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MINISTRIES

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Parashah Points: Tazria – Impurity After Childbirth?

Welcome to another episode of Parashah Points—short thoughts from the weekly Torah Portion.

This week’s Parashah Point comes from Tazria, which is Hebrew for “She conceived,” and it goes from Leviticus 12:1 to Leviticus 13:59.

This Torah portion gives laws for purification after childbirth as well as laws governing how to diagnose and quarantine lepers.

There’s a lot we can talk about in this Torah Portion. Today we’re going to answer an objection made by some critics of the Bible.

Some have argued that Leviticus 12 shows that women are inferior to men on the basis of the fact that the purification period for the birth of a girl is twice as long than for a boy.

Leviticus 12:2-5

Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If a woman conceives and bears **a male child**, then she shall be unclean **seven days**. As at the time of her menstruation, she shall be unclean. And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. Then she shall continue **for thirty-three days** in the blood of her purifying. She shall not touch anything holy, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying are completed. But if she bears **a female child**, then she shall be unclean **two weeks**, as in her menstruation. And she shall continue in the blood of her purifying for **sixty-six days**.

Why is the purification period twice as long for the birth of a girl? There are many suggestions that have been made. But first it should be pointed out that critics severely overstate their case when they argue that this passage indicates that women are inferior to men in the Bible.

First, when the period of purification is over, the mother is to bring the same purification offering whether the child was a boy or girl:

Leviticus 12:6

And when the days of her purifying are completed, **whether for a son or for a daughter**, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb a year old for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering.

Side note: while it's translated in English as "sin offering" in the passage, this is actually a purification offering for the purpose of cleansing ritual impurity, not sin.

The point is that the Torah intentionally places both son and daughter on the same level. The same purification offering is required for both of them.

So why is it that the purification period is twice as long for girls than for boys? Scholar Richard Davidson summarizes one plausible explanation:

The key to Lev 12:1-8 is found in the phrase "blood purification." It is the blood that defiles. Medical experts point out, and midwives are today still instructed to observe, that vaginal bleeding frequently occurs on the part of the newborn girl as well as her mother. Hence, the phrase "blood purification" likely applies to the discharge of both mother and daughter, and thus the ritual uncleanness of two females must be accounted for. Since this uncleanness has to be ritually dealt with and the baby cannot do so, the mother with whom the child was formerly united and from whom she has emerged, symbolically bears the uncleanness so that the period is doubled. Thus we are dealing with simple mathematical logic, two generators of uncleanness require two periods of purification.

-Richard Davidson, "Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament," p. 246

Whatever the exact reason may be, it's clear that these laws in no way teach that women have an inferior status to men. The Torah is full of laws governing ritual impurity, and while some laws apply exclusively to women, there are plenty that apply exclusively to men (Lev. 15:16-18; 32; 22:3).

In reality the Torah affirms the value of women as creatures who, like men, bear God's image and are thus worthy of equal value, dignity, and respect. The Bible lifted up women in the midst of a world that denigrated and abused them. And Bible believers today are on the front lines of promoting women's rights around the world. When it comes to this issue, radical feminists and atheists have misplaced their outrage.

For more information, see our teaching, [Is the Bible misogynistic?](#)

Thank you for joining us for another Parashah Point!

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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