

## **FEBRUARY 24**

### **Leviticus 15:1-16:28**

This is the chapter that we've all been waiting for...not. But hey, it does make you wonder a little, why we have it in the Bible. God is the one who told Moses to tell this to the people. There is a message in all of this. One message was for the nation, having to do with their view of their need before God. These things taught them what was holy and what was common, and what was clean and what was unclean. All of their lives and disciplines would have daily reminders of how they stood before God. For us as disciples, the other message is that even though these "rules" don't apply to us, God still wants us to have a mindset that there is to be holiness in how we live before the Lord and that holiness is to be valued. There is a "cleanness" that is important that we should seek to maintain in our behavior and attitudes as we honor God. This mindset has nothing to do with "works" or earning God's love, but it has to do with having a sober attitude toward where we live, and a grateful attitude toward whom we serve.

One of the challenges today is to think of why chapter 15 comes before chapter 16 topically. I think it has to do with the fact that chapter 15 deals with very regular parts of life and ceremonial cleanness, that is, readiness to worship at the tabernacle. Chapter 16 has to do with the national Day of Atonement. If you understand the importance of chapter 16, chapter 15 is letting people know that before that day or any of the important days of worship, (the Passover, for example) they needed to plan their lives accordingly so they would be ceremonially clean and able to worship at the tabernacle. This reminds me of what God told Moses to tell the people when they were about to come before the mountain and make the Mosaic Covenant in Exodus 19:15. Apparently this command didn't have anything to do with cooties.

#### Leviticus 15

This chapter follows a pattern: Man who is sick, man who is not sick, woman who is not sick, woman who is sick. In the case of both sick people, after they were well, they were to go to the tent and make an offering of devotion and an offering for the cleansing of sin. This is easy for them to do now, since they are living around the tabernacle, but later when they are in the land, this will mean taking a road trip (depending *when* they lived) to either Gilgal, then Shiloh, then Nod and finally Jerusalem. That would require obedience, but most importantly, gratefulness to God for their cure. I wonder if they ever obeyed this once they were in the land and the tabernacle was harder to get to? In the case of the well people, their normal bodily functions only made them "unclean." The passage of time and bathing made them clean again.

Vs. 1-12 These general rules seem to apply to anyone who has any emission. Notice that it means that if it involves intercourse, both people are unclean and the sheets have to be washed.

Vs. 13-15 This emission could have been due to disease or infection, but it is definitely sickness. One recurring thing in this section will be the seven days of cleansing followed by sacrifice. There is one suggestion I read that linked this to gonorrhea. Who knows? This meant that this person was a perpetual hazard to people who wanted to be ceremonially clean. Also, when this person was cured, they would have to travel to the tabernacle, wherever it was, and offer sacrifices for their cleansing. I wonder if they did.

As disciples, what is interesting to me is our response after we have recovered from something. We don't have to give an offering of devotion and an offering of cleansing and forgiveness. We offer up (if at all) a quick prayer, and we thank God that we can eat bratwurst again. Even though doctors and antibiotics are involved, we need to remember that only God can cure. We should be grateful. This is what Israel was learning.

Vs. 16-18 Does this surprise you? Since this involved the normal functions of life, it was cleansed by water and a person didn't need a sacrifice or a trip to Jerusalem. If it had required a trip and a sacrifice, that would have really kept the population down.

The first part has to do with a wet-dream or masturbation. I get that. Any emission of semen made a man unclean until the evening. The second part has to do with making love, being one flesh. This is something good and, being mentioned here, was obviously in the context of marriage. This is something good and commanded and invented by God. So, why the uncleanness? I think it is because of touching the semen. I think God is making a point, not because of it being "yucky," but because of it being special in some sense. As part of the reproductive process there is an aspect of the transfer of life, the transfer of sin, the fact that there is a divinely ordained miracle involved and maybe that in this miracle there is a measure of tragedy because of what is transferred along with the life.

Another thing that is interesting is that the whole reason to be ceremonially clean was to be wholly ready for God and to be able to receive His blessing. The "cleanness" was symbolic of total devotion and separation to God. There were times when God demanded that the people were to be clean, and He gave the command in Exodus 19:15, *Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman*. As already mentioned, it probably wasn't because women have cooties, it was because husband and wife were to appear before Him, "clean," devoted, fully focused on Him and separated to Him. The NT version of this is 1 Corinthians 7:5, *Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control*.

Now this is not the case with us at all, but just think of the logistical ramifications there would be in our lives if we knew we couldn't go to church if we had done something the night before. It would keep our actions in the forefront of our thinking and planning. We would have to think, "Ok if I do that after 9 p.m., it will go into the next day so I'll be disqualified. So we'll have to do that earlier so we'll be cleansed by evening.

Since the real focus is being cleansed to stand before God, you would always be thinking about the events before you and your actions. In a positive way, it would keep your connection with God always at the top of your thinking and planning. I'm glad we don't have those laws, but I would probably benefit, as a disciple, from that kind of thinking.

Vs. 19-24 I just have a few notes here.

First, the reason for the longer time of cleansing here was because of the blood. Blood has a special character in the Bible, because Leviticus 17:11 says, *For the life of the flesh is in the blood...* Also, the blood after menstruation is "dead."

Second, "menstrual impurity" doesn't really appear in the Hebrew. The word is either "menstruation" or "separation," but it seems that the word "impurity" was added to the range of meaning because of this context, that is, menstruation causing ceremonial uncleanness. This is one place where you want to go with the KJV or NKJV. There is nothing impure about the process, and impurity isn't necessary to the translation. Yucky might work, but not impurity.

In v. 24, there is the case of a husband unwittingly making love to his wife at the beginning of her period. Since he touches the blood, he too is unclean for seven days. In Leviticus 18:19, husbands will be commanded to leave their wives alone during the wife's "separation," or "menstruation."

As said before, these commands are object lessons for the nation of Israel, not for anyone else. God is weaving the regard for His holiness, and their separation to Him, into the daily fabric of all they do.

Without being legalistic or rigid, it is good for us as disciples, to have a high regard for God's holiness and our lives as being separated to Him. As we live for Christ every day, following Him in the harvest, Christ becomes woven into all we do.

Vs. 25-30 This is a sickness, and therefore the healing was followed up by sacrifice. This is the woman we just read about with the issue of blood in Mark 5:25.

Vs. 31-33 I made this its own section because of v. 31, explaining the purpose of these laws. The real focus was that the people should know they needed to be separated unto God, coming to Him with a sense of holiness and purity. God allowed exceptions; for example, in Mark 5:25, the Son of God allowed Himself to be approached and touched by an "unclean" woman.

Leviticus 16:1-28

This chapter describes the Day of Atonement in October. The priest could only enter the Most Holy Place one time a year. Just as an exercise in Bible study, go slowly through the chapter and try to list the order of events.

Vs. 1-5 Aaron and his sons were only to go beyond the veil into the Most Holy Place once a year on the Day of Atonement. God says it is because of the mercy seat and His glory being in that place. What is emphasized here is that Aaron could only come in with the blood of the sacrifices and, first, as a sinner needing forgiveness and serving the people. It isn't until v. 23 that Aaron wears the high priest's clothing.

Vs. 6-10 This explains what the animals are for. That second goat is very significant in the symbolism that God is building into Israel, and it has something to do with us and our understanding of Jesus.

Vs. 11-14 This is Aaron's sacrifice for his own sins. Notice that the censer had to be filled with holy fire from the altar of sacrifice. Also it is significant that the entire place had to be smoked up. If that represents prayer, I'll bet we don't pray enough. Hebrews refers to what we're reading here, especially Hebrews 9. Jesus, as our high priest, had no need to offer a sacrifice for Himself since He was sinless.

Vs. 15-19 The main purpose of this event was the yearly covering of the sins of Israel. Before this could happen, Aaron and the tabernacle had to be cleansed. Aaron needed cleansing from his own sin, and the tabernacle needed cleansing because of the effects of being surrounded by sinful people. When all these were cleansed, then payment was made for the people.

Vs. 20-22 One of the goats, the scapegoat, had the sins of the people placed on it and was sent into the wilderness to Azazel. Azazel means removal. To get the best take on this, I'll give you a couple lines from Eaton's Bible Dictionary:

*This word has given rise to many different views. Some Jewish interpreters regard it as the name of a place some 12 miles east of Jerusalem, in the wilderness. Others take it to be the name of an evil spirit, or even of Satan. But when we remember that the two goats together form a type of Christ, on whom the Lord "laid the iniquity of us all," and examine into the root meaning of this word (viz., "separation"), the interpretation of those who regard the one goat as representing the atonement made, and the other, that "for Azazel," as representing the effect of the great work of atonement (viz., the complete removal of sin), is certainly to be preferred. The one goat which was "for Jehovah" was offered as a sin-offering, by which atonement was made. But the sins must also be visibly banished, and therefore they were symbolically laid by confession on the other goat, which was then "sent away for Azazel" into the wilderness.*

Vs. 23-28 After this cleansing of Aaron and the tabernacle, Aaron would put on his high priest's clothing and be ready to offer other sacrifices for the Day of Atonement. Notice that everyone that is associated with taking the offerings out, etc., is required to wash with water.

This is all pretty cool. God not only forgave, but He gave them a visual aid of removing their sins. Their sins were loaded on a scapegoat, and they watched the animal pass out of sight, taking their sins farther and farther away. That is a symbol of what Jesus did for each of us. Psalm 103:12 - *As far as the east is from the west, So far does He remove our transgressions from us.*

Hebrews 10:4 says, *For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.* It is referring to this event that only covered their sins for a year. By contrast, the sacrifice of Christ covers our sin forever. That forgiveness and relationship with God is something good to take into the harvest as we follow our Lord.

### **Mark 7:1-23**

One of the things you wonder about is why Jesus was so hard with the Pharisees and scribes. I don't think we appreciate how dangerous it is to substitute our traditions for God's Word. I don't think we fully grasp how easy it is to use the Word to justify anything, including our lack of mission or fruit. And what gets lost in all of our tweaking of the Bible to conform to our lifestyle is our understanding of God and living in authentic relationship with Him. Jesus was God and could understand their hearts and the ramifications of what they were doing and teaching.

Vs. 1-5 Isn't it interesting that they went after Jesus on the topic of being ceremonially clean. These traditions of the elders were not in the Bible. They were rules, however, that became law for every Jew.

Vs. 6-13 Notice how Jesus shows them that rather than honoring God, they are fulfilling a prophetic judgment that God gave through Isaiah.

Honoring father and mother had a very strong financial component. Honoring meant caring for them as their age increased and their health declined. A son was to shape his life accordingly, to prepare for this coming event. *Corban* was a trick that honored neither God nor family. I wonder if the opposite of *Corban* was "Nabroc," giving everything meant for God, to your parents. ☺

Vs. 14-23 One note here is that after Jesus taught this in public, humiliating the Pharisees, it intensified their hatred for Him and He had to leave Judea for a while.

So what is the real point in all Jesus says about cleansing? It's interesting that we're talking about cleansing here and in Leviticus. What really defiles us is within, that is, sin. Jesus makes this clear. So, what really cleanses us? That is what the Pharisees and scribes wouldn't and couldn't find, because the answer wasn't a "what," but a "who." Who cleanses us is He who forgives us and then sends His Holy Spirit to live in us. Once we know Him, it is only by living in that close, daily connection in the Word and following the Spirit, that we can make sure that what comes out of us is honoring to our Father.

This is why for us as disciples, like the priest, the first order of business is to make sure we are close to Him, in love with Him, in His Word. It affects how we follow Him in the harvest, making disciples. This is why it is so important for us to be reaching out and making disciples, because without Christ, no one has a chance to be forgiven and to have the power of sin broken in their lives.

### **Psalm 40:11-17**

V. 11 After that great declaration of yesterday, David states his confidence in the Lord and in His *steadfast love* and *faithfulness*. It looked like David's trials were over but they weren't. It is interesting to me that God gave David many small deliverances in all the years he ran from Saul, but He made David learn slowly, waiting for the day when all would be at peace. That is so much like how God works with us. He teaches us to depend on Him as we follow in the harvest, not making our lives easy, but showing us over and over that He is faithful and that He loves us. I think of Paul in this regard. God didn't heal Paul, but made His grace sufficient for all of Paul's

needs. Paul said that he gloried in his weakness because when he was weak, he was strong - probably living on his knees before God like David was.

Vs. 12-15 David was harassed and being pursued.

Vs. 16-17 My heart clings to these verses, realizing that in order for me to say these as David did, I need to walk through those same valleys with God. That's how David and Paul learned. That's how disciples in the harvest learn, and the reward of living closely with our Lord is worth it.

### **Proverbs 10:13-14**

Try putting the parallel parts together. The reason these are in couplets is because of the parallel ideas that are being woven together. To understand them better or see them clearer for a devotional or short lesson, sometimes rearranging them helps focus on the real comparison or contrast being made. Just a suggestion:

On the lips of him who has understanding, wisdom is found, but the mouth of a fool brings ruin near.

The wise lay up knowledge (to guide them?), but a rod is for the back of him who lacks sense (to guide him?).