

# LAWS THAT PROTECT MOTHER AND CHILD RIGHT AFTER CHILDBIRTH: SYMBOLIZES THE NEED FOR CLEANSING FROM THE SINFUL NATURE LEVITICUS 12:01–08

## ***Introduction***

This chapter concerns a mother and her newborn child right after childbirth, one of the most sensitive (delicate, tender) times for a mother. Giving birth can be a painful experience, a time of much suffering. Yet right after the travail, the sight of seeing and holding the child is one of the most joyful experiences imaginable. Realizing that she has brought a newborn life into the world is one of the most heart-warming and rich experiences in life. God has made it so because it is His chosen way for the human race to reproduce. Christ Himself described the experience:

***John 16:21*** “A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.”

It is the time right after childbirth that is so critical for both mother and child. During these days, they need to be nurtured and bound together; they need to be protected both physically and spiritually. This is the reason God gave these laws: *Laws That Protect Mother and Child Right After Childbirth: Symbolizes the Need for Cleansing from the Sinful Nature*, Leviticus 12:1-8.

- I. A mother and son were protected (vv. 1 -4).
- II. A mother and daughter were protected (v. 5).
- III. A mother was protected by approaching God for cleansing (vv. 6-7).
- IV. A poor mother was protected by God’s mercy (v. 8).

## ***I. Leviticus 12:01–04 Protection after Childbirth for a Mother and Son***

A mother and son need to be protected right after childbirth.

1. The mother was protected by being counted ceremonially unclean for seven days (v. 2).
    - a. Physically, this isolated the mother until she could gain her strength and recover. Obviously the family members or midwives who helped the mother were also counted unclean until after the seven days were up. Being unclean meant:
      - => She could not do housework or any other kind of work such as cooking.
      - => She could not be imposed upon by her husband.
      - => She nor the baby could be disturbed by visitors such as friends and neighbours.
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- => She and the baby had plenty of time to bond and grow together during the all-important first days.
- => She could focus upon nursing and nurturing the baby, conveying a sense of intimacy, peace, security and love to the baby.
- b. Spiritually, this isolated the mother to focus upon God's grace and the terrible uncleanness of sin, in particular the fact that the sinful nature was passed down to her son and would be passed down from generation to generation.

Did the mother actually think about the uncleanness and pollution of sin? A Jewish mother obviously did. They certainly knew the law: she was considered by everyone to be religiously or ceremonially unclean. And religious uncleanness was a symbol of the pollution of sin. She also knew what we know: the Holy Scripture teaches that the suffering of childbirth is due to the first sin of mankind. The pain of childbirth was the judgment of sin pronounced upon the woman.

**Gen 3:16** *To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children."*

God obviously gave this law to teach two things: God's grace and the internal nature of sin, the passing down of the sinful nature. God wanted the mother and family to have joy and rejoice in His grace through the baby; but He also wanted them to learn the awful uncleanness of sin: that sin is internal, within the very nature of man. Sin caused...

- the pain and suffering of childbirth
- the transmission or the passing down of the sinful nature
- the transmission or the passing down of death

Childbirth is one way God is able to teach the truth of human depravity. God has created man to live with Him forever in perfection, but sin has disrupted this relationship. Sin has alienated man from God and has brought about death and judgment to come. The law of ceremonial uncleanness governing childbirth taught the truth of human depravity.

**Thought 1.** When a child is born, God wants His people to learn more and more...

- about the joy and rejoicing of His grace in the gift of a child

**Gen 33:5** *Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. "Who are these with you?" he asked. Jacob answered, "They are the children God has graciously given your servant."*

**Psa 113:9** *He settles the childless woman in her home as a happy mother of children. Praise the LORD.*

**Psa 127:3** *Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him.*

- about the terrible uncleanness of sin in all its depraved nature

**1 Cor 15:21** *Death came through a man.*

**Rom 5:12** *Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.*

**Rom 6:23** *For the wages of sin is death.*

**Psa 51:5** *Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*

**Psa 58:3** *Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward, spreading lies.*

**Thought 2.** Charles F. Pfeiffer says, “The ceremonial uncleanness following childbirth is related to the fact that man is a sinful creature. Following the fall, Eve was told that pain and suffering were to accompany motherhood. Human history has been a succession of births in which sinful man begets sinful man. In such a context the law requires ceremonial purification.” (Charles F. Pfeiffer. *The Book of Leviticus*, p. 33)

**Thought 3.** The Bible teacher J. Vernon McGee makes several excellent statements worth quoting:

⇒ *In the preceding chapter we saw the contamination of sin by contact. The external character of sin was emphasized — we live in a world surrounded by sin.*

*This chapter places the emphasis on the internal character of sin. Not only do we become sinners by contact, but we are sinners by birth. And this chapter is the law concerning motherhood, the transmission of sin by inheritance. The very nature that we inherit is a fallen, sinful nature. David said, ‘Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me’ (Psa 51:5).” (J. Vernon McGee. *Thru the Bible*, Vol. 1, p. 374)*

⇒ *Obviously there were certain hygienic benefits in the practice of these God-given laws — as we saw in the matter of diet. God was caring for His people physically, and at the same time was teaching them (and us) the great spiritual truth that we are born in sin.” (ibid., p. 374).*

⇒ *Uncleanness under the law reminded her that she had brought a sinner into the world.” (ibid., p. 375).*

⇒ *Someone said, ‘If my baby is born a sinner and he dies in infancy, is he lost because he is a sinner?’ No. In Adam all die, and that’s the reason the little one died. But the Lord Jesus said, ‘See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.’ (Mat 18:10). The word ‘angels’ [spirits] should be translated spirits — their spirits behold the face of the Father. In other words, when that little infant dies, his spirit goes to be with the Father. Why? Because Christ came down and died for sinners, and the little one has not reached the age of accountability. The minute he does, then he has to make a decision for Christ.*

*I like the quaint epitaph that Robert Robertson placed over the graves of his four children:*

*“Bold infidelity, turn pale and die,  
Beneath this stone four infants’ ashes lie;  
Say are they lost or saved,  
If death’s by sin, they sinned for they lie here;  
If Heaven’s by works, in Heaven they can’t appear.  
Reason — Ah, how depraved.*

*Reverse the Bible’s sacred page, the knot’s untied,  
They died, for Adam sinned; they live, for Jesus died.” (ibid., p. 375).*

**Thought 4.** The great Bible commentator Mathew Henry says this:

⇒ *This ceremonial uncleanness...was to signify the pollution of sin which we are all conceived and born in.... For, if the root be impure, so is the branch, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” (Mathew Henry. Mathew Henry’s Commentary, Vol. 1. (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co.) p. 489).*

**Psa 51:5** *Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*

⇒ *If sin had not entered, nothing but purity and honour had attended all the... blessing [of childbirth]... but now that the nature of man is degenerated... disgrace... sin and corruption that are... in remembrance of the curse upon the woman. (ibid., p. 490).*

2. The baby son was protected by being circumcised on the eighth day (v. 3).

Remember, circumcision was the sign or symbol that a person was a member of God’s people. Circumcision meant...

- that a baby son was to be reared as a follower of God
- that he was to be taught the covenant of God
- that he would inherit the promises of God — if he truly obeyed and followed God
- that God covered the baby under His covenant and grace until he reached the age of accountability

This, of course, gave great assurance to the mother during the early days of the child’s life, during the early years when he was so susceptible to sickness, accident, disease and so dependent upon others. God covered the child with His marvellous grace through the covenant of circumcision, and thereby He gave great assurance and security to the mother.

3. Both mother and child were protected through an extended isolation: the mother had to wait thirty-three days more before her purification ritual and before she could become fully active.

- a. Physically, this was a semi-isolation period that allowed the mother to fully recover. She was still counted unclean, which meant that she...
  - was protected from the exhaustion of travel and large crowds
  - was protected from the pain of too early sexual relations
  - was given the first few weeks to continue nurturing and bonding with her child
  - was given time to convey the much needed sense of quietness, peace, security and love to her child
- b. Spiritually, the mother was given time to grow in the joy of God's grace, in thinking and learning more about the uncleanness of sin. (See point one of this note.)

**Thought 1.** What a lesson for our generation in protecting mothers and their newborn children. The one thing Scripture teaches about mothers and children is this: they are to be honoured, supported and loved by both husband and other children.

*Mat 19:14* Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

*Eph 5:28* In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

*Col 3:19* Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

*Gen 33:5* Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. "Who are these with you?" he asked. Jacob answered, "They are the children God has graciously given your servant."

*Exo 20:12* "Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you."

*Lev 19:3* Each of you must respect his mother.

*Psa 113:9* He settles the childless woman in her home as a happy mother of children. Praise the LORD.

*Psa 127:3* Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him.

## **II. Leviticus 12:05 Protection after Childbirth for a Mother and Daughter**

Note the Scripture and outline of this point:

The mother's uncleanness in having a baby girl is doubled. She is counted ceremonially unclean for two weeks; then she had to wait sixty-six days for her purification ritual.

Why? Scripture does not say. Perhaps one or more of the following reasons are true:

- => perhaps to give extra protection to the baby daughter: more time to grow and gain strength since she was considered weaker and was being born into a harsh, cruel world.
- => perhaps to symbolize that the female sex was to be honoured, respected, cared for and looked after in a very special way throughout life.



- => perhaps to stress a double lesson on God's grace and on uncleanness since the baby girl would one day suffer childbirth herself.
- => perhaps to give the baby daughter an extended, uninterrupted time to grow in the sense of love, nourishment, peace and security — all of which she would someday need to convey to her own newborn children.

Whatever the case, the mother and baby daughter were both given eighty days to grow and bond together. No doubt, the last reason listed above had some bearing on the extended time for a baby daughter to be loved and nurtured. God wants strong families, and He has appointed the mother to be the focus of the love and nurturing within the family. The baby daughter was therefore given more time to absorb and grow in the uninterrupted love and nurture of her mother, given more time for the mother's nature to be absorbed, to become a part of her own little nature.

**Thought 1.** The lesson is clear: we must take time with our children and prepare them for their roles in life. We must take time to be with our children from the first day of their lives. Even little babies absorb, take into their nature, what we convey to them. We must, therefore, spend time in holding, loving, nurturing, feeding, playing with and reading to our children, and on and on — all to convey a sense of love, care, peace and security.

*Prov 22:6 Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.*

*Deut 6:7 Talk about them [God's children] when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.*

*2 Tim 1:5 I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.*

### **III. Leviticus 12:06–7 A Mother Protected by Approaching God**

A mother was protected by approaching God for cleansing or purification.

1. She was cleansed by approaching God through the sacrifice of the Burnt Offering. Remember, this was the sacrifice that would make atonement for her, that would satisfy God's holiness and justice against sin. Through the atoning sacrifice, God reconciled the unclean person to Himself, accepted the person.
2. She was cleansed by approaching God through the sacrifice of the Sin Offering. This was the sacrifice that bought forgiveness of sins. The Bible never says that childbirth is a sin, but all who bear children are sinners just as we all are. Therefore, the mother who bore a child was to offer the sacrifice for sins because of her uncleanness: she had just brought a child into a sinful world and had passed down the sinful nature to her child.

3. Note the result of her approaching God through the sacrifice of the two offerings: atonement was made for her through the Burnt Offering. God reconciled her to Himself, accepted her. Moreover, her sins were forgiven: she was counted ceremonially clean. She was able once again to participate in religious services. She was fully acceptable to God.

**Thought 1.** The sacrifice of the Burnt Offering and the Sin Offering was a type, a symbol, of Jesus Christ.

- (1) It is through Jesus Christ that atonement is made for us, that we are reconciled to God.

**Rom 3:23-25** *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.*

**Rom 5:8-11** *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

**2 Cor 5:21** *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

- (2) It is through Jesus Christ that our sins are forgiven.

**Mat 26:28** *"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."*

**Acts 5:03** *Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?"*

**Acts 13:38** *Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.*

**Eph 1:7** *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.*

**1 Pet 2:24** *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*

**1 John 1:9** *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

#### **IV. *Leviticus 12:08 A Poor Mother Was Protected by God's Mercy***

A poor mother was protected by God's mercy. Note the concession made for the poor by God. If a mother could not afford a lamb, she could offer the sacrifice of two pigeons, one for the Burnt Offering and the other for the Sin Offering. Note the glorious mercy of God: she was given the atonement (reconciliation with God) and the forgiveness of sin just as readily as the more advantaged mother.

**Thought 1.** God loves and cares for the poor as much as He does for the advantaged. He has made provision for the poor to be saved just as readily and easily as He has for others. Any mother can come to God for forgiveness and help: rich or poor, married or single, educated or uneducated, sick or healthy, young or old. Any person can be reconciled with God; any person can come to God for help and forgiveness of sins.

**Mat 11:28** *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."*

**Rom 10:13** *For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

**Isa 55:1** *"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost."*

**John 3:16** *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

**Rev 22:17** *The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. ■*