

### NUMBERS

#### Lesson 6 - Chapter 5

We began to study Numbers 5 last week, and right away the subject of impure (unclean) persons and what to do with them arose. We saw 3 categories of unclean people listed (although there are more): the person with Tzara'at (skin disease), the person with a genital discharge, and the person defiled because they touched a human corpse. And all 3 of these were to be put outside the camp of Israel (meaning outside the Community of Believers) until the cause for their impurity cleared up. When, and if, it did clear up then a 7 day period of purification was performed after which that person could rejoin the community in good standing.

Now let me explain something that is terribly misunderstood: ritual uncleanness still exists in our day. Yeshua did NOT somehow universally do away with all uncleanness in this world. However He did make all of His Disciples clean. We are told when Christ was crucified that two fluids flowed out of Him: blood and water. His blood atoned for our sin; His Living water made us clean. Both fluids were necessary on our behalf. And as we find out in the Torah, atonement is NOT the same thing as ritual purification. Atonement is the PRICE paid for our sin; purification is the **removal** of the uncleanness CAUSED by that sin or some kind of contact with impurity.

Further; uncleanness will continue to exist in this world even until the New Heaven and the New Earth. The only place on this planet that uncleanness doesn't exist is in the heart of a Believer. Yet uncleanness CAN be re-introduced. **NAS1 Corinthians 5:9 I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; 10 I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. 11 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? 13 But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.**

Here we have Believers who have decided they CAN continue with unclean evils, and somehow it doesn't matter because they've accepted Yeshua. So, you argue, but this passage speaks of immorality and wickedness.....where does it say unclean? I have a question in return: do you think that Yeshua removed the uncleanness from wickedness and immorality! In other words would you advocate that with the crucifixion of Jesus He took the impurity out of sin? Yet, in an odd way, that is the implication of the traditional Church teaching on the subject

(although I think that is mainly because they don't know that there is a distinct Biblical difference between uncleanness and sin).

Hopefully by now you have learned in Torah that ALL wickedness is inherently unclean. ALL immorality is inherently unclean. Not because I say so but because God's Word says so.

Now listen to this passage describing the very last hours of man's history, as we know it, in Revelation. In other words this is a time still well in the future of our age.

**NAS Revelation 21:1 *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. 2 And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them,***

So we know we are talking about the time Revelation 21 is speaking, and it's after the current time we're in when the earth and heaven are being re-formed like at Creation.

Let's read a little more, understanding that the end of man's history has come and the Kingdom of God is fully in:

**NAS Revelation 21:25 *And in the daytime (for there shall be no night there) its gates shall never be closed; 26 and they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; 27 and nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.***

NOTHING UNCLEAN shall enter in.....

If unclean stopped existing about 30 A.D., when Yeshua died, then why is it that 60 years later the Revelator, John, wrote about uncleanness as still continuing to exist far into his future, even existing right up until the NEW Heaven and New Earth were being created, and the New Jerusalem has just descended?

Only gentile Bible scholars and teachers, uninterested in the Hebrew Scriptures, or The Torah, or Bible History, or Hebrew culture, want to put forward the Scripturally unsound idea that Jesus did away with uncleanness in this world. If He did then what's the difference between "the world" and us, as Believers? Jesus also came to SAVE the world didn't He? But is everyone saved? No; because salvation is in a certain sense a two way street....because the only part of the world that **can** be saved is that part which will give itself over to Him. The rest is NOT saved; the rest is marked for destruction. Same with uncleanness. He cleansed **us** His Believers from uncleanness. He didn't make the world's uncleanness, clean. He **atoned** for our sin.....He didn't do away WITH the world's sin.....yet. If He did how come evil men fly jet airplanes into tall buildings? How come men kidnap Christian Missionaries and saw their heads off? How come some Believers cheat on their spouses? Why do disciples of Yeshua still occasionally tell a lie, or say something hurtful, or behave in our own self-interest, or get angry because we don't get our way, or constantly seek to be served instead of serving? The Bible

defines every one of those things as sin and every sin as unclean. There is no such thing as a clean sin, just because the sin occurred in a Believer. Or did Christ take the uncleanness out of sin? Get it? And when we sin, we automatically introduce uncleanness into our lives. And uncleanness is incompatible with holiness....the holiness that lives within us.....Yehoveh.

Oh yes, Jesus can and did cleanse us, His followers. He can cleanse ANYBODY who trusts in Him. But don't think for a minute we can wallow and participate in uncleanness and not have our relationship with God negatively affected. Listen to Paul speaking to gentiles in this passage: **NAS Romans 11:19** *You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."* **20** *Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear;* **21** *for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you.* **22** *Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.*

This is a direct quid pro quo, with a threat. IF.....you continue in faith to God, THEN you will revel in His kindness. But.....IF you fall away, you WILL be cut off. Many NT passages echo this exact sentiment because this is just a basic restatement of the Torah with the newness of faith in Yeshua .....the long promised Messiah... added. Why would there be such a threat if that possibility didn't even exist? Does God make hollow threats?

We'll develop this more a little later; the point is that uncleanness still exists and you can be polluted by it ***if you seek after it*** and if you do not protect yourself, and the Lord who lives in your midst, from it. And should you become tainted by uncleanness it will, at the least, severely harm your relationship with Yehoveh.

So as we encounter the issues of uncleanness throughout the OT and as we will throughout the remainder of chapters 5 and 6 of Numbers, please don't turn your minds and hearts off to it; understand that it is an issue NOT only of ancient historical interest it is speaking to us, today. It is often said that what foolish general would not want to know the tactics of his enemy? We are being very blind and foolish when we think that we are utterly immune to the effects of uncleanness, and so we have no fear of it, because many think it honestly no longer exists. We have many inside and outside of the Church now preaching that even Evil doesn't exist. Our enemy, Satan, has convinced many NOT to fear God and His laws, and to not think that they have to strive to remain pure, despite Paul's, Peter's, even Yeshua's admonition never to think that way; in fact, Paul calls such thinking conceit.

This is NOT a call to return to following the Law in the sense that it is a laundry list of things to do to gain a saving righteousness before God. Rather this IS a call to recognize that danger remains, that the Torah gives us practices that when adhered to add blessing to our lives, reminds us of God's principles, and that sin and uncleanness remain and are an ever-present hazard to the Believer.

**RE-READ NUMBERS 5:5 - 10**

We are about to see some progressive revelation, here. Revelation that begins to introduce a principle that might have seemed to be an innovation of the New Testament **until we've studied Torah**; but as it turns out, it is not a NT concept at all.

We have just read the hypothetical case of a person who has committed some kind of crime or fraud against another person; AND then swore an oath to God that he had NOT done this thing. He lied to those charged with investigating the situation and He lied to God.

Up until this point in the Torah lying to God was classified as an intentional sin, and was a type for which atonement was either very expensive or not available at all. But, now, a momentous new dynamic is introduced: confession. What exactly is confession? It is declaring that you did indeed sin against God, and that it was wrong, and that you are repentant about it. In fact the word used in verse 7 that is almost always translated as "confess" is in Hebrew ***ve-hitvadu***.....it literally means, "declare". So what occurs here is that the straw man harms his fellow man, lies to God about it by swearing an oath that he is innocent, and then later declares the wrong he has done. Confess is not a mistranslation; but by using something closer to the original meaning, DECLARE, we see of just what the act of confession consists.

Here's the dynamic of confession: every sin is essentially unforgivable if it is not confessed. Because to NOT confess is (in the Torah way of thinking) to LIE to God. Lying to God is an intentional and High Handed sin, for which there is no atonement. By confessing you are no longer lying to God but instead agreeing with Him that you have trespassed. Now the sin can be atoned for. The thing is this: the condition of the heart is a priority even in the sacrificial system. An unrepentant man who offers a sacrifice is NOT forgiven. The sacrificial system was not a forgiveness vending machine. It was only efficacious for the one who confesses and repents.

The specific type of sacrifice dealt with here is the ***'asham***; the reparation offering. It is that kind of sacrifice designed for when a person breaks the law, injures another person (either bodily or materially), and now must pay a price. The price is: complete reparation to the individual harmed PLUS 20%. And the sinner must also bring a prescribed sacrifice to the priest for atonement. So when a crime is committed against another person the usual procedure is reparation to the injured party, plus a penalty to the injured party, plus a sacrifice of atonement....an expensive lesson. Wouldn't it be nice if that were possible today, in our society? A person vandalizes a school, they're caught, and then they must restore the school to its original state AND pay an additional penalty to the school. If they refused they become the property of the school. Of course I'm not advocating slavery per se, but is that really any worse than having your life and liberty removed and being put into a cage for months or years? Who benefits from that? Actually the innocent PAY for the criminals' livelihoods while behind bars. Wouldn't it be better for the criminal to have to put his life on hold, focus every hour of the day on making the victim whole PLUS a penalty, and then be freed of his obligation? As it is now we put a criminal in jail and he comes out worse than when he went in. And all the victim usually gets is the satisfaction of knowing that the criminal was punished.

Now on the occasion whereby the injured party was killed as a result, or time had passed and the person died of non-related causes, then the criminal STILL had to pay all the reparation to

the injured party's kin. If there was no living kin to pay it to then it all went to the priesthood. This was another innovation quite unique to the Hebrews. In other cultures and societies unclaimed property resulting from law breaking, or reparations for which there was no living kin, all went to the state.....the king. Here, by God's definition, He receives them by means of the priesthood.

From a purely practical standpoint what is happening is that about 600,000 men had been organized into an army, the Israeli army. And if there was constant bickering and using God's name in vein; and if there was no clear way to make peace with God and have harmony amongst themselves, the army would disintegrate. That is why in the NT this same principle is brought forward and used to explain how the Disciples of Yeshua are going to be able to function as a community for the Kingdom of God. It is expressed in Matthew in this way:

**NAS Matthew 5:23** *"If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.*

Let's re-read Numbers 5: 11-31

### RE-READ NUMBERS 5:11 - 31

THIS is interesting. It really seems out of place in the Bible in some ways yet here it is, and we have to deal with it.

These passages cover the issue of a man who suspects his wife of adultery. And in a very rare (for the Bible) narrative the precise words are prescribed that are to be spoken in the ritual to make the determination if the wife is guilty. While this sort of thing is quite normal in most of the Middle Eastern cultures, it is almost non-existent in the Holy Scriptures. Usually, just a broad outline for the ritual procedure is provided and the exact words of the oaths and prayers that might be used are left undefined. The lack of detail in the Torah of some of the ritual procedures is what the earliest Hebrew Traditions sought to remedy. So we must not assume that Hebrew Tradition is necessarily in error or in opposition to the Scriptures. Often Tradition is absolutely necessary to fill in missing pieces of how to conduct a worship service, or celebrate a Biblical festival, or perform a circumcision ceremony, etc.

Now just like the matter of what to do when a person commits a criminal act against someone and then lies to God about it, this matter of a man suspecting his wife of adultery must have been a reasonably common occurrence otherwise it's prominent place in Numbers makes no sense. As highly idealistic as the regulations and principles of Torah are they were also needed and practical. Suddenly thrusting 2 or 3 million people together in such extreme circumstances as they would have faced in the Wilderness, and under what must have been a pretty densely packed tent city with little privacy, in a culture where modesty was required but now was difficult to maintain, would have made the likelihood of men and women coming into human contact in ways that they shouldn't all the more tempting and probable. So methods of dealing with it and discouraging it had to be established.

Verse 12 says, "***if the man's wife has gone astray and broken faith with him***".....

Notice the parallel use of the term "breaking faith" when it came to lying to God just a few verses earlier, and then here in relation to suspected adultery between a man and his wife. Just as the Wilderness Tabernacle is the best possible (albeit limited) earthly and physical representation of the spiritual dwelling place of God, so is the primary purpose of marriage as the best possible earthly and physical representation of our spiritual relationship with God. This OT principle is again brought forward to the NT when we learn that we, as Believers, are the bride of Christ. **NAS Revelation 19:7** "***Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.***" Believers, of course, are often referred to as God's, Messiah's, bride.

Adultery is a topic that is covered at several points in the Bible. And this is because marriage is such an important model of God's relationship with mankind. But adultery was a common problem that began in just a few generations after Adam and Havah (Eve); those adulterous people were wiped out with the Great Flood, but then within a few generations of Noah adultery was once again all too common. Therefore all the ancient law codes that we've been fortunate to uncover (some going back to a time well before Abraham) contain laws and procedures regarding dealing with adultery, because even pagans recognized the danger that it presented to a society.

When we examine the Mari documents and the Law of Hammurabi and a few others of these ancient legal codes we find that adultery was dealt with not as a matter of crime and punishment, but kind of "off the books" as a religious/personal matter. It might surprise you to know that despite all the cavorting and fraternizing of the gods themselves, and all the infamous orgies between the gods and goddesses, adultery among humans was still considered wrong and a very serious matter. In fact, most of these cultures viewed adultery as an affront ***against the gods*** perhaps as much or more as an indiscretion of a husband against a wife or vice versa.

Most of the time, it was the wife being accused because these Middle Eastern cultures were male dominated. And most of the time the husband had the legal right to kill his wife if she was caught in the act and the husband chose to kill her. But apparently that didn't happen all that often; most times the husband did NOT kill his wife but merely divorced her or lowered her status among his other wives and concubines, or something like that.

With Israel however it was all quite different. Adultery WAS a crime. And it was as much a part of the law code as murder or theft. The law code of Leviticus made the ONLY viable penalty for adultery to be death. There was no option of mercy or a lesser sentence. Which is why these verses in Numbers are all the more difficult to deal with because the woman in this case will NOT be put to death even if she is found guilty.

I will tell you bluntly that most mainstream Jewish and Christian OT scholars say that Numbers 5 has undergone quite a bit of redaction; in fact it's practically unanimous. Yet most will also say that in the main what we read here in Torah does fall in line with the rest of Numbers and so this is NOT a chapter that was added later or modified to an extreme. Let's deal with the problem of why Leviticus is uncompromising that the adulterous wife MUST be executed; but

here in Numbers, the exact opposite occurs; the adulterous wife is not to be killed.

In Leviticus it is assumed that the wife has been caught in the act or the evidence against her is so overwhelming that there is no doubt whatsoever and so she has confessed. The key here is that men have witnessed it, the wife has admitted to it, so this is just a matter of men carrying out the law. There is no trial per se; there are not two sides to the story. Determining the truth is not at issue. It's a slam dunk.

But in Numbers 5 it is a different matter. Here we are told 4 different times that the husband was but suspicious or jealous. And that the wife claims innocence. So is to be done? Since the custom of the era was that adultery was a religious/personal matter and a husband could kill his wife if he was convinced that she cheated on him, and that the law would not prosecute him if he did, that likely happened quite a bit. Numbers 5 put a stop to it because these verses call for a trial by GOD. Since God was the only witness, then God had to decide. But how is the case to be presented to God, and how does He make His decision known to men? This was accomplished by means of a carefully defined water ordeal upon the woman, and then whatever happened to the woman over time as a result of the ritual indicated God's decision.

This is where things get pretty sticky, theologically. Magic or sacred water that someone drinks and then something either happens or doesn't happen to indicate guilt or innocence was standard pagan practice throughout even the most advanced cultures. Our own American Indians practiced it and it also was the basis of early American witch-hunts, whereby a suspected witch was placed on a dunking stool, plunged into water, and if she drowned she was guilty, and if she survived she was innocent. No doubt this same mindset and belief system played a role in the Golden Calf incident where the gold of the idol was ground up, placed in water, and suspected participants in constructing the idol had to drink it.

The water ordeal procedure found here in Numbers is almost identical with procedures found in law texts of other ancient cultures of that era. In a Middle Assyrian text is a law that reads... "They will draw water, drink, swear, and be pure." In a Mari document... "the dirt under the jamb of the gate of Mari they took and dissolved in water and then drank. Thus spoke Ea: 'swear to the gods'". This is awfully similar to what we read here in Numbers.

Further the basic framework for the Mari and Hammurabi codes involved a combination of a water-ordeal and an oath to be sworn. And basically the concept was that the accused person who then drank the magic water swore an oath to the gods and if they had done what they were accused of, then certain terrible things would spontaneously happen to their bodies as a result. And if those bad things did NOT happen, then it was proof of innocence.

Turn your Bibles to John Chapter 8.

### **READ JOHN 8:1-11**

Notice that something very different has occurred here concerning adultery. Rightly so the Pharisees said the Torah demanded death for this woman because she was subject to the Leviticus law that was about a woman caught in the act of adultery. That is WHY the statement

that she was "caught in the act" is so key; otherwise the law in Numbers 5 would have applied.....a law that does NOT allow a suspected, but unproved, act of adultery to be punished. But Yeshua says go and sin no more; I'll not condemn you.

Condemn doesn't mean to just find you guilty; it means to set out the punishment. It doesn't mean, like in our modern society, to declare before the whole world that what you did was wrong.....to stand and have the world shake its collective finger at you and humiliate you. The word "condemn" really means being assigned the death penalty. The CURSE of the Law is condemnation for disobedience. The Curse IS condemnation. Condemnation means receiving the death penalty. The curse of the Law isn't the Law itself; it's the death penalty that comes from violating the Law. Jesus was saying to the woman, "I hereby do not apply the death penalty to you even though you deserve it".

Now I often go out of my way to explain what pagan cultures did and how they thought, because I don't want to do what too many flustered Bible Scholars and Pastors do when they run into stuff like this water ordeal for the accused woman in the Bible: turn it into allegory and make the problem vanish in a truckload of really nice sounding Christian terms and phrases which, in the end, have nothing in the world to do with what was actually going on. We are seeing in Numbers 5 the echoes of ancient and pagan practices among the Hebrews; in this case it's about trying to determine guilt or innocence of this woman suspected of adultery. I've told you on several occasions that if we're going to understand what is happening in the Bible then we have to take it in the context of the people, culture, and times it was written. And these Israelite people while being DECLARED holy by Yehoveh, and being set-apart by Yehoveh for service to Him, were thoroughly pagan in their ways and customs and thinking. Now this revelation may upset Jews and Christians alike, but such is the case and the Bible constantly speaks to it and the Prophets are constantly warning Israel to stop it!

I want to remind you that God Himself made it clear that He didn't choose Israel because they were more a faithful people (they weren't), or because they shunned other gods (they didn't), or because they behaved in more civilized ways, or were inherently kinder than most..... (none of which would aptly describe Israel).....He chose Israel for His own good reasons (which He has not shared with mankind), not because of any merit on their part. And, if we're honest about it, Yehoveh typically chose people who were the least likely to succeed, not those with the greatest fortitude or inner strength. It's the same thing for we Believers in Yeshua; we were just as pagan and weak and prone to evil as anybody else, but He allowed us into the Kingdom and into service to Him, anyway, because we agreed with Him on ONE issue: Jesus Christ.

And just as most of the ancient Hebrews continued to behave in as pagan a way as their neighbors even though they had personally witnessed the incredible miracles and presence of God and had agreed to follow Torah, so do a lot of Christians accept Christ but other than showing up for Church on Sundays generally continue in their same lifestyles and make the same kinds of decisions, and look exactly like the world, the remaining 6 days and 23 hours each week.

This is why we need to take the Scriptures in total and accept them as they are. They tell the truth, the unvarnished truth, and sometimes the truth isn't nice and neat or pretty or what we

had hoped it might be. But just as God used the extreme and evil decadence of the Roman Empire as a tool to spread the Gospel after Yeshua's death and resurrection.....and just as He currently uses America's wicked out-of-control infatuation with wealth and materialism and self to fund missionaries and do other works for the good of His Kingdom.... He also used the ancient Hebrews' complicity and closeness to paganism to achieve His purposes. God has always used men's evil for good. After all Yehoveh has only ever had ONE perfect tool to work with on planet earth.....Yeshua; all the rest of us are defective and probably ought to be returned for refund.

So let's rapidly review this water-ordeal for the woman suspected of adultery....the ritual goes like this:

1. Her jealous husband brings the suspected wife to a Priest, along with an offering of barley.
2. The woman is taken by the Priest and placed in front of the Tabernacle, which is what is meant by bringing her "before the Lord"
3. The Priest puts Holy Water into a special container, and dust from the Tabernacle floor is mixed in with it
4. The Priest hands the woman the barley and unbinds her hair.
5. The Priest then stands before the woman while holding the Holy Water vessel and recites an oath, and the woman agrees to the provisions of the oath by saying "Amen, amen".
6. The Priest next writes down the oath he just pronounced, and then washes the freshly inked letters off the surface into the same vessel that holds the Holy Water and dust.
7. The barley the woman has been holding is taken back from the woman by the Priest and presented to Yehoveh as a burnt offering on the Altar.
8. Now the woman drinks the mixture of Holy Water, dust, and ink.
9. Certain things happen to the woman if she is guilty. Nothing happens if she is innocent.

The "certain things" that are to happen to a guilty woman are a little bit masked because Hebrew idioms are used. The Scripture says that if she is guilty, her "thigh will sag and her belly will swell". Our CJB has the meaning a little better in focus: her reproductive organs will shrivel up. Thigh is a Hebrew idiom for genitals.....male or female.

Actually this makes all kinds of sense. In an act of adultery, by using her genitals the woman has sinned, therefore it is her genitals that will bear the punishment. What this amounts to is that if she is pregnant from the affair the baby will die; and if she is not pregnant she will become barren for the rest of her life. Let me be clear: no human is doing anything physically to this woman to cause her to abort her child or to become sterile. This mixture of water, dust and ink is not poisonous...and it does not cause harm (although it probably doesn't taste very good). Rather the end result is a supernatural judgment of God, the elements of which are wrapped up in the ritual and the water concoction she'll drink.

What can be difficult for people of our era to understand is the devastation a woman of that era felt by becoming barren. It was the female equivalent of a male becoming emasculated.....being made a eunuch. A barren woman has lost her value as a human being

because bearing children had everything to do with the spirit or essence of the father continuing on (in some mysterious and undefined way) in his son after the father died. Children were even a means to, and measure of, wealth, because the more children you had the more work could be done to the benefit of the family. And since the work was usually either tending crops or animals, more children usually meant more land could be cultivated and more animals could be cared for. A son was essential for passing forward the authority and name of the clan. For a woman to fail in her duty to bring new life into the world was the ultimate humiliation and an open rebuke from God..... not simply a sad episode to her life that in time she would deal with.

In the end because it was assumed that a woman was barren because God cursed her, she was often of lower status than the other women, and socially shunned.

So for God to pronounce guilt on the woman suspected of Adultery by making her reproductive organs unusable was perhaps second in magnitude only to death for her. We'll continue next week by comparing this with the story of the woman accused of adultery and brought by some Pharisees to Jesus to see what He does about it.