

CHAPTER 12

INTRODUCTION TO LEVITICUS 12

This chapter treats of the purification of a new mother, the time of whose purification for a man child was forty days, and for a maid child eighty, (^{<812>}Leviticus 12:1-5) at the close of which she was to bring her offerings to the priests, to make atonement for her, (^{<816>}Leviticus 12:6-8).

Ver. 1. *And the Lord spake unto Moses*, etc.] The laws in the preceding chapter were delivered both to Moses and Aaron, but what follows in this only to Moses; but inasmuch as the priest had a concern in it, it being his business to offer the sacrifices required by the following law, it was no doubt given to Moses, to be delivered to Aaron, as well as to the people. R. Semlai remarks, that as the creation of man was after that of the beasts, fowls, fishes, etc. so the laws concerning the uncleanness of men are after those relating to beasts, etc. and they begin with the uncleanness of a new mother, because, as Aben Ezra observes, the birth is the beginning of man:

saying: as follows.

Ver. 2. *Speak unto the children of Israel*, etc.] For this law only concerned them, and not other nations of the world:

if a woman have conceived seed; by lying with a man, and so becomes pregnant, and goes on with her pregnancy until she brings forth a child. The Jews from hence gather, that this law respects abortions; that if a woman has conceived and miscarries, eighty one days after the birth of a female, and forty one after a male, she must bring her offering ^{f418}; but the law seems only to regard such as are with child, and proceed to the due time of childbirth, whether then the child is born alive or dead:

and born a man child; which is, generally speaking, not only matter of joy to the mother, but to the whole family, (see ^{<812>}John 16:21): then she shall be unclean seven days; be separate from all company, except those whose presence is necessary to take care of her in her circumstances, and do what is proper for her, and even these became ceremonially unclean thereby; yea,

her husband was not permitted to sit near her, nor to eat and drink with her:

according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean; the same number of days, even seven, she was unclean on account of childbirth, as she was for her monthly courses, called here an infirmity or sickness, incident to all females when grown up, at which time they were separate from all persons; and the case was the same with a new mother; (see ^{<0154>}Leviticus 15:14-29).

Ver. 3. *And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.*] Or the foreskin of his flesh, that is, of the man child born according to the law, (^{<0172>}Genesis 17:12) and this seems to furnish out a reason why a male child was not circumcised before the eighth day, and why it was then, because before that its mother was in her separation and uncleanness, and then was freed from it; and so the Targum of Jonathan. The circumcision of a male child on the eighth day was religiously observed, and even was not omitted on account of the sabbath, when the eighth day happened to be on that, (see Gill on "^{<0172>}John 7:22-23"). It is an observation of Aben Ezra on this place, that the wise men say "in the day", and not in the night, lo, he that is born half an hour before the setting of the sun is circumcised after six days and a half, for the day of the law is not from time to time.

Ver. 4. *And she shall continue in the blood of her purifying three and thirty days*, etc.] That is, so many more, in all forty; for though at the end of seven days she was in some respects free from her uncleanness, yet not altogether, but remained in the blood of her purifying, or in the purifying of her blood, which was more and more purified, and completely at the end of forty days: so with the Persians it is said, a new mother must avoid everything for forty days; when that time is passed, she may wash and be purified ^{f419}; and which perhaps Zoroastres, the founder of the Persian religion, at least the reformer of it, being a Jew, as is by some supposed, he might take it from hence:

she shall touch no hallowed thing; as the tithe, the heave offering, the flesh of the peace offerings, as Aben Ezra explains it, if she was a priest's wife:

nor come into the sanctuary; the court of the tabernacle of the congregation, or the court of the temple, as the same writer observes; and

so with the Greeks, a pregnant woman might not come into a temple before the fortieth day^{f420}, that is, of her delivery:

until the days of her purifying be fulfilled; until the setting of the sun of the fortieth day; on the morrow of that she was to bring the atonement of her purification, as Jarchi observes; (see Gill on “⁴²⁰Leviticus 12:6”).

Ver. 5. *But if she bear a maid child*, etc.] A daughter, whether born alive or dead, if she goes with it her full time:

then she shall be unclean two weeks; or fourteen days running; and on the fifteenth day be free or loosed, as the Targum of Jonathan, just as long again as for a man child:

as in her separation; on account of her monthly courses; the sense is, that she should be fourteen days, to all intents and purposes, as unclean as when these are upon her:

and she shall continue in the blood of her purifying sixty and six days; which being added to the fourteen make eighty days, just as many more as in the case of a male child; the reason of which, as given by some Jewish writers, is, because of the greater flow of humours, and the corruption of the blood through the birth of a female than of a male: but perhaps the truer reason may be, what a learned man^{f421} suggests, that a male infant circumcised on the eighth day, by the profusion of its own blood, bears part of the purgation; wherefore the mother, for the birth of a female, must suffer twice the time of separation; the separation is finished within two weeks, but the purgation continues sixty six days; a male child satisfies the law together, and at once, by circumcision; but an adult female bears both the purgation and separation every month. According to Hippocrates^{f422}, the purgation of a new mother, after the birth of a female, is forty two days, and after the birth of a male thirty days; so that it should seem there is something in nature which requires a longer time for purifying after the one than after the other, and which may in part be regarded by this law; but it chiefly depends upon the sovereign will of the lawgiver. The Jews do not now strictly observe this. Buxtorf^{f423} says, the custom prevails now with them, that whether a woman bears a male or a female, at the end of forty days she leaves her bed, and returns to her husband; but Leo of Modena relates^{f424}, that if she bears a male child, her husband may not touch her for the space of seven weeks; and if a female, the space of three months;

though he allows, in some places, they continue separated a less while, according as the custom of the place is.

Ver. 6. *And when the days of her purifying are fulfilled, for a son, or for a daughter*, etc.] For a son forty days, and for a daughter eighty; but the ancient Jews formerly, that they might not break it, ordered, that the offering enjoined as follows should not be brought until the next day after the time was up: their canon runs thus ^{f425},

“a new mother does not bring her offering on the fortieth day for a male, nor on the eightieth day for a female, but after her sun is set; and she brings her offering on the morrow, which is the forty first for a male, and the eighty first for a female; and this is the day of which it is said, “when the days”, etc. (^{<OR16>}Leviticus 12:6).”

She shall bring a lamb of the first year; the Septuagint adds, without blemish, as all sacrifices should be, if not expressed; “or the son of his year” ^{f426}; some distinguish between “the son of a year”, as the phrase sometimes is, and “the son of his year”, as here; the latter denoting a lamb in its first year, though something wanting of it, the former a full year old, neither more nor less:

for a burnt offering; in gratitude, and by way of thanksgiving for the mercies she had received in childbearing:

and a young pigeon, [or] a turtledove, for a sin [offering]; either the one or the other. With the Persians ^{f427}, it is incumbent on a new mother, in Abam (the twelfth month), to bring twelve oblations for the sin which proceedeth from childbirth, that so she might be purified from her sins. It is an observation of the Misnic doctors ^{f428}, that turtles precede pigeons in all places; upon which they ask this question, is it because they are choicer or more excellent than they? observe what is said, (^{<OR16>}Leviticus 12:6) from whence may be learned, that they are both alike, or of equal value. But why a sin offering for childbearing? is it sinful to bear and bring forth children in lawful marriage, where the bed is undefiled? The Jews commonly refer this to some sin or another, that the childbearing woman has been guilty of in relation to childbirth, or while in her labour; and it is not unlikely that she may sometimes be guilty of sin in some way or other, either through an immoderate desire after children, or through impatience and breaking out into rash expressions in the midst of her pains; so Aben Ezra suggests, perhaps some thought rose up in her mind in the hour of childbirth because

of pain, or perhaps spoke with her mouth; meaning what was unbecoming, rash, and sinful. Some take the sin to be a rash and false oath: but there seems to be something more than all this, because though one or other of these might be the case of some women, yet not all; whereas this law is general, and reached every new mother, and has respect not so much to any particular sin of her's, as of her first parent Eve, who was first in the transgression; and on account of which transgression pains are endured by every childbearing woman; and who also conceives in sin, and is the instrument of propagating the corruption of nature to her offspring; and therefore was to bring a sin offering typical of the sin offering Christ is made to take away that, and all other sin; whereby she shall be saved, even in childbearing, and that by the birth of a child, the child Jesus, if she continues in faith, and charity, and holiness, with sobriety, (^{<5425>}1 Timothy 2:15) these offerings were to be brought

unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest; to offer them up for her. When the temple was built, these were brought to the eastern gate, the gate Nicanor, where the lepers were cleansed, and new mothers purified^{f429}.

Ver. 7. *Who shall offer it before the Lord,* etc.] Upon the altar of burnt offering:

and make an atonement for her; for whatsoever sin in connection with or that attended childbearing; as typical of the atonement by Christ both for sin original and actual:

and she shall be cleansed from the issue of her blood; in a ceremonial sense, and according to that law be pure and clean:

this [is] the law for her that hath born a male or a female; enjoined her, and to be observed by her; and though now with the rest of the ceremonial law it is abolished, yet it has this instruction in it; that it becomes women in such circumstances to bring the freewill offerings of their lips, their sacrifices of praise, and in a public manner signify their gratitude and thankfulness for the mercy and goodness of God vouchsafed to them, in carrying them through the whole time of childbearing, and saving them in the perilous hour.

Ver. 8. *And if she be not able to bring a lamb,* etc.] As everyone was not in circumstances sufficient to be at the expense of buying a lamb for this purpose, having none of their own:

then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; which was a kind and merciful provision for the poorer sort; since it was necessary that by them the favour received should be acknowledged, as well as the sin attending them in such circumstances should be atoned for. This being the offering brought by the mother of our Lord, shows the state of poverty in which she was; and by this, and the circumcision of her child, and the presentation of it before the Lord at the time of her purification, it appears that they were both under the law, and obedient to it:

the one for a burnt offering, and the other for a sin [offering]; Jarchi observes, that in oblations the sin offering goes before the burnt offering, for sin being atoned for, the gift was accepted; but here the burnt offering went first, the reason is not very apparent:

and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean; equally the same as if she had brought a lamb, instead of young pigeons, or turtledoves.