16-18)

Verse 16. **And a man, if a laying of seed goes out of him, he shall bathe his whole body in water and be unclean until the evening.**

And a man, if a laying of seed proceeds to go out from him. These words refers to a discharge of semen from a man's body. Evidently it referred to any manner by which the discharge occurred, whether sexual intercourse or other. It is not said that a discharge of semen brought "foulness," "loathing," or "corruption," as most interpreters have contended. It is said that it brought uncleanness, which was a ceremonial condition, not a spiritual or moral condition. Nothing is implied here concerning the rightness or wrongness or the act itself. Like most of the experiences of life, on some occasions this act could be very evil, while on other occasions it could very right. The conditions under which it could be right or wrong are not dealt with here, only the ceremonial condition that resulted from it. The fact that uncleanness could be admitted and practiced as a result of a discharge of semen shows that the ancient Israelites, with the Lord's approval, were less inhibited on these matters than we are, not more superstitious as most interpreters have contended.

Defining this type of uncleanness and the method of its cleansing are both described in this one verse. Cleansing was accomplished by bathing and waiting until the evening, once again showing that human effort and the passing of time were required to remove the effects of sin from a person's life (see comments on Lev. 11:25 in MESSAGE 14).

**Verse 17. And any clothing and every skin on which semen comes shall be washed with water and be unclean until the evening.**

Anything touched by the semen became unclean and was to be cleansed by washing in water and waiting until the evening (see comments on Lev. 11:25 in MESSAGE 14).

**Verse 18. And a woman with whom a man lies [for] laying of semen, they shall bathe in water and be unclean until the evening.**

A woman with whom a man had intercourse and who, therefore, was touched by his semen, also became unclean. This requirement applied even when the woman had legitimate sex relations with her husband. Coming in contact with semen was a symbol of sin, not a moral or spiritual evil in itself. She was cleansed in the same manner as the man.

- C. From a discharge of menstrual blood and its cleansing (15:19-31)
  - 1. From a normal menstrual period and its cleansing and its cleansing (15:19a)

**Verse 19a. And a woman, when she is discharging blood [that] she discharges from her body, shall be in her impurity seven days.**

A third type of discharge that brought uncleanness was a discharge of menstrual blood. The word translated "impurity" has the same meaning as "uncleanness." Her uncleanness was ceremonial and symbolic, not moral in and of itself (see comments on Lev. 12:2 in MESSAGE 15).

When a woman's menstrual period occurred, her cleansing required a waiting period of seven

days. Verse 28 explains that this seven-day period of impurity was to be counted after her menstrual discharge had ended, so it definitely applied to the time required for her cleansing. A longer time was required for her cleansing than was required for a man after the discharge of semen because a menstrual period lasts longer than a discharge of semen, and it symbolized a longer involvement in a sinful practice. The period of waiting after the woman's menstrual period ceased reminded the Israelites that the damaging effects of sin lasted even after the person had ceased a sinful practice, and the longer a person persisted in a sinful practice the longer it took to remove those effects from his life. No mention is made of a requirement that the woman wash her clothes or her body as a part of her cleansing, but those actions must be implied since washing was a standard requirement for cleansing ceremonies, and they were required of someone who touched her while she was unclean (see comments on vs. 21-22 below). They were also required of a woman who had an abnormally long menstrual period (see comments on vs. 25-27 below).

- 2. From touching a woman during her menstrual period and its cleansing (15:19b-23)

**Verse 19b-23. 19b And anyone touching her shall be unclean until the evening.**

**20 And everything on which she lies during her impurity will be unclean; and everything on which she sits will be unclean.**

**21 And whoever touches her bed shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until the evening.**

**22 And whoever touches anything on which she sits shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until the evening.**

**23 If it [is] the bed or anything on which she sits, in touching it he will be unclean until the evening.**

Anyone who touched the woman during her period of uncleanness and anyone who touched the bed on which she lay or any article on which she sat was made unclean.

In each case, cleansing was accomplished by washing the person's clothes, bathing the body, and waiting until the evening (see comments on Lev. 11:25 in MESSAGE 14). No mention is made of cleansing the objects on which she lay or sat. It must be assumed that they also were cleansed by washing and waiting until the evening (see comments on Lev. 11:25 in MESSAGE 14; and on Lev. 15:4-12 in this MESSAGE). These requirements were additional symbols that reminded the Israelites that close association with sinners cause damaging effects on the person's life and that both effort and time are necessary to remove those effects.

4. From being touched by menstrual blood and its cleansing (15:24)

**Verse 24 And if a man lying lies with her, and her impurity gets on him, he shall be unclean seven days and every bed on which he lies will be unclean.**

“Lies with her” in this verse does not refer to participating in a sex act but simply contact with menstrual blood from sleeping in the same bed with a woman during her menstrual period, as a husband would normally do. This conclusion is supported in that a later message states that a man and a woman who had sex during the woman's menstrual period should both be put to death (see comments on Lev. 20:18 in MESSAGE 24). Since this verse requires only a seven-day period of uncleanness, it must refer to accidental contact with menstrual blood from sleeping in the same bed with a menstruating woman. In addition to the man's becoming unclean, every bed on which he lay during the seven days of his uncleanness became unclean. This requirement was similar to uncleanness from contact with a woman during her menstrual period, though it is not as all inclusive (see comments on vs. 19b-23 in this chapter.)

4. From an abnormally long menstrual period and its cleansing (15:25-27)

Verses 25-27. **25 And if a woman discharges a discharge of blood for many days [that is] not in the time of her impurity, or if she discharges beyond the time of her impurity, her uncleanness [shall be] all the days of her impurity. She shall be unclean all the days of her impurity.**

**26 Every bed on which she lies all the days of her discharge shall be to her like the bed of her impurity, and everything on which she sits will be unclean like in the uncleanness of her impurity.**

**27 And whoever touches them will be unclean. He shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until the evening.**

If a woman should have a long menstrual period that did not occur normally or if her normal menstrual period extended longer than usual, her uncleanness would last as long as the bleeding continued. The rules were exactly the same as those practiced during the seven “days of her impurity.” “The days of her impurity” means the full length of her menstrual period. “She shall be unclean” means she will be ceremonially unclean during the whole time. Interpreting this statement to refer to a different kind of discharge and a different kind of uncleanness, as Meyrick, Keil, and Peisker did, is unwarranted.

Her cleansing required washing her clothes, bathing in water, and waiting until the evening after the bleeding had stopped. The waiting period was shorter than that required after the end of a normal menstrual period, probably because she had already been unclean for such a long time (see comments on vs. 19a above).

5. Fire-offerings required as a part of the woman's cleansing (15:28-30)

Verse 28. **And if she is cleansed of her discharge, she shall count to herself seven days, and after that she shall be clean.**

As in verse 13, "cleansed" is used in this verse to refer to the ceasing of the blood flow (see comments on Lev. 15:13 above). However, "shall be clean" in this verse means removing the ceremonial condition of uncleanness. After the woman was clean by the ceasing of her menstrual period, she was to wait for seven days as a part of her cleansing ceremony. This verse applies to a woman's regular menstrual period, since ceasing from a normal period required seven days (see comments on v. 19a above), while cleansing from an abnormally long menstrual period required only waiting until the evening (see comments on v. 25-27 above). No mention is made of her washing in water as a part of her cleansing, but it is probably implied. Both waiting and washing are now familiar symbols in cleansing ceremonies (see comments on Lev. 11:25 in MESSAGE 14).

Verses 29-30. **29 And on the eighth day, she shall take to herself two turtledoves or two young pigeons and bring them to the priest to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.**

**30 And the priest shall offer one for a sin-offering and the other for a rededication-offering; and the priest shall cover over her before Jehovah for her unclean discharge.**

These verses add an additional requirement for the woman's cleansing. A sin-offering and a rededication-offering were also required as a part of the cleansing. Birds were specified as the offering to be offered for both offerings. These inexpensive forms of the offerings were specified so that the cost would not be a burden on a woman every month after her menstrual period (see comments on Lev. 5:7-10 in MESSAGE 2 concerning the use of birds for a sin-offering and on Lev. 1:14-17 in MESSAGE 1 concerning the use of birds for a rededication-offering). The same principle had been followed in offerings to be offered in the case

of cleansing from an abnormal discharge (see comments on vs. 14-15 above). The sin-offering and the rededication-offering symbolized that God's forgiveness and grace were required for removing the effects of sin from a person's life, in addition to the person's effort and the passing of time..

- D. Warning against entering The Tabernacle in an unclean condition (15:31)

Verse 31. **You must keep separate the people of Israel during their uncleanness, and they will not die in their uncleanness by making unclean My Tabernacle that is in their midst.**

You must keep separate the people of Israel during their uncleanness. The verb in this statement is plural. Both Moses and Aaron were to teach the Israelites to keep away from The Tabernacle while in an unclean condition.

My Tabernacle. The word translated "Tabernacle" in this verse is used here for only the second time in the book of Leviticus (see comments on Lev. 8:10 in MESSAGE 10 The Tabernacle and all that was in it.). The word means a tent used as a dwelling or home. It means that The Tabernacle was Jehovah's home place, though He also was present everywhere. Though "The Tabernacle" is the name we use most often for Jehovah's place of dwelling and worship, in the Book of Leviticus the name "Tent of Meeting" and other names were used much more frequently

and they will not die in their uncleanness by making unclean My Tabernacle that is in their midst. Entering The Tabernacle while ceremonially unclean would show lack of respect for Jehovah's absolute holiness and purity. Ignoring that requirement would show defiance of God and His commandments. Lack of respect for God's presence was essentially the same sin as that committed by Nadab and Abihu (see comments on Lev. 10:1-3 in MESSAGE 11). It amounted to open rebellion. The death penalty had already been promised for open rebellion against ceremonies commanded by Jehovah (see comments on Lev. 8:35 in MESSAGE 10 under the heading And you will not die and on Lev. 10:7 in MESSAGE 11 and

on Lev. 10:9 in MESSAGE 12 under the heading and you will not die; see also Introduction to Lev 20 in MESSAGE 24 and comments on Lev. 20:21 in MESSAGE 24). So taking care to avoid making The Tabernacle unclean would save a person from death.

It is highly instructive that the closing word concerning all the cleansing ceremonies God commanded to remind the Israelites to avoid sinning was a declaration that ignoring those teachings would result in death. God provided Israel many symbols and ceremonies that taught how to overcome sin. But he ended all of those provisions with the sad information that any Israelite who refused to learn from those provisions would have to pay the consequences. He would die. An Israelite who accepted Jehovah in his heart but still neglected observe the regulations concerning clean and unclean would die physically. An Israelite who rejected Jehovah's authority over him completely would die eternally. Death was, is, and always will be the penalty for rejecting and defying God.

#### Summary Note (15:32-33)

Verses 32-33. **32 This is the law of the discharging and of a laying of semen that comes out of him to become unclean by it**

**33 And of the sickness by her impurity and of the discharging of a discharge by a male or female and of a man who lies with a woman who is unclean.**

These verses are a summary of the message contained in this chapter concerning bodily discharges. It was likely not a part of the message delivered by Jehovah, but like other summary notes was added by Moses when he compiled the messages of Jehovah (see comments on Lev. 11:16-47 in MESSAGE 14). In this summary note, four classifications of uncleanness from bodily discharges are mentioned: (1) from a discharge of semen (see vs. 16-18), (2) from a discharge of menstrual blood (see vs. 19-23,25-30), (3) from abnormal discharges of a male or a female (see vs. 2-15), and (4) from being touched by menstrual blood unintentionally when sleeping in the same bed with a menstruating woman (see v. 24). This summary covers all the cases described in the message, but not in the same order. Note that verse 2 had used the word "man" when referring to abnormal discharges. Verse 33 in this summary note confirms that the word was used there in a generic sense, including men and women (see comments on Lev. 15:2 above under the heading A man who).

#### Application

Sin in the life of a believer is a serious matter. It can be forgiven, when the believer asks for forgiveness. But, even then, sad effects are left on the sinner's life. Those effects can be removed only by a combination of effort on the part of the believer, the passing of time, and the grace of God. However cooperation between the one who sinned and God can and will remove the hardness and coarseness that sin brings to the life of a believer and replace them with the likeness of God.

1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us [our] sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That verse is not talking about pardon for the penalty of sin granted to lost men. It is talking about forgiveness and cleansing from the effects of sin that has come into the life of a believer. Sin in the life of a person who has not accepted Jesus brings eternal condemnation, because that person's sin is primarily rejecting Jesus. It is removed only by faith in God. Sin in the life of a believer brings loss of fellowship with God. His restoration to God's fellowship requires only confession.



However, even after being restored to God's fellowship, damage remains on the life of a believer person who has sinned. Coarse attitudes, evil thoughts, ugly habits, physical weakness remain with him. The longer he has continued to sin, the deeper are the marks that sin has left on him. Those marks will not disappear easily. He must work at making clean thoughts, positive attitudes, righteous actions, and physical vigor return to being natural for him again. The change will not take place over night, but it will come if he persists in doing good. He will especially need to draw near to God, be faithful in church, study his Bible, be persistent in prayer, and depend on the goodness and grace of God. The Lord will help him, and the time will come when the results of his sin will vanish away. People will scarcely be able to remember the days when he disappointed himself and failed His God.

Though the healing and restoring power of God is great and blessed, a better way exists. The better way is for a believer to guard himself carefully, so that sin does not creep into his or her life and bring damage with it. None of us will be completely perfect, but we should strive to be as near to it as we possibly can. As the ancient Israelite strove to be ceremonially clean as a reminder to stay away from sin, let us put our energies into growing in righteousness every day.

However, the stern reality remains. If a person rejects all of God's warnings about sin, he will die. If he has trusted his life to Jesus and still persists in some sin, he will die physically (1 John 5:16-17). If he rejects God completely from his heart and life, he will die eternally. His destiny will be banishment into hell forever..