

**Tazria** (she bears seed – gives birth) Cleanliness and Quarantine **Portion #27 (1/2 way)**

**Torah:** Leviticus 12:1-13:59

**Haftarah:** 2 Kings 4:42-5:19

**Brit Chadashah:** Luke 7:18-35

This is a very complicated portion and I had fun checking with commentaries and a variety of other translations in order to better understand what was being said. The portion deals with three main categories of “uncleanness”: childbirth, skin infections (including boils, burns and rashes), and infected cloth or clothing (mildew and mould). Two radical health principles are highlighted throughout the discussion: hygiene and quarantine.

Let us deal first with recovering from the uncleanness of childbirth. Neither the mother, nor any children are ever considered unclean in and of themselves, but any time there is an issue of blood involved, precautions had to be taken to protect both the mother and her child. Before the advent of modern medicines and especially antibiotics, complications from child birth were one of the leading causes of death among women and their newborn babies. Modern medications and practises of good hygiene have been lifesavers.

When the baby was a boy, she was unclean for seven days and on the eighth day the boy was circumcised. This would have occurred in the home and nowhere near the sanctuary. The mother was then considered unclean for a further 33 days. There is no mention of her child being unclean, but since she was breastfeeding, the child had the mother’s full attention during this rest period of exclusion. She was not allowed into the sanctuary and she would not join in on community events until her uncleanness was dealt with.

She had to offer both a burnt offering and an atonement offering in order to be pronounced clean. If she was not well off, she could offer doves or wild pigeons as offerings. These kosher birds are both very numerous and easy to catch. Chickens and other domestic fowl had not yet been introduced into the region.

If the child were a girl, the mother would be unclean for 66 days, twice as long as for a boy. This was not because girls are more unclean than boys, but the mother was anticipating her daughter’s first menstruation and cleansing the little girl before this cycle happened.

Lets move onto various skin problems. First, we need to understand that in the Torah, the word “leprosy” referred to any number of skin conditions. The priests were tasked with diagnosing various infectious skin conditions and so chapter 13 goes into a lot of specific information. Part of the treatment of these various conditions involved an initial quarantine of seven days. After a second examination, if the condition was not spreading or getting worse, a second seven day quarantine occurred before performing the cleansing rituals.

It is not always easy to identify which skin conditions are being described, but the priest was primarily concerned with whether the skin condition was improving or getting worse. If the condition was considered permanent, a permanent form of quarantine occurred. The leper was not allowed into the camp and had to dwell outside. How far outside the camp is not specified, but no direct contact with clean people was allowed.

They were still fed, but that was about it. Things could be provided for them as long as there was no direct contact with healthy people. If their condition suddenly got better, they would again be examined by the priest and allowed back into the camp, once the condition was completely healed.

Scabs, moles, boils and rashes were considered temporary leprosy, but the people were still quarantined until it was determined that their condition was improving, and, by association, was not contagious. If a rash or a boil developed from a burn wound, the person would be quarantined until there was an improvement.

The general procedure was an examination by a priest once the skin problem was noticed. After examining the problem, the priest would determine if it was a temporary or a permanent condition. Then a first seven day quarantine happened to give the problem a chance to show that it was either healed or on the way to being healed. If there was no improvement or only a slight improvement, a second seven day quarantine occurred and then if there was no improvement, the infected one had to move out of the camp so that he or she did not infect anyone else in the camp. It is not said, but I think it would be safe to say that female priests examined the ladies, while male priests examined the men.

Lev. 13:12-17 is easily misunderstood. It first says that when the skin turned partially white, without turning the body hair white, the person was quarantined until there was an improvement. But when an infected person turned completely white, they were considered to be clean. But if a patch of raw or bleeding flesh appeared in the midst of the white, the person was considered unclean. A person who turned completely white showed that the condition was over and new skin was growing back, but as long as the old, infected skin had not disappeared, the person was considered unclean.

When mildew or mould appeared on any article of clothing, the priest would first examine the infection and wash it, to see if the mould or mildew was dealt with. The infected clothing could be wool, linen or leather and had to be quarantined to make sure that the mildew or the mould was not growing to the point that people could be infected. It is not until the next Torah portion that instructions are given concerning dishes and houses which develop mildew or mould. It will also deal with discharges of fluid, either from the skin or from the male or female sexual organs.

Along with a leprous skin condition, any discharge of body fluids or blood caused the affected person to be labelled unclean. Over the years, Jews and Gentiles considered skin problems and the discharge of body fluids to be a divine judgment by G-d for sin. The sick person was told to repent if they wanted to get healed. Job's friends were convinced that Job's troubles were caused by his sins and would not believe that Job had done nothing wrong. It was Solomon's way of saying that sickness and disease are not always the direct result of sinning. G-d did punish His people with sickness, but He always warned them and gave them a chance to repent so that the sickness would either be avoided or removed.

One Talmudic Jewish commentary said that only special priests were used as sickness inspectors, possibly because a priest who was inspecting would be considered unclean until evening and so could not fulfill any of his priestly rituals. This is pure speculation and is not taught either by the passage or by its historical context. We have to deal with our sins when we fall and we have to deal with our infections when they occur. Nothing more, nothing less.

## **Sermon: Biblical Symbols and Spiritual Realities.**

In this message, I will deal with three things. First I am going to define symbolism and talk about the difference between literal and literary. Symbolism uses word pictures to convey spiritual meaning. The Bible is full of majestic symbols that point us towards spiritual realities, but there are two pit falls which must be avoided. They are sacerdotalism and magic behaviour.

The Catholic church and the orthodox churches believe that the Bible teaches us sacraments, or special rituals that are needed both for salvation and for spiritual nourishment. The Catholics have seven sacraments, but the Bible does not teach salvation through special rituals. Salvation and the Grace of G-d are accessed by faith and demonstrated by our obedience to what the Bible teaches. We neither believe in nor practice salvation through special rituals.

I know of people who will not step on a crack on the sidewalk and feel that if they perform specific actions, they can oblige G-d to bless and protect them. There are even those who figure that if they have enough faith, G-d is obliged to give them what they are asking for. This is called the Word of Faith movement and they even practise visualization, where if they are able to clearly and steadfastly visualize what they want, G-d will make it appear or be delivered into their lives. Prayer is asking, not ordering and gives us no control over G-d – it is supposed to place us under the control of G-d. Even though we live under G-d's constant protection and provision, we will not be spared any tribulations and disasters, which are the birth pangs of Messiah's coming Kingdom.

Never take a symbol literally. We will get more into this when we deal with the L-rd's Table and baptism. Another concern we should be careful of when we read the Bible is called proof texting, where we take a verse out of context or misunderstand what is actually being said. Probably the worst example of this is the flat earth theory. The Bible does not actually teach that the earth is flat, any more than it does that trees clap their hands and mountains leap like lambs. Trees have no hands and mountains have no feet. Figuratively, Yeshua is the lamb of G-d, but He does not have hooves and is not covered with wool.

Two passages concern our study today. One of them talks about eating the flesh and blood of the Messiah when we observe the L-rd's table and the other speaks about baptism saving us, as the ark saved Noah and his family when the flood happened. In John chapter 6, we see a group of people come back to Yeshua because they have been fed and want to be fed again. Yeshua is nobody's meal ticket. He grosses them out by saying that unless they eat His flesh and drink His blood, they cannot have everlasting life.

Most of the freeloaders leave disgusted and immediately afterwards Yeshua asks the apostles if they are going to leave as well. Peter says that they are staying because Yeshua has the words of everlasting life. This is right after Yeshua says that the flesh profits nothing because the words He is speaking are Spirit and Life. He is not even talking about the L-rd's Table and is not impressed by freeloaders who want some more bread. He did not come to give us magic bread which turns into His actual flesh or special wine which magically turns into His actual blood. He is making a point and not referring to anything to do with the L-rd's Table. He is present in our midst and not in any of the symbols we are using to remember Him.

In I Peter 3, the apostle is making a comparison between Noah's ark which saved eight people from the flood and Tevilah (baptism). The flood waters did not save Noah, the ark did. The waters of baptism do not save us, but coming to faith with a clear conscience does.

Both of these passages have been used as proof texts which some people use try to say things that neither passage had any intention of saying. We have to look at the spiritual realities which biblical symbols are teaching us and not come up with bizarre teachings that have no biblical basis.

Lets deal with Tevilah (baptism) first. Catholics and most protestant churches sprinkle people and call it baptism. The Greek word from which baptism is derived, means to totally immerse. It is a symbolic identification with the death and resurrection of our Messiah, who took two Passover symbols and gave them a special meaning. Some Messianics believe that we should only do the L-rd's Table at Passover, because that was its original context.

In I Corinthians 11, Paul says we are to celebrate the L-rd's as a memorial to Yeshua, whenever we do it. Whenever we take the bread and the wine (or juice), we are announcing the death of our Messiah until He returns. Messiah did not cancel or even change Passover, He took two Passover symbols, the matzah (unleavened bread) and the third cup and established a new context as part of a new covenant.

There are two places where Jewish believers and Gentile believers stand together as the one new man: Tevilah (baptism) and the L-rd's Table. He did not take a hunk of His flesh and say that this is His body and He did not drip His blood into a cup and say this is my blood. Neither the matzah, nor the wine (juice) changed during the ceremony and neither symbol is capable of granting us salvation. In the L-rd's Table, the matzah and the juice symbolize His body which was broken for us and His blood which was shed for us.

Every time we celebrate the L-rd's Table we do not repeat the sacrifice of His body and His blood, which was a one time deal. It is a memorial of His great sacrifice and not a repetition of His suffering. I know they mean well, but when Catholic priests break their bread, they feel they are actually breaking the Messiah all over again. It was only intended to be a memorial.

His resurrected body ascended up to Heaven so that He could come back to us in the Spirit and dwell in our hearts, instead of only being able to be in once place at once. The L-rd's table does not turn the bread and wine into His literal body and blood (transubstantiation). When we perform the ritual of communion (L-rd's Table) His Spirit does not actually take up residence in the bread and wine, so that we can be nourished by this special ceremony (consubstantiation). The L-rd's Table is a very special and powerful remembrance of both what Messiah did on the cross and why He did it.

When Paul says that we have to discern the body of our Messiah when we eat the matzah and drink the wine (juice), we are eating and drinking a judgment on our selves. Communion is not a kind of kiddish, where we have a little snack after service. We are to confess our sins and ask for forgiveness and remember what the Messiah did so that salvation became possible. We are remembering the Passover meal where He announced His death and resurrection. He took two Passover symbols and gave them a new meaning because we know that the L-rd's Table is a memorial of what He accomplished. Nothing more and nothing less.

Well, how do we perform these two sets of symbolic behaviour and who may participate in them with us? It is our custom to perform the ritual of the L-rd's Table at the new moon and everyone is welcome to celebrate with us. Our little ones can participate with their parent's permission, because we want to build good solid spiritual habits into their lives while they are young, so that when they get older, they will not abandon them. We do not use alcoholic wine for the cup, because we do not wish to be a stumbling block for anyone who is struggling with an alcohol addiction.

Catholics and most protestants use real wine and one of big problems priests struggle with is alcoholism because they have to take communion at least once a day. When priests do hospital visits, they usually take communion with each patient they are visiting. If they start at the top floor, they are very drunk by the time they reach the ground floor.

Some evangelicals claim that the wine Yeshua drank was really grape juice and they forbid the consumption of any alcohol whatsoever. They believe that biblical spirituality requires the complete abstinence from alcohol of any kind. The exception are some groups of Brethren who use real wine when they celebrate the L-rd's Table.

Whether or not we drink alcohol, we do not use it in our celebration of the L-rd's Table. It remains a ceremony with a triple significance. It remembers His great sacrifice which gives us salvation. It also reminds us of our need to repent and not live our lives wallowing in sin. It is also a proclamation of Messiah's death until He returns. The marriage supper of the Lamb is not a heavenly form of the L-rd's Table, it is a massive cosmic Passover Seder because Messiah will not celebrate Passover until He returns.

He is present in our hearts whenever we celebrate Passover. He is also in our hearts when we perform the L-rd's Table. These are two rituals of remembrance so that we celebrate both our deliverance from Egypt and from the Egypt of this world. Symbols are both reminders of spiritual realities and word pictures which want to teach us how to walk with the Messiah.

The Bible gives a basic guide on how to perform these ceremonies and as long as we have the basic elements, we can use a great deal of flexible creativity in how they are performed.

When it comes to the L-rd's Table, we first distribute the two elements and we either say a prayer asking for forgiveness before we partake of the two elements or as we partake of each one. We repeat the words which Yeshua used in the Upper Room so that we understand precisely what it is we are doing. We are also careful not to add meaning to the L-rd's Table so that its original purpose does not get diminished. We are not turning the bread and wine into the body and blood of our Saviour. We are not receiving salvation every time we do it. We are remembering and are expressing our gratitude for what He has done for us.

We are not partaking of a meal or even a snack, as we do for our noshes and for kiddish. In our hearts and in our minds, we go back to the upper room as we realize that what is about to happen is the most pivotal moment in human history. The power of sin and darkness is going to be shattered forever and the end days are about to begin.

We know that for the three days our L-rd's body was in the grave, His Spirit descended into the great Remand Centre of G-d. He woke everyone up – people who die are asleep until the resurrection – and He shared the Gospel with them.

Those who believed in Him or who walked with Him, while they earnestly waited for Him, stayed awake. Those who had no faith or righteousness went back to sleep and will stay asleep until the resurrection and the Day of Judgment. The righteous ascended with the Messiah and even though they did not receive actual physical bodies, they were able to be seen by people. We are not told what they did until the Messiah ascended up into Heaven.

They would not have needed to eat or really sleep and since we have no information about the time they spent on earth, we will have to invoke Deut. 29:29 and not go beyond that which is written (I Corin. 4:6). Until the Day of Judgment and the resurrection of all the souls who are currently sleeping in death, Yeshua is the only one to have a resurrected, glorified body. He ascended back to heaven so that He could return in the Spirit.

At the Lord's Table, we celebrate what His earthly body did for us on the cross. It was the perfect salvation which paid the price for the forgiveness of mankind's sins. His resurrected body took this amazing victory to Heaven and it is applied to us all by His spirit who can now take up residence in as many hearts as are ready to receive Him.

When it comes to our procedures for Tevilah (baptism), I follow a basic biblical model. Matthew's Gospel says it is to be done in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts refers to being baptized in Yeshua's name and there are many Jesus' name only churches who reject the trinitarian formula. Is it a contradiction or an error? No.

The disciples of John scattered through out the Roman empire and spoke of the imminent arrival of the Messiah of Promise. They did not know who He was yet. So they baptized in the name of the Father, the name of the unknown Son and the name of the Holy Spirit. When the early disciples began to share the Gospel around the Roman empire, they encountered disciples of John who believed in the Messiah, but did not yet know who He was.

They had already been baptized using the trinitarian formula, but were rebaptized, this time identifying the Son as Yeshua. They were not baptized in Yeshua's name alone and this is not the intended formula for believers to use. They may have even had the trinitarian formula repeated, with the addition of Yeshua's name. I know of some pastors who baptize in the name of the Father, the name of the Son and the name of the Holy spirit, in Yeshua's name.

I find that way of doing it a little stranger because the Messiah does not have to be named twice. When I baptize people I do it in English and in Hebrew because we live in a Messianic context.

I know of some rabbis who just stand beside the person and let them baptize themselves, because that is how a Tevilah is done in Rabbinic Judaism. I am not Rabbinic and while I am aware of what the Talmud teaches, I neither follow it, nor feel obliged to follow its rituals.

I will ask each candidate if they believe that the Messiah died for them, rose for them and is one day coming back for them. They answer yes three times and I say: "upon profession of your faith in the Messiah of Israel, I Tevilah you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy spirit (B'shem ha Av, v'ha Ben, v'ha Ruach ha Chodesh).

Under they go and up they come and the ritual of purification is completed as they identify with the death and resurrection of our Messiah. Shabbat Shalom and Shavua Tov.