

God's Plan for Separation and Our Choices

In weeks reading from *Parashat Tazria (Vayikra / Leviticus 12:1-13:59)*, the Lord speaks to Moshe saying when a woman gives birth to a baby boy, she will be unclean for seven days (12:1-2) and on the eighth day the child is to be circumcised (12:4). Following the birth, the woman is to remain in the blood of her purification for thirty days and she is not to touch any consecrated thing nor enter into the sanctuary until the days of her purification are complete (12:4). If she gives birth to a baby girl, she will be unclean for two weeks and remain in the blood of her purification for sixty days. The woman is then to bring a young lamb as an Olah Korban (burnt offering) and a dove as a Khatat Korban (sin offering). If she cannot afford the lamb, she is to bring two turtle doves or two pigeons for a sin offering (12:5-8). The Lord then commands Moshe regarding the disease of Tzaraat (Leprosy). The Cohen (Priest) is to inspect the person showing the signs of Tzaraat (13:1-46). The person having Tzaraat is to remain outside of the camp and the Scriptures say 13:45 *'As for the leper who has the infection, his clothes shall be torn, and the hair of his head shall be uncovered, and he shall cover his mustache and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!'* 13:46 *'He shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. (NASB)* The command goes on stating that cloths are also capable of contracting Tzaraat (13:47). The linen garment is to be quarantined for seven days and reexamined. If the garment is found to contain Tzaraat it is to be burned with fire (13:51-52). When the Cohen looks and the Tzaraat in the garment has not spread, the garment is washed and if the spot remains, the garment is to be declared unclean and it is to be burned with fire (13:55). If the mark is faded after washing, the mark is to be torn out of the garment, washed a second time, and inspected to be certain the Tzaraat has not reappeared in the garment (13:56-59). This describes that a very careful inspection is conducted and in a similar way we are to inspect our lives very carefully.

ספר ויקרא פרק יב

א וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: ב דַּבֵּר
 אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר אִשָּׁה כִּי תִזְרִיעַ
 וַיִּלְדָּה זָכָר וְטָמְאָה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כַּיְמֵי נִדְתָה
 דֹּתָהּ טָמְאָה: ג וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי יְמוּל
 בְּשֹׁר עֲרֻלָּתוֹ: ד וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם וּשְׁלֹשֶׁת
 יָמִים תֵּשֵׁב בְּדָמֶי טְהָרָה בְּכָל-קֹדֶשׁ לֹא-
 תִגַּע וְאֶל-הַמִּקְדָּשׁ לֹא תָבֹא עַד-מְלֵאת
 יְמֵי טְהָרָה: ה וְאִם-נִקְבְּהָ תֵלֵד וְטָמְאָה
 שְׁבַע יָמִים כַּנִּדְתָּהּ וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם וּשְׁשֶׁת יָמִים
 תֵּשֵׁב עַל-דָּמֶי טְהָרָה:

Vayikra / Leviticus 12:1-5

12:1 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 12:2 *'Speak to the sons of Israel, saying: 'When a woman gives birth and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean for seven days, as in the days of her menstruation she shall be unclean. 12:3 'On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. 12:4 'Then she shall remain in the blood of her purification for thirty-three days; she shall not touch any consecrated thing, nor enter the sanctuary until the days of her purification are completed. 12:5 'But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean for two weeks, as in her menstruation; and she shall remain in the blood of her purification for sixty-six days. (NASB)*

Reading through this week's portion, the opening verses lead to many questions. The Parshah opens stating that childbirth renders a woman ritually impure, however, there

are differences in the lengths of the time of impurity depending on the gender of her offspring (a baby boy verses a girl). Why is there a difference in the period of impurity for a woman who has given birth to a boy (seven days) as compared to one who has delivered a girl (fourteen days)? Why is there a different standard where the mother must wait thirty days verses sixty days in the blood of her purity? In both cases, there is a two-phased period of impurity. How does the initial time of impurity (seven days for a boy and fourteen days for a girl) differ from the second phase (thirty-three days for a boy and sixty-six days for a girl)? *Vayikra / Leviticus 12:2* states that a woman after childbirth “*shall be impure as at the time of her condition of menstrual separation.*” Note also that in the first stage, during the seven days, she made all that she touched unclean; in the second stage, during the thirty days, she was only required to touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, as she was progressing towards cleanness. Why do you think these two conditions were linked in this way? Let’s examine the Scriptures and try to figure out what is going on.

The first thing to do is to begin with a short study on the word Tazria (תִּזְרִיעַ). Turning back in the Scriptures, the first occurrence of the root form of the Hebrew word Tazria (תִּזְרִיעַ) is found in *Bereshit / Genesis 1:11-12*:

Bereshit / Genesis 1:11-12

1:11 Then God said, ‘Let the earth sprout vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them’; and it was so. 1:12 The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit with seed in them, after their kind; and God saw that it was good. (NASB)

יא וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תִּזְרַע הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׁא עֵשֶׂב מִזְרִיעַ זָרַע עֵץ פְּרִי עֵשֶׂה
 פְּרִי לְמִינֹו אֲשֶׁר זָרַע-בוּ עַל-הָאָרֶץ וַיהי-כֵן: יב וַתּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׁא עֵשֶׂב
 מִזְרִיעַ זָרַע לְמִינֵהוּ וְעֵץ אֲשֶׁר זָרַע-בוּ לְמִינֵהוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים
 כִּי-טוֹב:

The word Mazria (מִזְרִיעַ) in *Bereshit / Genesis 1:11-12* is a verb written as a Hiphil Participle. A participle is a form of a verb that is used in a sentence to modify a noun or noun phrase, and thus plays a role similar to that of an adjective or adverb. In the creation account, Mazria modifies Zera (זָרַע) describing the earth sprouting forth vegetation. The word Tazria (תִּזְרִיעַ) in *Vayikra / Leviticus 12:2* is a verb written in the Hiphil Imperfect 3rd Feminine Singular form. The imperfect is a verb form, found in various languages, which combines past tense (reference to a past time) and imperfective aspect (reference to a continuing or repeated event or state). The infinitive definition of Tazria is “*to sow, scatter seed.*” The word Tazria (תִּזְרִיעַ) is Hebrew for “*she conceives,*” and the NASB translates as “*when she gives birth.*” Is there some sort of connection that is being made between the creation account and the woman who gives birth in *Vayikra / Leviticus 12* by the use and meaning of the Hebrew words in these Scriptures? It is interesting to note that “*childbirth*” may be written in a different way in the Hebrew bible, using the word

וַיִּלְדֵּי rather than the word תִּזְרִיעַ (see *Shemot / Exodus 1:19*). It may be that Moshe is making a connection to the Creation account. In the creation account it is also important to note that the first few days were days of separation. The Lord God separated the light from the darkness, and the land from the sea, and the sky. Note also that separation is a form of sanctification and holiness. Upon having separated (sanctified) the land, the Lord commanded it to bring forth vegetation. This appears to be an interesting connection that is being made to the woman who following her giving birth is commanded to separate herself for the Lord because of her blood and then to remain in the blood of her purity for a certain specified amount of time.

Note also, in *Midrash Rabbah Leviticus Chapter 14, Part 1*, on Parashat Tazria, Rabbi Simlai notes that just as God created humans after creating cattle, beasts, and birds, the law concerning human impurity in *Vayikra / Leviticus 12* follows that concerning cattle, beasts, and birds in *Vayikra / Leviticus 11* and what we eat regarding clean verses unclean foods. (א"ר שמלאי כשם שיצירתו של אדם אחר בהמה חיה ועוף כך תורתו). (אחר בהמה חיה ועוף הה"ד זאת תורת הבהמה ואח"כ אשה כי תזריע.) This portion is placed within the context of separation and holiness before God.

In addition to this, we read the verses following the command of the woman who gives birth in *Vayikra / Leviticus 12:6-8*:

Vayikra / Leviticus 12:6-8

12:6 'When the days of her purification are completed, for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the doorway of the tent of meeting a one year old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. 12:7 'Then he shall offer it before the Lord and make atonement for her, and she shall be cleansed from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who bears a child, whether a male or a female. 12:8 'But if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean.' (NASB)

According to the Scriptures, there are two types of sacrifices required of a woman after she gave birth regardless of whether it was a boy or a girl; a whole burnt offering (Olah Korban) and a Sin offering (Khatat Korban). The first sacrifice is designated to sanctify the altar and the second is for sin. These things might be related to pregnancy, delivery, and new life since the baby would need to remain with the mother throughout this time period since he or she would need the mothers milk. Thus, the baby was also taking part in separation process after having been born.

The remainder of Parashat Tazria deals with the laws concerning Tsaraat (leprosy). The person stricken with Tsaraat must wait outside the camp and then undergo inspection by the priest. Following the careful inspection of the priest and the declaration the person stricken with Tsaraat has become clean, there is a procedure that is followed to complete the cleansing process. The blood is sprinkled seven times and he is pronounced clean. Following these things, the person who has been healed washes his

