



## **LEVITICUS 12 - 16 HEALTH LAWS ABOUT INFECTIONS, CHILDBIRTH & LEPROSY; ATONEMENT**

After God gave the food laws in Lev. 11, He now continues with the marvelous health laws, thousands of years ahead of their time, dealing with sanitary and hygienic principles that are used as common practice in modern medicine.

God tells the Israelites: "By these you shall become unclean; whoever *touches* the carcass of any of them shall be unclean until evening; whoever carries part of the carcass of any of them *shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening*... Anything on which any of them falls, when they are dead shall be unclean, whether it is any item of wood or clothing or skin or sack, whatever item it is, in which any work is done, *it must be put in water*. And it shall be *unclean until evening; then it shall be clean*" (Lev. 11:24-32).

Notice the importance of washing in water after touching a dead body to avoid bacterial or viral infections. Today, this is one of the primary sanitary laws in hospitals.

Dr. McMillen explains the difference between Egyptian medicine and the principles God gives to the Israelites: "To embed splinters, the Egyptians applied worm's blood and asses' dung. Since dung is loaded with tetanus spores, it is little wonder that lockjaw took a heavy toll of splinter cases. About the time this Egyptian medical book [*Papyrus Ebers*] was written, Moses was born in Egypt. Although his parents were Israelites, he was raised in the royal court and "was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians"...However, when Moses led the great company of Israelites out of Egypt, the Lord gave him a most remarkable promise: "If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put *none of the diseases* on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you" (Exodus 15:26).

"The divine instructions were not only devoid of harmful practices, but had many detailed positive recommendations. Let us take a glance at the impact of those positive instructions on the history of prevention of infectious diseases.

"Let me give an example by citing what happened in Vienna, Austria in the 1840's. In the maternity wards of a celebrated hospital, one out of

every six women died...When the women died, they were wheeled into the autopsy room. The first order of each morning was the entrance of the physicians and medical students into the morgue to perform autopsies on the unfortunate victims. Afterward, *without cleansing their hands*, the doctors with their retinue of students marched into the maternity wards to make pelvic examinations on the living women. Of course, no rubber gloves were worn.

"A young doctor, Ignaz Semmelweis, observed that it was particularly the women who were examined by the teachers and students who became sick and died. After watching this heartbreaking situation for three years, he established a rule that, in his ward, every physician and medical student who had participated in the autopsies of the dead must carefully *wash his hands* before examining the maternity patients. Before the new rule went into effect, fifty-seven women had died. Afterwards, only *one out of forty-two women* died. The statistics strongly indicated that fatal infections had been carried from corpses to living patients...Many centuries before Dr. Semmelweis, God gave to Moses *detailed instructions on the safest method of cleansing the hands after handling the dead or the infected living*. Semmelweis' method of cleansing went a long way in preventing many deaths, but it would not be accepted in any hospital today.

"In contrast, the Scriptural method specified not merely washing in a basin, but repeated washings in *running water*, with *time intervals* allowed for drying and exposure to sun to kill bacteria not washed off. Furthermore, the Scriptural method also required contacts to *change to clothes* that had been washed and dried. The biblical techniques was so different from and so much more effective than anything man ever devised that, again, it is logical to believe the regulations were given, as the Bible claims, *from God to Moses*" (*None of these Diseases*, 1968, p. 9-10, 13-15).

God then goes on to explain sanitary principles in *childbirth*, certainly one of the moments when a woman is most exposed to infections. "Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying, 'If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean *seven*

*days*, as in the days of her customary impurity she shall be clean [in chap. 15 it mentions everything the blood touches has to be washed]...she shall not touch any hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary *until the days of her purification* are fulfilled” (Leviticus 12:1-4).

This is a sanitary measure to avoid infections, not only in childbirth, but also in her menstrual cycle. Remember, the Israelites, as other nations up to virtually a century ago, *did not know how diseases were transmitted*. Yet, here we have a preventative measure requiring quarantine and a washing of all things the woman’s blood comes into contact. Medical studies reveal it is easier for a woman to contract a disease during her menstrual cycle since a woman’s inner genital linings are more exposed and thus susceptible to wounds. An article from *The Journal of Reproductive Medicine*, Nov. 1989, indicated that sexual intercourse during a woman’s menstrual cycle presented a high risk of fragments of uterine tissue migrating to other organs in the pelvic region and producing dangerous cysts.

In chapter 13, God gives instructions about one of the most dreaded and relatively common diseases of that time—*leprosy*. “When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling, a scab, or a bright spot, and it becomes on the skin of his body like a leprous sore, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests” (1-2).

Chapters 13 and 14 give a detailed account of how to diagnose this terrible disease by the priesthood. Eventually, many priests became true health officials, dealing with all kinds of diseases. In Christ’s day, it was the norm to have a “town physician,” many either a priest or a rabbi, which performed their duties--some better than others.

The priest knew if the sore was infectious, immediate quarantine was required to avoid spreading it to the rest of the congregation. If it was leprosy, the person could not return to the community until healed. Leprosy still exists today, but now is greatly under control due in part to the application of these biblical laws.

Dr. George Rosen comments, “Leprosy cast the greatest blight that threw its shadow over the daily life of medieval humanity. Fear of all other disease taken together can hardly be compared to the terror spread by leprosy. Not even the Black Death in the fourteenth century, or the appearance of syphilis

toward the end of the fifteenth century, produced a similar state of fright...Early in the Middle Ages, during the sixth and seventh centuries, it began to spread more widely in Europe and became a serious social and health problem. It was endemic particularly among the poor and reached a terrifying peak in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

“Leadership was taken by the church, as the physicians had nothing to offer. The church took as its guiding principle the concept of contagion as embodied in *the Old Testament*...This idea and its practical consequences are defined with great clarity in the book of *Leviticus*...Once the condition of leprosy had been established, the patient was to be segregated and excluded from the community. Following the precepts laid down in *Leviticus*, the church undertook the task of combating leprosy...it accomplished the first great feat...in methodically *eradication of the disease*.”

Dr. McMillen adds, “As soon as the European nations saw that the application of scriptural quarantine brought leprosy under control, they applied the same principle against the Black Death. The results were equally spectacular, and millions of lives were saved. If the lethal plagues had continued unabated, many celebrities of the Renaissance might never have been born, or they might have died untimely deaths. Thus, European history was greatly influenced *because men began to practice the words of God to the Israelites*: ‘If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God...I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought upon the Egyptians’” (Ibid., pp. 11-12).

God now concentrates in chapter 15 on how they can avoid *deadly infectious diseases* through touching different types of bodily fluids.

*The Evangelical Commentary* states, “In the Bible, personal cleanliness was largely left to individuals. Bodily discharges from sexual organs were not considered as serious as infectious skin diseases, but *everyone was expected to practice good hygiene*. Any sexual discharge not only rendered a man unclean, but if the discharge made contact with any articles of furniture or clothing, *they too were unclean*. The individual involved had to wash himself and everything which was unclean; both person and articles remained unclean until evening.” These are all valid principles applied in modern hygiene.

*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* adds: "Observance of these rules would reduce the incidence of infectious fevers and diseases such as cholera, spirochetal jaundice, polioencephalitis, and bubonic plague. The legislation was *the first of its kind* to recognize that infection could be transmitted by both food and water."

In the New Testament, we don't see any of these sanitary laws being abolished, but since the priesthood now changed from Aaron's to that of Jesus Christ, the ritual aspects would no longer be applicable—including having to present oneself before a priesthood because of uncleanness.

The apostle James and the elders in Jerusalem made very clear to Paul what "laws" they were talking about that converted gentiles *did not* have to keep. They said, "Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken *a vow* [a ritual law]. Take them and *be purified* with them, and *pay their expenses* so that they may *shave their heads* [another ritual law] and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and *keep the law* [as a Jewish Christian]. But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and decided that *they should observe no such thing...*" (Acts 21:23-15). What *things* were they talking about? Things such as vows, purity laws, paying for sacrifices, and shaving their heads after the Nazirite vow. *None of these things were binding on the Gentile Christians.* But these don't have anything to do with the Ten Commandments.

It is the *ritual aspects* of the law that have been removed. As Hebrews 9:9-10 says about *the ritual law*, "It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience—concerned only with foods and drinks, *various washings*, and *fleshly ordinances* imposed until the time of reformation."

So, today, the biblical principle is we should carefully wash ourselves after a bodily discharge that is a breeding ground for germs, so we don't infect ourselves or others. Now, a natural question that an Israelites would ask is, "When will we be able to remove all of our uncleanness?"

God then answers by explaining the Day of Atonement as one of His Holy Days. He says, "Tell Aaron your brother not to come at just any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat

which is on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat." (16:2).

God then explains the ceremony of the Day of Atonement, centered around the two he-goats, one symbolizing Azazel (the expelled one) and the other for the Lord. Then the he-goat, representing the Lord, is killed and its blood is sprinkled on the Tabernacle and on the Israelites, representing Christ's future sacrifice for sin.

As Hebrews 8 says, "But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but *with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all*, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, *how much more shall the blood of Christ*, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, *cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*" (11-14).

Once the he-goat for the Lord was sacrificed, then Aaron laid hands upon the other he-goat, representing Azazel, or Satan. He then confessed their sins, and symbolically placed them on the head of this goat, as the chief culprit. As the Bible says, "We know that...*the whole world* lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19).

Instead of killing this goat, it is led by a strong man into an inhabited region and loosed to wander aimlessly. This fate is similar on a physical plane to what is going to happen to Satan on a spiritual plane. Our best understanding is that he and his angels will ultimately be expelled from the universe, to be as "wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever" (Jude 13).

Then God gives the instructions on fasting by all of His people on this day. "This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all" (Lev. 16:29).