



# *Leaves* From the Tree

*Studies from God's Word*

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



LEVITICUS 7 - 13

## Leviticus 7

***7:5-10 - "The priest shall offer them up in smoke on the altar as an offering by fire to the LORD; it is a guilt offering. Every male among the priests may eat of it. It shall be eaten in a holy place; it is most holy. The guilt offering is like the sin offering, there is one law for them; the priest who makes atonement with it shall have it. Also the priest who presents any man's burnt offering, that priest shall have for himself the skin of the burnt offering which he has presented. Likewise, every grain offering that is baked in the oven and everything prepared in a pan or on a griddle shall belong to the priest who presents it. Every grain offering, mixed with oil or dry, shall belong to all the sons of Aaron, to all alike."***

This section continues the restatement of the laws for five main tabernacle offerings that were previously covered in chapters 1-5. The difference is that this section is written for the priests to govern their role and participation in these offerings. In these verses, the emphasis is on what is to be done with the sacrifices as they are offered. Each sacrifice was first offered to God to honor Him and satisfy the requirements of the law, but the hide, meat and grain of the sacrifices were then to be used as God designated. For the burnt offering the meat of the sacrifice was burned, but the hide of the animal was to be given to the priest who actually served in the offering by placing the sacrifice on the altar. For the grain offering, once the grain was properly prepared and offered, the priest was given the grain for him to eat.

The principle that applies here is that the priests were the Lord's servants in His house, and by giving them a portion of the offerings given to Him, the Lord was paying His servants their wages. The Levitical priests were engaged in what we call today full time ministry. In other words, they did not work other jobs or have other sources of personal income. Their own livelihood was supported entirely by their ordained portion from the offerings of the tabernacle. Paul describes this principle which carries over even into the New Covenant. "Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel." (1 Corinthians 9:13-14). The pattern is that the Lord calls some from among His people to serve Him as their life's work. The Lord also ordains for His people to give a portion of what He has given to them to honor Him. Those who serve in this capacity are intended to be supported in their work of service from the offerings of the people of God.

There is in our generation a commonly shared resistance to give offerings to the work of God because of how some who receive those offerings have abused their position and privilege by accumulating too much from the offerings and misusing what was intended to provide for their true needs, not all of their fleshly

desires. The reluctance to give to such so called servants of God is understandable and even wise in many cases. In order for these offerings to honor the Lord as they are intended it is first necessary for the one receiving the offering to honor the Lord as they should. This story from a later time in Israel's history shows how the sons of the high priest who were themselves priests abused the offering system for their own benefit.

"Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they did not know the LORD and the custom of the priests with the people. When any man was offering a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand. Then he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. Thus they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. Also, before they burned the fat, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give the priest meat for roasting, as he will not take boiled meat from you, only raw." If the man said to him, "They must surely burn the fat first, and then take as much as you desire," then he would say, "No, but you shall give it to me now; and if not, I will take it by force." Thus the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for the men despised the offering of the LORD." (I Samuel 2:12-17). The sins of Eli's sons is described as "very great before the LORD." Any offerings made to the Lord are holy and He will not tolerate for long men who dishonor His name by mishandling the gifts that are given to Him. Their abuse reflected on the Lord Himself and tempted the people of God to withhold their offerings.

***7:20-21 - "But the person who eats the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings which belong to the LORD, in his uncleanness, that person shall be cut off from his people. When anyone touches anything unclean, whether human uncleanness, or an unclean animal, or any unclean detestable thing, and eats of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings which belong to the LORD, that person shall be cut off from his people."***

We saw in a previous chapter that the peace offering was meant to be eaten by the person that made the offering as a fellowship meal to celebrate that the peace the person enjoyed in their covenant relationship with the Lord. There was a critical limitation on the person bringing the offering however. They were not allowed to eat the peace offering if they were currently in an unclean spiritual condition. They might be rendered unclean in a number of ways. For instance merely touching a dead body of an animal or person would render anyone unclean until they went through the specific requirements to be restored to ceremonially clean condition. If any person in Israel ignored this command and ate the peace offering while they were still unclean then their standing in the holy nation of God immediately changed to a drastic degree. That person was "cut off from his people." To be cut off was to lose all covenant rights and identification. A cut off person was treated as if they were not part of Israel at all. They had no access to the tabernacle for sacrifice, and they were treated as if they were one of the Gentiles.

For many, such a serious consequence seems harsh and unreasonable. However, as with many things, the Lord sees this situation from a different perspective than most. He considers violations of His holiness to be a much more serious issue than we tend to view them. In this case, there was an important symbolic reason why the Lord wanted such violations to result in a complete disassociation of the offender from His house and His holy people. If the Lord were to overlook the defilement of the peace offering and allow an unclean person to celebrate the peace offering meal without consequence, what He would be communicating is that sin and the unclean condition it produces has no effect upon our peace and fellowship with God. In other words, He would be declaring by His inaction that the cross was not really necessary to establish peace and restore fellowship between God and us. Sin defiles and until that defilement is cleansed we cannot celebrate peace with God because there would be no peace with Him.

We see a similar concern of the Lord's played out in one of the New Testament churches. In the church in Corinth, there were some who were participating in the Lord's Supper in a way that dishonored the Lord and the purpose for the meal. Paul wrote them and explained that the Lord had already begun to deal with those offenders in a discipline of His judgment. "For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world." (I Corinthians 11:29-32). The severity of the violation is shown by the severity of the consequences that the Lord imposed on them which included both sickness and in some cases death. The Lord is neither detached or unconcerned about His holy things. It is important for us to recognize that there are some things which He has chosen to represent His holy standards which He will personally guard even to the point of dealing with us whenever we trample on His holiness.

***7:37-38 - "This is the law of the burnt offering, the grain offering and the sin offering and the guilt offering and the ordination offering and the sacrifice of peace offerings, which the LORD commanded Moses at Mount Sinai in the day that He commanded the sons of Israel to present their offerings to the LORD in the wilderness of Sinai."***

These final verses of chapter seven sum up the first seven chapters of Leviticus. These chapters have detailed the laws of the five offerings of the Lord for both the Israelite who is to bring the offerings and the priest who is to receive them and make the offering to the Lord. As we look back over this section the themes that should stand out are the high value the Lord places upon His holiness, the absolute necessity of sacrifice to enjoy restored relationship with the Lord, and the necessity for all things to be done in the exact ways the Lord commanded in the service of the tabernacle. These seven chapters are not a collection of the

Lord for the worship of Israel. These were all laws which detail the commandments of the Lord for the offerings. It was not an option whether to make these offerings to the Lord. If any refused to make these offerings they were cut off from the Lord and from Israel.

Additionally, the offerings were commanded to be presented in a specific place, offering specific gifts, in specific amounts, at specific times, by specific persons, for specific reasons, and in specific ways. The implication in all of this is that left to ourselves, we would not recognize the need to make such offerings to the Lord or would offer them with the wrong perspective and in the wrong way. The details of the Lord's specific requirements in these offerings were not designed to make approaching God more difficult, but to reflect His order. "But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner." (I Corinthians 14:40). Remember also that each offering pointed to the cross in its own way, illuminating a different aspect of the one great offering of Jesus for our sins.

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## Leviticus 8

***8:4, 9, 13, 17, 21, 29, 36 - "So Moses did just as the LORD commanded him."***

This chapter now shifts the focus away from the offering laws that filled the first seven chapters and returns to a narrative of the consecration and ordination of Aaron as the first high priest of the tabernacle and his sons as priests along with him. The setting apart of Aaron and his sons for the priesthood was previously detailed in a set of consecration laws previously in the book of Exodus. In this chapter, the role of Moses is key in his responsibility to act upon each one of the requirements of the Lord to complete this process of ordaining the new priests that will serve the Lord in the tabernacle.

Moses was faithful to carry out every requirement of every one of the ordination laws.

In his obedient faithfulness Moses serves as a type of Christ. This section from Hebrews draws that comparison between the role of Moses in the tabernacle and the role of Christ in relationship to the church. "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession; He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house. For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house--whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the

end." (Hebrews 3:1-6). The faithfulness of Moses to carry out all of the will of God for the tabernacle reflects the perfect faithfulness of Christ as He carried out all of the will of God in every detail in the New Covenant tabernacle which is the church. As beautifully as the faithfulness of Moses reflects the work of Christ, the writer of Hebrews draws an important distinction between Moses and Christ. Moses served God in the house of God. Christ's faithfulness was revealed as the Son of God over His own house.

The faithfulness of Moses to obey all of the commands of God in this chapter also serves as a model for us to follow. There are seven verses in this chapter that essentially repeat the same phrase, "So Moses did just as the LORD commanded him." The seven fold repetition emphasizes that the obedience of Moses was a complete obedience in every detail. This is the standard to which we are called in our own service to the Lord. There are two aspects of what Moses did that are instructive to our own service to the Lord. First, what Moses did was determined by the command of the Lord. Second, how Moses obeyed the Lord in these commands establishes a high standard for all believers in their own service. What Moses did was receive and follow the will of the Lord. His ministry service was not based upon his own human imagination or preferences. He served because the Lord commanded it. The command of the Lord bears the authority of the Lord and places the servant under the singular responsibility to carry out the will of the One Who commands. Each believer in Christ is called to serve the Lord as Moses did. We are not turned loose to imagine the specifics of our obedience for ourselves any more than Moses was. We have been given the clear commands contained in all of God's revealed Word, the Scriptures. Our obedience to God is measured by our faithfulness to carry out the instructions detailed in the Scriptures regarding our lives, our families, in society, and in the church.

How Moses served the Lord in these commands is highlighted by the phrase "just as." It emphasizes that he followed the commands of the Lord to the fullest extent and in every detail. When the Lord commanded that a scarlet thread was to be used, Moses did not substitute a green thread and justify himself with rationalizations that green would somehow be just as good. The implication was that Moses grasped that every detail of the Lord's commands was critical because it originated from the Lord. Moses never presumed to substitute his own ideas or preferences for the command of the Lord. The reason that this is so important for our own generation of believers is that so many have chosen to ignore or disregard clear commands in Scripture and in their place have substituted personal standards or the standards of the world. As servants of the Lord, our lives are not our own. It is our responsibility to learn the commands of the Lord for our lives and then to obey all of them just as the Lord commanded.

**8:10 - "Moses then took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it..."**

From the passage in Hebrews 3:1-6 quoted above we see that the church is identified as the house of the Lord just like the tabernacle was identified as His house. In this passage, Moses anointed the tabernacle and all the furnishings within it. He did so by pouring some of the special anointing oil upon the structure of the tabernacle, and not just upon Aaron. This points toward a similar double anointing in the new Covenant. Christ is the anointed One, and in His baptism by John the Baptist, Christ was fully and permanently anointed with the Holy Spirit. "After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him," (Matthew 3:16). "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME" (Luke 4:18). "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him." (Acts 10:38). When the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at His baptism that was His anointing. The Holy Spirit did not come and go from Jesus, but remained with Him from that moment forward. In the same way we describe His anointing as permanent.

Just as the tabernacle was anointed along with the anointing of the first high priest, Aaron, the church is anointed along with Christ in the New Covenant. Our anointing is based upon His anointing. The anointing is the presence of the Holy Spirit coming upon a person, filling that person and remaining with them as He did with Christ. As a fulfillment parallel, the entire tabernacle was anointed by Moses and the entire church is anointed by Christ sending the Holy Spirit. "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Matthew 3:11). As Lord over the New Covenant tabernacle, which is the church, Jesus anoints the entire church by filling the church with His Holy Spirit. Our anointing is similar to His in that the Spirit fills us and remains with us. Our anointing does not wane over time or fluctuate from week to week. Our anointing is lasting and permanent. "But you have an anointing from the Holy One" (I John 2:20). This is an important corrective to many well intentioned but misguided prayers and teachings, especially in Pentecostal and charismatic Christian circles. Many pray for a new or fresh anointing, but they do so without understanding that is the equivalent of asking God for a new or fresh Holy Spirit to come live inside of them. Every true believer in Christ is anointed and will always remain anointed. The anointing neither grows or diminishes. This is because the anointing is a person, and not simply a spiritual substance.



***8:22-24 - "Then he presented the second ram, the ram of ordination, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram. Moses slaughtered it and took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear, and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. He also had Aaron's sons come near; and Moses put some of the blood on the lobe of their right ear, and on the thumb of their right hand and on the big toe of their right foot. Moses then sprinkled the rest of the blood around on the altar."***

When Aaron and his sons were set apart in this consecration ceremony for their calling to minister as priests, Moses first applied the blood of the ram of ordination to their bodies in three locations. In our study from Exodus 29 we saw that there was a symbolic reason why some of the blood of the sacrifice was applied to their right ear, right thumb and right big toe. The Lord was showing by the ear that they were being set apart to hear His Word and that all of their thoughts were to be guided from this point forward to the Word of God and not their own thoughts. The thumb signified that everything they laid their hands upon, all of their life's work was from this point to be dedicated unto the Lord. In other words they were to do His will and not their own. The toe indicated that every step they took in their lives from this point was to follow Him. These three parts of the body as a whole pictured that their entire life was being set apart for God's service. The reason that blood was applied in these three spots was to show the priest was being spiritually sanctified or set apart for God's holy service.

This ceremony was what qualified Aaron and his sons to lead the people of God in the tabernacle service. This pattern of applying some blood to these three body parts is no longer practiced in the ordination of leaders to their ministry in the New Covenant. There is however, a spiritual principle regarding church leadership that we can draw from this pattern and still applies. The principle that applies is that holiness is the first priority of the Lord for those that He chooses and calls into church leadership. In most church denominations, the priority for choosing and preparing new church leaders is usually education, not consecration. The traditional pattern for developing new leaders is through the avenue of seminaries and Bible colleges where the great emphasis is placed on higher religious education. The candidate for leadership is passed and later assigned primarily on the basis of how much they have learned rather than how holy they are. I am not implying that education played no important role in the ministry preparations of Aaron and his sons. They, more than the rest of Israel were responsible to become educated in the requirements of the tabernacle and they would do so by paying special attention to the instructions of the Lord for all of the aspects of the tabernacle. However, this day of their ordination was not a day in which their knowledge of the tabernacle was tested. It was a day of blood. The Lord's priority for those He calls is sanctification and then education. Biblical education is especially important as a foundation for future fruitful ministry. But, education without sanctification results in an empty intellectual grasp of the

details without really understanding the point of any of this. A sanctified servant of the Lord is now prepared to learn and serve in the way the Lord intends.

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## Leviticus 9

***9:1-6 - "Now it came about on the eighth day that Moses called Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel; and he said to Aaron, "Take for yourself a calf, a bull, for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering, both without defect, and offer them before the LORD. Then to the sons of Israel you shall speak, saying, 'Take a male goat for a sin offering, and a calf and a lamb, both one year old, without defect, for a burnt offering, and an ox and a ram for peace offerings, to sacrifice before the LORD, and a grain offering mixed with oil; for today the LORD will appear to you.'" So they took what Moses had commanded to the front of the tent of meeting, and the whole congregation came near and stood before the LORD. Moses said, "This is the thing which the LORD has commanded you to do, that the glory of the LORD may appear to you."***

In the last chapter the focus was on the final preparation and consecration of Aaron and his sons as the priests of the tabernacle. In order to complete their consecration they had to enter into the outside courtyard of the tabernacle where the altar and laver were, and stay there for a full seven days. Each of those seven days the required sacrifices were offered for them. Now, at the beginning of chapter nine Moses calls to Aaron and his sons to signal that their week of consecration is complete. Moses represents the Lord in this call. It is the Lord's call to come near to Him and serve Him in His house. The call of the Lord takes place on the eighth day again signifying that what is about to take place represents a progression to a new creation work of the Lord.

We have previously seen in our study of the tabernacle in Exodus that the house of the Lord is filled with new creation symbols. The specific new creation connection here is spotlighting the role of Aaron as the new high priest as the beginning of a new creation work of God. This points us again to the fulfillment of these symbols in the role of Christ. The New Covenant is a covenant of new creation. Christ's role as our heavenly High Priest is foundational to the new creation. Until Christ entered into the heavenly temple of God on our behalf following His perfect sacrifice, His resurrection, and His ascension, we had no high priest to mediate between ourselves and God. His presence in heaven as high priest represents all, but only all, who have been born again into the new creation.

The new creation symbolism is established by the end of the seven days of the original creation week represented in the seven days of Aaron's consecration in the courtyard. It is on the eighth day that Aaron will be able to enter into the

house of the Lord representing all the covenant people of God. Even Aaron is not allowed to enter the tabernacle before the eighth day which emphasizes that only those who belong to the new creation work of salvation in Christ have access into the spiritual house of God.

Moses declares that this day of inauguration of the priesthood's ministry is going to be marked by the arrival of a special guest. The culmination of the day's ceremonies will see the appearance of the Lord. Only once before in all of history had the Lord appeared in the midst of a people and that was on the day that the tabernacle structure was finished in Exodus 40. Now, Moses declares that the Lord was going to appear again in relationship to the beginning of the ministry of the high priest which shows in the greatest possible way the importance of that special office. As always, everything that is promised to happen is contingent on the offering of the sacrifices the Lord commands and the obedience of the people to follow His commands.

There are three New Covenant principles of the Christian life that are brought to the forefront in this section. 1) The goal of true religion is not ceremony or ritual but the presence of the Lord. 2) The sacrifice of the cross always precedes the presence of the Lord. 3) No one can enter the presence of the Lord apart from the mediating ministry of the high priest God has consecrated.

***9:15-18 - "Then he presented the people's offering, and took the goat of the sin offering which was for the people, and slaughtered it and offered it for sin, like the first. He also presented the burnt offering, and offered it according to the ordinance. Next he presented the grain offering, and filled his hand with some of it and offered it up in smoke on the altar, besides the burnt offering of the morning. Then he slaughtered the ox and the ram, the sacrifice of peace offerings which was for the people; and Aaron's sons handed the blood to him and he sprinkled it around on the altar."***

Aaron now begins to actively function for the first time in his role as high priest. Appropriately, the very first act of the very first high priest in serving the Lord on behalf of the people of God is was to make these offerings recorded here in this section. Aaron offered four offerings representing the covenant people. He offered in order a sin offering, a burnt offering, a grain offering and a peace offering. Each of these offerings represented different aspects of the purpose of Christ's one sacrifice of Himself on the cross. What is unique about the cross is that Christ was functioning both as the One making the offering to God as the high priest, and the sacrifice offered. His death accomplished all that the various Levitical offerings were designed to represent. The order of these four offerings is intentional and shows a theological progression of how the cross applies to our lives.

The first aspect of the cross is that it provides the necessary payment that our sins require which is death. This payment is essential for a restoration of

relationship with God. Without the cross, people stand before an awesomely holy God as souls polluted and corrupted by their many transgressions against His standards. The second aspect of the cross represented by these sacrifices is that of atonement for the entire person in the burnt offering. The salvation accomplished by the cross covers all of me, all of my failures, and every part of my life. The result of salvation is that all of my life now belongs to Christ, and none of it belongs to me any longer. The third aspect of the cross shown in the grain offering is that not just me, but all I will ever do in the future belongs to Him also. The cross marks the end of my old life and the beginning of a new life that is His (Galatians 2:20). The final aspect of the cross highlighted here is found in the meaning of the peace offering. Because of Christ and His death on the cross I now live in peace with God (Romans 5:1). I now live to please Him not in an effort to make peace with God, but because I am forever at peace with Him.

***9:22-24 - "Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he stepped down after making the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting. When they came out and blessed the people, the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. Then fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces."***

As soon as the last required sacrifice was offered by Aaron, his next official act as high priest was to bless the covenant people of God. This establishes a pattern that will remain constant throughout all of Old Testament history. The sacrifices God requires are the spiritual prerequisite for the blessings of God. Aaron represents God in this act of blessing. The act of blessing here involved Aaron lifting his hands and proclaiming the Lord's pleasure toward His people. The words of blessing he spoke are not recorded here, but were most likely similar or identical to this blessing. "The LORD bless you, and keep you; The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace." (Numbers 6:24-26). Through the proclamation of blessing the Lord extends a greater measure of His grace and benefits to His people.

These four sacrifices offered were on behalf of the entire covenant nation of Israel. That means that the benefits represented in these sacrifices were not just for Moses, Aaron, and his sons to enjoy. The spiritual benefits of the blessing of Aaron were gained by every person in Israel the moment these sacrifices were offered. The parallel is the full availability of every blessing purchased by the cross to anyone that believes the gospel of Christ. This verse from Ephesians seems like a bit of exaggeration when it is first read, but it accurately declares the full truth of what the cross accomplished for those who believe. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ," (Ephesians 1:3).

There was actually a double blessing pronounced at this time. The first blessing was immediately after the sacrifices were offered. Then Moses and Aaron together entered into the tabernacle. Once they came back out of the tabernacle a second blessing is declared upon all the people. The double blessing displays that God is now holding nothing back in His desire to bless His people. Like the wording in the Ephesians passage above, "every spiritual blessing" has been poured out through the mediation of the new high priest. This reveals the heart of God toward us. He is gracious and merciful and inclined to bless us with overflowing blessings. If you doubt His heart's intention, take a closer look at the cross.

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## Leviticus 10

***10:1-3 - "Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, "It is what the LORD spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.'" So Aaron, therefore, kept silent."***

This development with Nadab and Abihu is a sudden and unexpected interruption in the event of the ordination of the new Levitical priesthood. Chapter ten should be read as an immediate continuation of the events of chapter nine. In the last chapter, Aaron and his sons have completed their consecration process for the priesthood which has lasted seven days. It is now the eighth day and the new priests have begun to serve the Lord in His house. Nadab and Abihu were the two eldest of the four sons of Aaron. They were also the next two highest ranking priests with Nadab being the next in line to become the high priest following Aaron's death.

The immediate context behind this circumstance was established at the end of chapter nine. "Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting. When they came out and blessed the people, the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. Then fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces." (Leviticus 9:23-24). Chapter nine ends with the first offerings by the Levitical priests according to the instructions of the Lord being fully accepted by the Lord. The Lord left no room for uncertainty in His acceptance of the offerings when He caused fire from His presence to consume all the offerings on the altar in the eyes of all the people. Now, sometime that day, following the accepted offerings, the eldest sons of Aaron took their firepans which were used for holding coals to light incense in the tabernacle, and they offered what is identified as "strange fire" in the presence of the Lord. As soon as they did so,

another fire came out from the Lord's presence and rather than consuming sacrifices on the altar as before, Nadab and Abihu are consumed, and die. This is the Lord fighting fire with fire. The strange fire of Nadab and Abihu is swallowed up, as are they, in the holy fire of the Lord's judgment.

There has been great interest in identifying exactly what the strange fire was by both Jewish and Christian commentators because of the severity of the response of the Lord. This was a death penalty response by the Lord and it was immediate and without appeal. There have been at least twelve different possibilities offered including the theory that they changed the incense formula the Lord had commanded (Exodus 30:37-38), they entered too far into the tabernacle by violating the Holy of Holies (Leviticus 16:1-2), and that they drank when they entered the house of God (Leviticus 10:9). However, we cannot know for sure exactly what this great violation was because the Lord has chosen not to give us any additional details. What we do know is that it involved a blatant disregard for the instructions of the Lord for offering incense and that God considered it to be such a serious offence to His holiness that the appropriate punishment was death. Without any further details, we can learn the main point of this circumstance, which is the absolute priority of the holiness of God. All through the book of Leviticus so far the Lord has been emphasizing through the laws of the offerings and the laws of the priesthood that His holiness is the first concern before all other things. Now the Lord puts a terrifying exclamation point at the end of this lesson and does so in a double execution of two of His own most valued servants. This becomes for ever generation of priests to follow, and for all of Israel, an object lesson that will not be easy to ignore.

Nadab and Abihu should have known better. They had a greater exposure to the presence of the Lord than anyone else in the world other than Moses and Aaron. Their special role among the other priests was first shown by the Lord when He named them when He called the leaders of Israel to join Him on Sinai. "Then He said to Moses, "Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel, and you shall worship at a distance." (Exodus 24:1). Because they had been granted this special privilege, and had been called to such a high and holy calling as assistants to the high priest, the Lord also held them to a high standard of accountability. "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required" (Luke 12:48).

The Lord did not require perfection from them. The previous seven days of sacrifices that they offered in their consecration to the priesthood testified to their imperfection. What the Lord did require of them was that they honor Him, treat Him as holy in the eyes of Israel, and obey His commands. For some reason, Nadab and Abihu decided to approach the Lord in their own way rather than the way the Lord had ordained. Remember that the fire used to burn the incense was to be taken from the altar of sacrifice which pointed forward to the cross and the incense itself was picturing the acceptable worship and prayers pleasing to God because of the cross. Their strange fire symbolically corrupted the meaning of

the cross. It was the Old Covenant equivalent to the proclamation of a false gospel that Paul condemned. "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" (Galatians 1:6-9). Even though the exact circumstances of this day are impossible to duplicate today, the lessons of that day still apply. There is no tabernacle, we are not Levitical priests, and there is no longer any incense to offer. We are however considered a royal priesthood of a higher order in the New Covenant, and the Lord is no less concerned about His holiness today than He was that day. The issue is whether this story is relevant for Christians today. It seems to me that in our present generation of believers where presuming on God's grace is the norm and disregarding the judgments of God is commonplace, that it is more than relevant; it is a much needed spiritual corrective.

There is one more key detail from this passage that should catch our attention. How did Aaron respond when the fire of the Lord consumed his two sons? First, before Aaron can respond, Moses speaks on behalf of the Lord directly to Aaron and gives an explanation for what has just occurred. "It is what the LORD spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.'" The clear implication in the words of Moses is that they had been held to a higher standard because of their high office. They received from the Lord exactly what they deserved for their sin against His holiness. The words of Moses impacted Aaron's heart, and he remained silent. His silence meant that Aaron accepted the judgment of the Lord upon his sons without protest. This alone took great faith on Aaron's part. He did not scream his anger out toward the Lord, or even quietly ask the question many of us would ask, "Why Lord?" There was no need for the question because Moses had already supplied the answer. Aaron trusted that the Lord was just and righteous to end the lives of his own sons because they actually deserved it, and because of the need for the holiness of the Lord to be indelibly imprinted on the hearts of all of Israel in this. Aaron has shown himself to be far from perfect, but in this he also shows that he is a true man of faith.

***10:4-7 - "Moses called also to Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Aaron's uncle Uzziel, and said to them, "Come forward, carry your relatives away from the front of the sanctuary to the outside of the camp." So they came forward and carried them still in their tunics to the outside of the camp, as Moses had said. Then Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, "Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, so that you will not die and that He will not become wrathful against all the congregation. But your kinsmen, the whole house of Israel, shall bewail the burning which the LORD has brought about. You shall not even go out from the doorway of the tent of meeting, or you will die; for the LORD'S anointing oil is upon you." So they did according to the word of Moses."***

Following the death of Nadab and Abihu, Moses called two of Aaron's extended family to come and carry their bodies out of the sanctuary area and outside of the camp of Israel. In a normal burial circumstance the closest relatives would bear the body to the place of burial, but in this case Aaron and his other two sons are not permitted by the Lord to participate. Aaron, Eleazar and Ithamar are also not permitted to show the traditional cultural response to the death of their close family members by either removing their head coverings or tearing their clothing. At first glance, these requirements seem like the Lord is being too harsh to require such restraint of the father and brothers of the slain priests. The Lord's requirement was spiritually necessary however. If they had moved the bodies themselves they would have invalidated the consecration of the last seven days because any priest that touched a dead body was rendered ceremonially impure. In order to fulfill their higher calling they had to forego the ordinary responsibility toward their son / brothers.

The Lord also did not allow them to display the normal outward marks of mourning of removing the head covering and tearing their own garments because they now represented the Lord to all of Israel in their role as priests. With His actions, the Lord had shown that they deserved to die. By maintaining their composure and not outwardly mourning their death, Aaron and his sons displayed their faith in the righteousness of the Lord's judgment. The lesson here for us is that it matters to the Lord that we do the right thing, but it also matters to Him when we declare to others by our attitude and actions that He has done the right thing. Our response to the actions of the Lord has an influence on how others will interpret and respond to His actions.



***10:8-10 - "The LORD then spoke to Aaron, saying, "Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, so that you will not die--it is a perpetual statute throughout your generations--and so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean, and so as to teach the sons of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them through Moses."***

Immediately after the death of Nadab and Abihu, the Lord speaks directly to Aaron for the first and only time. In all other interactions when the Lord communicated necessary information to Aaron, He did so through Moses. In this case, the Lord speaks directly in order to establish a firm boundary in Aaron's heart regarding His holy standards for the priesthood. The Lord introduces a new standard here of prohibiting the drinking of wine or strong drink by Aaron or any of the Levitical priests prior to their going on duty in the service of the tabernacle. This is the basis for the theory some hold that the sin of Aaron's sons was drinking on the job. It is possible that Nadab and Abihu had been drinking before offering strange fire. However, we can be certain that their drinking was not the cause of their death. In identifying why they were slain, the specific reason given was the strange fire, not strange drink. The question remains though as to why the Lord would bring up the issue of priesthood drinking right after this incident unless it had some relationship. It seems to me that Nadab and Abihu were probably drinking, and their judgment was adversely affected by it in their foolish decision to offer strange fire. This does not lead us to the conclusion that all alcohol use is automatically sinful, but it should warn us that there is a time and place and way to drink, and that there are times, places, and ways to avoid drinking altogether.

The Lord also uses this context to describe the secondary ministry of all Levitical priests. The first ministry of the priests was to serve the Lord in His tabernacle. The secondary responsibility was to function as a teacher in the community of Israel. Their teaching ministry was to pass on to the whole nation the benefit of what they had learned of the holiness of the Lord through the statutes of the Law. This shows us that the priesthood, while mostly hidden from public view because their responsibilities were conducted primarily where only the priests could go inside the tabernacle, was never intended by the Lord to develop into some kind of secret order learning and conducting rituals only for themselves. All of their work as priests was designed by the Lord as a teaching device, first for all of Israel, and second for all of us in the New Covenant. Their teaching included instructing the people in the laws of the Lord, but also involved their own obedience to the standards of the priesthood. Every time they followed a requirement for the priests that the Lord had established, their obedience was teaching every Israelite that was watching. This was not class room style teaching, but what we describe as teaching by example. Biblical teaching includes both elements.

If a priest disregarded one of the standards of the Lord, he was still teaching, but now was teaching the wrong lessons by the bad example he was setting. Because the Lord's purpose was for the entire nation to be His holy nation (Exodus 19:6, I Peter 2:9), and not just to have a holy priesthood in the midst of a corrupt nation, the role of the Levitical priests as teachers by example was a critical aspect of the Lord's plan. The New Covenant parallels should be obvious. Those that the Lord calls to be teachers of His people today dare not live as the Pharisees who taught with their words a high level of holiness, but displayed with their lives a low level of holiness. Bible teachers must teach the truth about God both with their words and their actions. The Lord holds them accountable to that standard. "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment." (James 3:1).

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## Leviticus 11

***11:1-8 - "The LORD spoke again to Moses and to Aaron, saying to them, "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'These are the creatures which you may eat from all the animals that are on the earth. Whatever divides a hoof, thus making split hoofs, and chews the cud, among the animals, that you may eat. Nevertheless, you are not to eat of these, among those which chew the cud, or among those which divide the hoof: the camel, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you. Likewise, the shaphan, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you; the rabbit also, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you; and the pig, for though it divides the hoof, thus making a split hoof, it does not chew cud, it is unclean to you. You shall not eat of their flesh nor touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you.'"***

This is the first chapter in a new five chapter section of purity laws. The laws in this section are expressions of the concern of the Lord identified in His commands to the priests in the previous chapter. "and so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean, and so as to teach the sons of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them through Moses." (Lev 10:10-11). This section was designed to teach Israel how to make spiritual distinctions between the ways of the Lord and the ways of the world around them. These were practical object lessons to teach the basics of holiness. Chapter 11 is primarily covering food laws, but also contains a section of laws of contamination caused by forbidden contact with the dead bodies of animals.

The food laws in this chapter became the basis for most of what later became called the Kosher laws of Judaism. Many of those standards are still practiced today in the segment of the Jewish community concerned to keep them. This section is also one of the most commonly misunderstood and misapplied section

of God's Word among believers. The aspect of this section that is straight forward and beyond debate is that the Lord commanded His people to refrain from eating certain animals, fish, birds and insects while also allowing them to eat others of the same categories. The four categories covered in this section follow the original categories established in creation in Genesis. The category forbidden is identified as unclean by the Lord, while the allowed category is identified by Him as clean. It is the attempt to explain the meaning of the terms clean and unclean and why God made these distinctions a law for Israel that the debate has developed over the generations. Here are the main views of what these laws are designed to address. Keep in mind that there are true believers that hold each of these views. The four explanations are:

1) Arbitrary: this view believes that there is no reason behind these distinctions. God simply made arbitrary diet boundaries for His people to test their obedience and to teach them to be different from the Gentile nations. Many Rabbis through history have held this view as well as many Christian Bible teachers. The weakness of this view is that God is not characterized by arbitrary standards, and in all of His law has His own wise reasons for why He commands and forbids certain things for His people.

2) Religious: this view holds that God did not want His people to eat the animals that were commonly worshipped and sacrificed to pagan gods. It is true that God forbid His people from following the pagan practices of the cultures around them. The weakness of this view though is that many of the animals Israel was allowed to eat were also worshipped and sacrificed to false gods. The bull for instance, was a clean animal that could be eaten by Israel, but it was worshipped by Egypt.

3) Hygienic / Health: this is the most common view held through history and the certainly the view most believers hold today in trying to understand the Old Testament food laws. It holds that God gave these laws to benefit the health of Israel by teaching them to avoid contact with dead animals that could carry dangerous bacteria and infectious diseases. The prohibition on eating these animals sees the Lord restricting the diet of Israel for their health much like some people in our culture today choose to not eat red meat for health concerns. The weakness of this view is that the Lord never mentions health as His motivation in establishing these laws, but holiness. To mix health and holiness confuses physical and spiritual categories. Additionally it is difficult to maintain the health distinction on a scientific basis since new research would indicate that many of the unclean animals are as nutritious as the clean ones. This view is completely undermined when we bring in New Testament information on this subject as we will see below.

4) Symbolic: this view holds that the clean and unclean animals were meant by the Lord to represent as symbols the spiritual differences between people in covenant with God (Israel) and people outside the covenant (Gentiles). I'm convinced that this is the correct way to interpret these laws. Their symbolic

purpose only extended to the coming of Christ and the beginning of the New Covenant. As a result, they no longer physically apply to believers today. We are free to choose to eat animals from either category as part of our diet today without violating any concerns of the Lord.

There are several New Testament passages that address the concerns of the Old Testament food laws, but for the sake of space these two passages will be sufficient to show us how we should understand them. The first passage is from the teaching of Jesus. In this passage He was responding to a concern raised by the Pharisees over Him allowing His disciples to eat food from the marketplace without first going through a ritual cleansing. In His response Jesus declared a principle which Mark correctly identified as radically changing all of the Old Testament food laws. "And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.)" (Mark 7:18-19). In the New Testament, all of the previously unclean animals listed in Leviticus 11 and the parallel chapter in Deuteronomy 14 have now been declared clean by the Lord Jesus. This should prove conclusively that the food laws were never meant as health laws. If so, the Lord would not have changed them in the New Testament or else we would have to conclude that He cares less about our health than He did about the health of Israel. If pork was a bad meat to eat for health reasons in the Old Testament, it still is today, as is shrimp, and catfish, all of which were forbidden, but are now allowed.

The second passage is from Peter's experience recorded in Acts. "But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. A voice came to him, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!" But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean." Again a voice came to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky... And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean." (Acts 10:10-16, 28).

In this event, God caused Peter to fall into a trance. He then gave him a vision. In the vision Peter was commanded by God to kill and eat animals that were identified as unclean in Leviticus. Even though it was God commanding, Peter at first objected out of concern to not violate the food laws. God insisted and implied that if He was commanding him to eat, that the food was clean because of His command. God repeated this vision experience for Peter three times to make sure it sunk in for him. As soon as the vision ended there were Gentiles that God had sent that had arrived at the house who appealed to Peter to come preach the

gospel to them. Then, later in the chapter Peter describes this experience to others and what he had learned from it. The lesson was that God was speaking to him through the imagery of the unclean animals about the spiritual condition of the Gentile nations. The point was that they were spiritually unclean because they were outside of covenant relationship with God, but that through the gospel of Christ, those who believed were now clean.

***11:44-47 - "For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth. For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy." This is the law regarding the animal and the bird, and every living thing that moves in the waters and everything that swarms on the earth, to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean, and between the edible creature and the creature which is not to be eaten."***

The Lord's concern was and is holiness. He wants His people to be holy. The holiness God desires for His people is not artificial or hypocritical, but real and authentic. In the Old Testament He trained His people in the basic principles of holiness through various practical areas of their lives including what they could or could not eat. The point was that holiness touches every area of our lives and we should not limit our perspective of holiness to only what we say and do on Sundays in church meetings. This section identifies the source of true holiness for Israel and the source for true holiness for Christians in the New Testament also. The source of our holiness is not found in ourselves but in our relationship to the God Who is holy. Israel was called to be holy and live holy lives, not based on their own opinions of what was holy and not based on their own behavior to make them holy. Instead, their holiness was a derived or dependent holiness. Their holiness was established by their relationship to the Lord Who is holy. As they remained in right relationship with Him, honored the laws of His house, and followed His standards, they were identified by Him as a holy people. In the same way, Peter quotes from this section of Leviticus 11 and applies it to the Christian life.

"As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." (I Peter 1:14-16). Our holiness as Christians is also not measured by our own relative perfections based upon our own goodness. Our holiness is based 100% upon His holiness. The sacrifice of Christ upon the cross is the basis for our holiness, and as the children of our holy Father in heaven we grow in holiness as we grow in our relationship with Him.

## Questions from Leviticus 10:

**Question:** 10:7 - "You shall not even go out from the doorway..." - Was there a lavatory or place to sleep in the tent of meeting? In 8:35, it also indicates they are to stay day and night for seven days.

**Answer:** I'll have to separate your question into two parts. For part one let me answer the seven day stay from 8:35. For the seven days of the consecration of the priests they actually lived in the courtyard just outside of the tabernacle. They were not allowed to enter the tent until their consecration was complete because they would carry defilement into the Lord's house otherwise. For sleeping purposes they slept under the stars for those nights. We are not given details of what they slept on, but I would imagine that they slept on whatever they normally slept on. No, there was no lavatory either in the tent or in the courtyard. It is a good practical question regarding how they relieved themselves for the seven days, but the text is completely silent on this issue. I would guess that some portable arrangements were made because they were not allowed to leave the courtyard at all for the seven days, and it would have defiled the courtyard if they simply dug a hole in the ground.

However, the reference in chapter 10:7 is addressing a completely different issue. This was Moses' warning Aaron to not leave the actual tabernacle once he entered it that day to fulfill his duties as high priest. Following the original seven days of consecration, the priests did not live in the tabernacle or the courtyard. They each lived in their own family tents that were set up in close proximity to the tent of the Lord. Each day they reported to the tabernacle for their specific service. In order to enter the tabernacle they went through a daily process of dressing in the clothes of the priest, offering sacrifice at the altar and washing at the laver. Once they entered into the tabernacle they were to finish their task before leaving. There were no bathroom breaks so to speak. For Aaron this included filling the lamps on the lampstand with oil and trimming the wicks. The task did not take hours to accomplish, and his personal needs had to be taken care of before he entered the courtyard, or after he left.

**Question:** 10:9 - Under the New Covenant, I believe Timothy was encouraged to drink wine for his ailment (1 Tim 5:23) and they drank wine at weddings as a celebration (John 2:3). But since our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) and we are called to be filled with the Spirit, also 1 Peter 2:9 notes being a royal priesthood and a holy nation - could you comment on what are the acceptable times to drink wine and when should we avoid it (Eph 5:18)?

**Answer:** In the New Testament there is no absolute prohibition against drinking wine in spite of what many well intentioned believers have claimed. There are guidelines of wisdom established by various passages. The guidelines address issues such as not over indulging with the danger point of drunkenness defining when an allowable activity becomes a sinful activity. Other concerns include

whether our drinking brings glory to God or diminishes His glory, always considering the effect by way of influence our drinking may have on others observing our behavior, and our motives in the behavior. To answer your specific question, it would be acceptable to drink a little wine in a social setting of celebration or fellowship as long as no one present would be caused to stumble. The appropriate time, place and amount to drink are all subject to the individual's conscience and discernment, and it uncertain it is wise to lean toward less than more.

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## Leviticus 12

***12:1-4 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying: 'When a woman gives birth and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean for seven days, as in the days of her menstruation she shall be unclean. On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. Then she shall remain in the blood of her purification for thirty-three days; she shall not touch any consecrated thing, nor enter the sanctuary until the days of her purification are completed.'"***

Chapters 12-15 cover various cases of ceremonial uncleanness caused by issues arising from different physical conditions. Keep in mind that uncleanness is not identical to sinfulness. Anything sinful is unclean in relationship to the tabernacle, but not everything that was unclean was sinful. This chapter is concerned with the resulting uncleanness of the mothers in Israel following childbirth. The first clarification that should be made is in what about childbirth causes ceremonial uncleanness. Ceremonial uncleanness meant that the unclean person was excluded from the courtyard of the tabernacle until the appropriate time had passed and all the requirements for cleansing had been fulfilled. There was also to be no physical contact between the unclean person and a clean person during that time or else the uncleanness would be transmitted to the clean person. There is no detailed explanation given in this chapter or anywhere else in Scripture regarding the exact reason for the uncleanness connected to childbirth so we will need to pay close attention to the details of the short text we have in this chapter.

The first important detail to notice is who is identified as unclean as a result of the birth. It is not the child who is identified as unclean, but the woman who gave birth; "...she shall be unclean..." There is a comparison the Lord draws for us to another unclean issue that will be addressed later in chapter 15; "as in the days of her menstruation she shall be unclean." The comparison is made to the uncleanness resulting from her menstruation. What was unclean about this was the contact with the discharge of blood. It was not the child that was unclean, or childbirth itself. The Lord ordained the birth of children and identifies their entrance into the world a blessing for covenant families. Yet, childbirth carries

with it an unavoidable reminder of the fall of man into a sinful and corrupted spiritual condition. The discharge of blood during and following childbirth are a symbolic reminder of element of death that affects even the entrance of a new life into the world.

Following the birth of a male child the mother was unclean for seven days and then was to remain separate for an additional 33 days. The son was to be circumcised on the eighth day. The timing of the circumcision was symbolic and pointed forward as we have studied before to a new covenant reality. The eighth day signifies a new creation because it is the first new day of a new week after the original creation week of seven days is complete. The circumcision itself is a symbolic act, "and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;" (Colossians 2:11). Old Covenant circumcision was performed in the flesh of males on the eighth day by the father or community leader. New Covenant circumcision is performed at the new birth upon the heart of the believer by Christ Himself. The first removes excess physical flesh, while the second removes our old fleshly nature.

***12:5 - "But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean for two weeks, as in her menstruation; and she shall remain in the blood of her purification for sixty-six days."***

This law required the same kind of ceremonial uncleanness for the birth of a female child as the birth of a male, except the time period for the mother's uncleanness was doubled. No one knows for sure, including myself the reason why the Lord doubled the time period for female children. There is no explanation offered in this law for this required distinction. There is no clear and definitive passage elsewhere in the Scriptures that accounts for this. Even the best commentaries written on Leviticus offer a list of theories and possible explanations, but none seem particularly satisfying to me. The only suggestion that I would even lean toward is that this was intended to be continuing reminder from the Lord of the consequence of Eve's role in the original fall of man in the garden. Remember, it was Eve who listened and was deceived by the serpent's wicked suggestions to disregard the command of God regarding the tree. It was Eve who first took and ate the fruit from the forbidden tree. It was Eve that gave the fruit to Adam to eat. This does not mean that Adam was blameless in the fall. He actually bore the greater responsibility in his decision to disobey God and eat from the tree. Most reminders of the fall point back to Adam, but the Lord has does not want us to ignore Eve's contribution and childbirth is one area where her role is center stage in remembering the fall (Genesis 3:16, I Timothy 2:14-15).



***12:6-8 - "When the days of her purification are completed, for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the doorway of the tent of meeting a one year old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. Then he shall offer it before the LORD and make atonement for her, and she shall be cleansed from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who bears a child, whether a male or a female. But if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean."***

In order for the new mother to be restored to ceremonial cleanness she had to wait the required time period and then visit the altar of sacrifice in the courtyard of the tabernacle and offer two sacrifices. The first sacrifice was a burnt offering and the second was a sin offering. Without these offerings she could not be restored. One detail of this required offering answers one of the theories attempting to explain the difference in the time period of uncleanness for male and female births. One theory is that the law was intended to show that females have an intrinsically lower value to God than males. This cannot be true, because the sacrifice to restore the mother to ceremonial cleanness is identical for both male and female children. She was to offer the exact same sacrifices in both cases. If the issue was the relative value of the child then the sacrifices would have been twice as great for the male children.

There is also an important change in the order of the two sacrifices offered. In a previous chapter, we saw that in the case of someone who had sinned, they were to approach God and first offer a sin offering. Here, for childbirth, a sin offering was made only after a burnt offering. Remember the burnt offering was an offering of dedication. The point here is that giving birth was not a sinful act for the mother. A sin offering was made, but only after she dedicated herself to the Lord in the burnt offering. It seems that the main issue was that the Lord wanted the new mothers in His holy nation to focus on the need for a new dedication to the Lord in their new role as a mother in Israel, while as a secondary focus to remember the taint of sin from bringing a new life into this fallen world.

Even the mother of Jesus followed this requirement of the Law and we see Mary fulfill it in this portion from the gospel of Luke. "And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "EVERY firstborn MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD"), and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS." (Luke 2:22-24). The Lord allowed two choices for what was offered for the burnt offering depending upon the economic condition of the woman making the offering. Those that could afford to do so were to offer a lamb. If they could not afford a lamb then a turtledove or pigeon was acceptable. We should notice that

Mary, the mother of Jesus, offered the bird rather than the lamb, which confirms that the family of Jesus was among the poor in Israel.

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## Leviticus 13

***13:1-6 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling or a scab or a bright spot, and it becomes an infection of leprosy on the skin of his body, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests. The priest shall look at the mark on the skin of the body, and if the hair in the infection has turned white and the infection appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is an infection of leprosy; when the priest has looked at him, he shall pronounce him unclean. But if the bright spot is white on the skin of his body, and it does not appear to be deeper than the skin, and the hair on it has not turned white, then the priest shall isolate him who has the infection for seven days. The priest shall look at him on the seventh day, and if in his eyes the infection has not changed and the infection has not spread on the skin, then the priest shall isolate him for seven more days. The priest shall look at him again on the seventh day, and if the infection has faded and the mark has not spread on the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him clean; it is only a scab. And he shall wash his clothes and be clean."***

These next two chapters 13 and 14 are part of a larger section from 11-15 concerned with practical issues that affect whether a person is ceremonially clean or unclean. Chapters 13 and 14 are specifically focused on the problem of leprosy. This is acknowledged by most Bible scholars as an unfortunate and misleading translation of the Hebrew word. There is a medical condition called leprosy still present in the world today, largely in third world countries that is a serious skin ailment but which also produces other more serious problems in the body. That disease is also called Hansen's disease. The conditions addressed in these two chapters are not Hansen's disease and so technically are not leprosy at all. If we were to identify the conditions in these chapters by their correct medical terms we would choose a range of conditions such as psoriasis and others.

These chapters are commonly either skipped over by believers reading the Bible due to the excessive details of uncomfortable medical conditions. The purpose of these chapters is usually interpreted as a brief section on health concerns aimed at the physical welfare of Israel. To read these chapters in that way is to miss the spiritual purpose behind the Lord's decision to include them in the Scriptures both for His people at that time, and also for our spiritual benefit now (II Timothy 3:16). The purpose of these chapters is not the health of Israel any more than the purpose of the food laws was to encourage Israel to eat a healthy diet. If the

purpose was to create a kind of medical directory in the Law, it is curious that only skin conditions are addressed. There are many many more serious medical conditions that afflict humanity that it seems the Lord would have covered if His purpose was a medical one. If this were the case, the priests would also be functioning for these cases more like a doctor than a priest. The priests are commanded by the Lord to investigate the outbreaks of these conditions, examine them closely, rule on the required response by the afflicted person, and even impose isolation upon them when necessary. However, all of these actions are in relationship to the whether the Israelite was clean or unclean, not unhealthy or healthy. Remember the clean / unclean issue had everything to do with whether the person was allowed to approach God in His holy dwelling place, the tabernacle.

Instead, the Lord chose this group of similar skin conditions to represent as symbols certain spiritual conditions that result from living in a fallen world. It is possible to identify the various forms of leprosy with sin, but I think that there is a better connection to be drawn. If the point of the symbol was to represent sin directly, then a sin offering would need to be offered at the completion of the cleansing process required of the afflicted person. Instead, I think a better connection is to see the conditions in this chapter as symbols representing the defiling influence of living in a fallen world, and that certain kinds of contact with the world can leave even a committed member of God's holy nation unclean. The reason skin conditions were chosen was due to the skin being the physical organ through which we make all of our contact with the world around us and its visible nature for the purpose of community evaluation. Of course, sin does enter into this equation because ultimately all defiling elements of the world can be traced back to a root of sin of one kind or another. However, the point in these symbolic laws is that you and I can be affected spiritually by unhealthy direct contact with defiling aspects of the world around us even if we do not give ourselves to them in a defiling way.

The point of the investigation by the priests was to determine the depth and activity level of the infection in the person that had contracted the condition. If their contact was more than skin deep and actively growing worse, it would be necessary to isolate that person so that they in turn did not infect others in the covenant community. As just one of many possible examples of how this symbol teaches us about defiling influences from the world, consider gossip. If I am exposed in conversation with someone in the world to gossip which is unhealthy and heart corrupting, I may not have sinned by the mere exposure. It all depends on how I treated that temptation to participate in the gossip. The issue is if I allowed it to go deeper than skin deep and my own heart was affected toward the person that was the target of the gossip. If I in turn pass that gossip on to others then my condition is more than a temporary spot on my skin, but has become a full blown infection that is growing and deepening in my heart. If I am not isolated from the believing community while infected, I have the potential to cause my own condition to spread to others and risk infecting the entire community. This

pattern is not limited to gossip, but is seen in all of the many ways we can be adversely affected by the fallen world in which we live.

***13:45-46 - "As for the leper who has the infection, his clothes shall be torn, and the hair of his head shall be uncovered, and he shall cover his mustache and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!' He shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp."***

In the worst cases of infections that did not pass inspection, the infected person was isolated from the camp of Israel. They were not allowed to visit the tabernacle, or remain within the community camp boundaries. They were to live outside of the camp for the duration of their condition as long as it was active and infectious. They were required by law to tear their outer garment, uncover their head, cover their mustache and whenever they came within physical proximity of another person who went outside the camp they were to cry out, identifying themselves as unclean. These requirements served as an early warning system for all clean Israelites so that accidental physical contact could be avoided and no one would be rendered unclean also by that contact. The physical signs of tearing the clothes, uncovering the head, and covering the mouth were all common signs of mourning one who had died. In this case, the unclean person had not died, but they were to use the outward signs of mourning to indicate that they were in a condition of living death. It was a kind of living death, because life was not defined as mere physical existence, but by proximity and relationship with God. The person that was not allowed to even approach God due to their defilement was as though they were dead.

The New Testament uses this same imagery to describe the common spiritual condition of people in the world that do not know God and have not been saved. "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." (Ephesians 2:1-3). One of the great benefits of salvation is that the Lord cleansed us from the defilement of the world and brought us into His holy presence. We can learn from these laws that there remains an ongoing danger of inappropriate contact with the defilements of the world which can infect us.

### **Questions from Leviticus 12:**

**Question:** What is the difference in offering, a lamb, pigeon or turtledove? Does the kind of offering signify something? Does it mean if a person is a high class level he has to offer lamb, or if a low class level only a turtledove?

**Answer:** The difference between offering the lamb and the bird offerings in chapter 12 is purely economic. The Lord was making a gracious allowance for those in Israel that were too poor to afford offering a lamb, so He allowed the poor to offer inexpensive birds. Those who could afford it were expected to offer the lamb.