

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Master of Divinity

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF THE STATE OF WOMAN'S IMPURITY (LEVITICUS 15) AND ITS APPLICATION TO THE WOMEN OF PRINCE OF PEACE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH, DANSOMAN, GHANA

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Date Completed: May 2022

The purpose of this study was to investigate the applicability of the concept of woman's impurity during a menstruation period in modern settings and develop recommendations on how to address the debatable issues related to this concept at Prince of Peace Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church, Dansoman, Ghana. After a presentation of some ancient Near East, Greco-Roman, and Jewish backgrounds, the study looked at purity and impurity issues in the Old and New Testaments. I arrived at the conclusion that ritual or ceremonial purity or impurity, especially as relating to women during menstruation, should not be observed today.

The objectives that motivated the study were to investigate why some church members felt and believed that the menstruating woman was impure and could not partake in religious activities. What was the rationale for prohibiting the woman in her menses from approaching her Lord? This study investigated and brainstormed on the

type of understanding required to prevent such thoughts that the Old Testament concept of impurity is not applicable to women in a modern setting. This is a historical, biblical, and theological study. Many have written on the topic of purity and impurity, but the researcher narrowed the study to the woman during her menstruation. The study concludes that now that the temple no longer exists so is the issue of purity and impurity. To the Lord, what mattered most was the cleanness and purity of the heart. The study recommends that members of the Prince of Peace SDA Church continue to have a biblical study on the issue of purity and impurity.

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A project

presented in partial fulfillment
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Dedicated to my wonderful wife Sarah Twum-Barimah
and my children Ethan Twum-Barimah,
Edward Twum-Barimah, and Ellen
White Twum-Barimah

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank God for sustaining me during all these years of study. I give Him all the glory, praise, and adoration. Secondly, I want to thank my dear wife and children for their support during all those sleepless nights of study. I also want to thank Dr. Nathan Odonkor for introducing the Master of Divinity programme to me when I received the call into the ministry. Thirdly, I want to thank Pastor Frederick Attuah for all the pastoral support. I am eternally grateful to Professor Davidson Razafiarivony, who was more than a lecturer, adviser, and mentor. I pray that the good Lord bless you in all you do and that you soar to new heights. Professor, you are indeed a Christian. Lastly, I also want to thank Professor Feliks Poniowski for his immense contribution to this work. He opened my eyes to very crucial thoughts. Thank you very much, sir.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In Ghana, menstruation is associated with procreation, providing women with the ability to create children. On the other hand, it is said to produce potentially contaminating substances that can hurt others, especially men.¹ In the Ghanaian setting, the perception of menstruation can be divided into two categories: positive and negative. Menstruation, according to the positive paradigm, represents the female's fertility and societal acceptance, particularly among adolescents. Menstruation is viewed as filthy, repulsive, and polluted according to the negative model.²

Menstrual taboo is biblical and not based on some perception, values, or attitude.³ As Kiuchi opines, the sanitary approach and the symbolic approach, which sees the idea of “death” as fundamental to the rule, both need mention.⁴ The ancient purification ceremonies, as well as the exclusion of women from participating in the sanctuary services, both arise, in part, from this idea of separating the holy from the

¹Pranee R. Liamputtong, “Being a Woman: The Social Construction of Menstruation among Hmong,” in *The Hmong of Australia: Culture and Diaspora*, eds. Nicholas Tapp and Gary Yia Lee (Australia: Australia National University Press, 2010), 154, accessed 11 February 2022, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/j.ctt24h7r3.9>.

²Kofi Agyekum, “Menstruation as a Verbal Taboo among the Akan,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 58, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 367, accessed 13 February 2022, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3631182>.

³Ibid., 368.

⁴Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *Leviticus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 38.

unclean.⁵ By the Talmudic period, ritual purity had become a private domain of sexual life and a primary preoccupation of women, rather than a category related to public life and cultic activity.⁶

The issue of purity and impurity has been under discussion since time immemorial. The debate is still going on in many quarters of the world. Cleanness is represented by purity, which is the absence of dirt, stain, or soil.⁷ As things stand, those who suffer from these evils are considered impure.⁸ The ancient people of the world addressed the issue of purity and impurity with some form of purification. During ancient times, some uncleanness was associated with dead bodies, bodily discharges such as menstruation and emission from men, and childbirth.

This practice has led many to look down on women as subservient, inferior and especially during their monthly period of blood flow. This is very prevalent in many churches across the continent. Traditional communities have long accepted the significance of menstruation and have isolated women during their period either by placing a limit on their activities or restricting them through isolation.⁹ This practice has led to some women absenting themselves from church services during their

⁵A. D. Frimpong, "Purity and Impurity: Menstruation and Its Impact on the Role of Akan Women in the Church," (PhD diss., Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, 2011), 12.

⁶Beth S. Wenger, "Mitzvah and Medicine: Gender, Assimilation, and the Scientific Defense of 'Family Purity,'" *Jewish Social Studies* 5, no. 1/2 (1999): 179, accessed 11 February 2022, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/4467548>.

⁷Harold J. Stukeley, "Purity in Fifth and Fourth Century Religion," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 67 (1936), 286, accessed 17 August 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/283242>. Purity is regularly associated with whiteness and brightness and the absence of filth. Here it deals with what is pure, undefiled, anything black is considered impure. It deals more with the "absence of" more than the "presence of" something. Once the "evil" is absent then it is pure and clean.

⁸*Ibid.*, 286.

⁹Brian M. du Toit, 'Menstruation: Attitudes and Experience of Indian South Africans,' *Ethnology* 27, no. 4 (1988): 394, accessed 13 February 2022, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3773400>.

period. The rationale behind these taboos is premised on varying interpretations of a chain of circumstances.¹⁰ A survey of 44 communities by Montgomery identified five kinds of menstrual taboos observed:

1. The discharge during menstruation is considered unpleasant, unclean, or potentially harmful.
2. Individuals who are menstruating are prohibited from engaging in sexual intercourse.
3. Menstruating individuals face personal limitations such as food restrictions and restrictions on movement and communication.
4. Menstruating individuals are prohibited from touching or using objects that are associated with men, including personal belongings, weapons, tools used in farming and fishing, craft tools, crops cultivated by men, and religious symbols and shrines that are guarded by men.
5. Menstruating individuals are not allowed to prepare meals for men.¹¹

In many instances, bleeding women were consigned to menstruation huts.¹²

These perceptions, among others, are based on the fact that blood is considered a powerful cultural symbol.¹³ It is believed that menstrual blood and other discharges are symbols of impurity.¹⁴ Handling the purification of the body reflects external and

¹⁰du Toit, 'Menstruation,' 394.

¹¹Rita E. Montgomery, "A Cross-Cultural Study of Menstruation, Menstrual Taboos, and Related Social Variables," *Ethos* 2, no. 2 (1974):137, accessed 13 February 2022, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/639905>.

¹²Gloria Steinern, *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* (New York: National Organization for Women Press, 1986), 366.

¹³Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing, 1969), 79.

¹⁴Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 35.

internal threats to the social structure. Kitahara has advocated that, there is a relationship between menstrual taboos and hunting, in that it is believed that menstrual odor negatively affects the hunting spree.¹⁵

The impurity of women during their menstruation has been accepted and practiced throughout many cultures around the world. It cuts across race, caste, belief systems, and gender, among others. One can say that impurity and its corresponding negative reactions have caused many people to take some decisions that they would otherwise have resented. Understanding the emergence of early Christianity requires a thorough understanding of the relationship between ritual purity and moral purity.¹⁶

The church is not spared by the issue. During a Bible study, there was a discussion on the issue of clean and unclean animals, and this brought up the issue of the impurity of the woman during her menstruation. One of the members suggested that the old system of separating the menstruant should be applied in this situation. The other group argued that the practice was no longer needed and was outmoded and out-of-date. Some women in the church at the time expressed their feelings about the impurity of the woman. Also at one event, an elder announced that any woman in her period was to excuse the gathering.¹⁷ Many deaconesses are prevented from officiating during this cycle, while others are excluded from taking part in baptisms. In some instances, some women actually believe they are unclean during their

¹⁵M. Kitahara, "Menstrual Taboos and the Importance of Hunting," *American Anthropologists* 84, no. 4 (1982): 901, accessed 13 February 2022, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/676505.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ac24ad41ea429fd34ae90db4a27575bed&ab_segments=&origin=.

¹⁶Eyal Regev, "Moral Impurity and the Temple in Early Christianity in light of Ancient Greek Practice and Qumran Ideology," *The Harvard Theological Review* 97, no. 4 (2004): 383, accessed 17 August 2017, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/harvard-theological-review/article/moral-impurity-and-the-temple-in-early-christianity-in-light-of-ancient-greek-practice-and-qumranic-ideology/13B76C67B879625BF26C5AF654D404F6>.

¹⁷Gertrude D. Buck, "Healing Story: A Bold Woman in the Crowd," *Consensus* 27, no. 2 (2001): 13, accessed 11 February 2022, <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol27/iss2/2>.

menstrual period, and this has become very normal with them as they do not feel discriminated against. Many women are gradually losing their spiritual stability because of the purity/impurity issue. They are viewed as unclean or impure during this period. This project paper seeks to find a solution to this issue.

Statement of the Problem

The issue is that there is no consensus among church members and perhaps Bible scholars as well as to how the biblical prohibition against women during their impure period can be applied in modern society. The effects of the consideration that women are impure during menstruation are manifested in various spheres. In some places, men do not sleep in the same beds as their wives during their menstruation period. Many women are excluded or exempted from participating in Church sacraments because they are in their menstrual period. Many people have an obscure view on this issue, and this seems to divide the church.

Purpose of the Study

The goal of this study was to look into how the concept of a woman's impurity during her menstruation was understood in the Ancient Near East and the Bible. A biblical perspective on the misunderstood concept of the impurity of women in the church was presented. The researcher inquired whether ritual or ceremonial purity or impurity, especially as relating to women during menstruation, should still be observed today and how that can address the issue in the Prince of Peace Church.

Significance of the Study

Many have written on the general notion of purity and impurity.¹⁸ However, what has been written on the subject of the purity of women during their menstruation and how to efficiently deal with it in the church, is lacking. That is the major contribution of this research.

Scope of Study

The concept of purity and impurity is a broad topic, but I have limited my study to the purity of a woman during her menstruation. This is very prevalent in many cultures in Africa. In Ghana, it is practiced unconsciously in the cities but clearly enforced in the rural areas of the countryside. Because people are influenced by their cultural values, with some biblical teaching seemingly supporting it, the question of the impurity of women during their menstruation has entered the church.

Methodology and Procedure

This study analyses the concept of impurity in the Bible. This Master of Divinity project uses multiple methodologies, as the methodological approach for each of the following chapters reveals: Chapter 1 introduces the concept of impurity;

¹⁸Jonathan Klawans has written on impurity and sin in ancient Judaism: Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Jacob Neuser has written on the idea of purity in ancient Judaism: Jacob Neuser, "The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 43 (March 1975):15-26, accessed 26 August 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1460731.pdf>. Friedrich Joachim Quack has also written on purity in the ancient Near East: Friedrich Joachim Quack, "Conceptions of Purity in Egyptian Religion," in *Purity and the Forming of Religious Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean World and Ancient Judaism*, eds. Christian Frevel and Christophe Nihan Christian Frevel and Christophe Nihan (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 158-215, accessed 25 August 2017, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.1163/j.ctv2gjnwr2.9.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ae912096912c214a63fcf627db2d6a4e5&ab_segments=&origin=. In addition to these scholars is Liora Ravid who has written on purity and impurity in the books of Jubilees: Liora Ravid, "Purity and Impurity in the Book of Jubilees," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 1 (April 2002): 13-20, accessed 23 August 2019, <http://jss.sagepub.com/content/13/1/61>. Davidson Razafiarivony has written on purity and Impurity in the Church: Davidson Razafiarivony, "The Concept of Purity/Impurity in the Church," in *Culture, Adventist Theology, and Mission in Africa*, ed. Sampson M. Nwaomah, Ericks Galenieks, and Davidson Razafiarivony (Nairobi, Kenya: Only Creative 2019), 168-197.

Chapter 2 analyzes the concept of impurity in the ancient Near East, the Greco-Roman world, and the Jewish people. Chapter 3 analyzes the issue of impurity in the Old Testament, purification and rectification, and in the New Testament. Chapter 4 discusses the issue of purity and impurity, particularly impurity of women during menstruation in the church and, more specifically, at the Prince of Peace Church, and how to deal with it. The last chapter concludes the whole discussion on the subject and then presents recommendations and practical suggestions.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUNDS ON PURITY AND IMPURITY

Ancient Near East

The ancient Mesopotamians held the belief that the gods exerted both positive and negative influences on the visible world, affecting every aspect of life.¹ Stefan Maul observed that in the theistic worldview of the ancient Orient, there was no room for chance or randomness. Instead, everything was seen as an expression of the divine will, constantly manifesting itself in the world.² The physical realm was regarded as a reflection of the gods' intentions, and understanding it required acknowledging this context.³ The society had various codes of conduct, including lists of revered or forbidden animals, as well as restrictions on individuals experiencing taboo conditions resulting from physical events like skin diseases, menstruation, or sexual activity.⁴

There were numerous sources of impurity, and the act of purification was a broad effort aimed at eliminating impurity in any manifestation.⁵ Ancient people

¹Laura Morrow, "Israelite Ritual Law Concerning the Menstruant in Context: Embodiment and Meaning in Ancient Mesopotamia and Ancient Israel," in *Searching the Scriptures: Andrews University Seminary Emerging Scholars Pay Tribute to Their Professors*, ed. Slaviša Janković (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2017), 47, accessed 5 March 2022, <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/papers/7>.

²Stefan M. Maul, "Divination Culture and the Handling of the Future," in *The Babylonian World*, ed. Gwendolyn Leick (New York: Routledge, 2007), 362.

³Morrow, "Israelite Ritual Law," 47.

⁴Karel van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia: A Comparative Study* (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1985), 23.

⁵David P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), 248.

regarded women who were menstruating and women who had given birth as unclean, and women who were menstruating were considered dangerous.⁶

In the Mesopotamian context, impurity was classified into two categories: the first pertained to everyday life, while the second was associated with the violation of a taboo.⁷ This notion of purity and impurity was prevalent among the nations in the ancient Near East. When a taboo is transgressed, some rituals are performed and purification is done.⁸ It can be concluded that the Ancient Near East nations were concerned about the purity and impurity of their citizens. The impurity of a woman could be a physical but involuntary condition during her menstruation.⁹

During this time, she is considered impure and thus reclusive. This exclusion is to prevent contamination of her environment. The environment includes physical items, people, and places.¹⁰ The menstruants were considered impure during these times and were excluded from religious activities until the days of menstruation were over and purity rites were undertaken.

The priests held the responsibility for establishing and upholding the regulations of purity. They were regarded as the most knowledgeable and wise individuals in this regard.¹¹ The temples were considered the purest in the Ancient

⁶William E. Phipps, "The Menstrual Taboo in the Judeo-Christian Tradition," *Journal of Religion and Health* 19, no. 4 (1980): 298, accessed 25 August 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27505592>.

⁷Michael Guichard and Lionel Marti, "Purity in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Paleo-Babylon and Neo-Assyrian Periods," in *Purity and the Forming of Religious Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean World and Ancient Judaism*, eds. Christian Frevel and Christophe Nihan (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 49.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., 55.

Near East. The gods of the sky and the earth guaranteed the rites of purification and the kings were considered the purifiers.¹² In the Ancient Near East, “a young woman menstruating was regarded as a serious source of impurity.”¹³ “Women living in the palace of Mari had to periodically leave the palace.”¹⁴ To avoid spreading the impurity, the woman had to leave her home and return after her period was finished.

Purity in the Temple

Temples in the Ancient Near East had limited access.¹⁵ No man entered the temple apart from the priest/prophet.¹⁶ The rules of purity were “applied, determined, and maintained by the priest or prophet.”¹⁷ The presence of the temple reminded the people of their spiritual needs and brought them closer to whatever they believed in. All who came to the temple must have ensured that they were ritually clean and pure. The priests were obviously considered the purest of all men and were to lead the way to spiritual cleanliness. The priest thereby ensured that they, together with their people, were ceremonially clean. The priests were persons who were mandated to intercede on behalf of the people, and they were considered the intermediaries for the gods. The priests ministered to the people and were responsible for their spiritual well-being. Quake states that the king or priest was the epitome of purification. He can decide who is clean or not; that is the pharaoh’s prerogative, as he is the standard by which all are made clean. As some point he can declare a person clean or

¹²Guichard and Marti, “Purity in Ancient Mesopotamia,” 72.

¹³Ibid., 74.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., 79.

¹⁶Ibid., 72.

¹⁷Ibid., 55.

unclean.¹⁸ This led to a number of rules and systems being made, in order to maintain the purity of the citizenry.

Impurity of Menstruating Woman in Ancient Near East

Every ritual ablution was performed in each home. No unclean water was thrown in the city.¹⁹ The streets were filled with water after washing the clothes and undergoing the ablution. It was customary for the feet of respectable people to be washed on returning home.²⁰ This is because these people may have stepped on impurities in the city and streets. And washing one's feet was the ritual purification from such impurities. Other times it could result from spitting in the streets as well.

One of the prominent nations in the Ancient Near East was Ancient Egypt. It was a place where religion and purity were highly valued. Since time immemorial, they have upheld issues of purity both at home and abroad. The citizens were therefore highly religious and left nothing to chance. Egypt, like other ANE nations, considered impurity as a result of many life related issues, these include childbirth, menstrual period for the women, touching of the corpses, touching of the knife that has been made impure. There were series of rituals a person who had been made unclean or impure would be subjected to before being made clean again.

The woman during her menstruation was a major source of impurity in the Ancient Near Eastern nations. Menstruation was commonly described as a "period of purification," which could suggest a condition of impurity.²¹ Naturally, menstruating

¹⁸Quack, "Conceptions of Purity in Egyptian Religion," 215.

¹⁹Guichard and Marti, "Purity in Ancient Mesopotamia," 75.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Barbara Watterson, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (Stroud, UK: Sutton, 1991), 84.

women did not come close to the dwelling places of the gods.²² “The great wall in Nippur had a metal door called the big door of the impure. This building housed menstruants who lived in the palace undergoing ritual ablution or purification. The woman was required to wash symbolically outside the town.”²³

The Egyptians, among many other Eastern nations, considered menstruation a major source of impurity. The young woman was to recluse herself during this period until the period of menstruation was over and purification rites, or ablution, were done. Women who lived in palaces were required to leave and relocate to a location designated for them. But largely, most women stayed at home during this time. The rites included washing one’s self and clothes. Having purified oneself, she then accepted and was welcomed back into society.

According to Babylonian beliefs, any man who came into contact with a menstruating or impure woman would become impure for a period of six days.²⁴ Additionally, during the Middle Assyrian period, a decree was issued stating that the king's wives were not allowed to approach him while menstruating, as this would compromise his sacred purity and prevent him from making offerings to the gods.²⁵ Marsman suggests that deities and their sanctuaries were considered pure and sacred spaces, and thus should not be contaminated by substances or individuals from the realm of impurity.²⁶

²²Watterson, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, 74.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Hennie J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East* (Boston, UK: Brill, 2003), 487; also Karel van der Toorn, *From Her Cradle to Her Grave: The Role of Religion in the Life of the Israelite and Babylonian Woman* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1994), 435.

²⁵Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 487.

²⁶Ibid.

Summary

The impurity of woman during her menstruation in the Ancient Near East was a major concern. The peoples in that region took this issue rather seriously.

Purity and Impurity in the Greco-Roman World

Polytheistic System of Worship

The ancient Greeks were deeply religious and worshipped a multitude of gods, each associated with different aspects of life.²⁷ They had a diverse pantheon where deities were assigned specific roles and responsibilities. For instance, Hera presided over marriage, Ares represented war, Hephaestus governed fire and craftsmanship, Artemis was the goddess of the hunt and aided women in childbirth, Dionysus was associated with wine, and Poseidon ruled over the sea, earthquakes, and horses. Athena was revered for her connection to crafts and domestic arts, Hades was the god of the underworld, and Zeus held the highest position as the supreme deity.²⁸ The Greeks categorized their deities into three groups: the Olympian gods, associated with the sky, the chthonic or earth deities linked to the earth, and the heroes, revered as powerful beings who bridged the gap between gods and mortals.²⁹ Rituals were an integral part of Greek religious practices, with prayers and libations offered to the household gods every morning and evening, and wine poured as a libation before each meal.³⁰

²⁷David E. Aune, *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 24.

²⁸Davidson Razafiarivony, class notes for NTST 620 New Testament Background to Early Christianity, Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi, Kenya, June 2017.

²⁹Aune, *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*, 24.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 26.

Greek Influence

The Romans were Hellenised by the Greeks by adopting their culture, language and lifestyle. Many cultures of the world adopted the Greek lifestyle. People learned their philosophy and thinking, tradition and system of worship. They basically “westernised” the existing world. Both the Greeks and the Romans were religious and offered sacrifices to their gods after various degrees of blessings while offering animals.³¹ Greco-Roman religion was “polytheistic so it was tolerant of other gods and goddesses, the more the safer.”³²

In the Greco-Roman world, gods and goddesses and their abodes were given the utmost level of cleanliness and, as a result, shielded from any “conceivable source of contamination.”³³ The temple priests were regarded as the cleanest of men and were required to adhere strictly to the laws of cleanliness and impurity.³⁴

Purity and Impurity Practiced

What kind of purity and impurity were practiced in the Greco-Roman world? Pregnant women, breast feeding mothers were not permitted to enter the temple, because they believed women were ritually unclean after childbirth. Now visitors to the temple of Athena were clear on this: “Whoever wishes to visit the temple of the

³¹Aune, *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*, 24.

³²Davidson Razafiarivony, power point presentation for NTST 620 New Testament Backgrounds to Early Christianity Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi, Kenya, June 2017. In this presentation, he said that if one leaves a god or goddess out during thanksgiving could result in severe calamities. Most people thereby prefer the term to the unknown god, thereby including all known and unknown; this makes one safe, and is preserved from the anger of the gods and goddesses.

³³A. M. Shah, “Purity, Impurity, Untouchability: Then and Now,” *Sociological Bulletin* 56 no. 3 (September-December 2007): 355, accessed on 11 August 2017, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23620634>.

³⁴Ibid.

goddess, whether a resident of the city or anyone else. The same prohibition applies to contact with the dead and with the delivery of a woman in childbirth.”³⁵

It was believed that women in their menstrual period should not cook or serve until their period of uncleanness was past. Women became unclean after childbirth. It was taboo to sleep with a woman during her menstrual cycle.³⁶ But, the Greco-Romans distinctly carried on the credence in moral impurity as well. It was essential for the observance of moral purity in its customs and belief systems.³⁷ They were aware of moral impurity, which resulted from a sinful situation.³⁸ When one commits sin as in stealing, lying, bearing false witness and killing, he or she becomes morally unclean.

Purification

“Sacrifices, ablutions, and other ceremonies could remove impurities.”³⁹ Impurities in ordinary life demanded a time of seclusion, and also from ceremonies.⁴⁰ It was a common practice for a person to have his bath after returning from a funeral to remove any form of impurities. It was also believed that one could become clean after bringing a sacrifice to the temple and giving it to the priests. They also practiced some form of ablution to prevent evil and mishaps around them. After the woman’s period of menstruation, she became clean again and could resume normal activities.

³⁵Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 187.

³⁶Shah, “Purity, Impurity, Untouchability,” 356.

³⁷Regev, “Moral Impurity and the Temple,” 386.

³⁸Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism*, 83.

³⁹Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 187.

⁴⁰Ibid., 188.

Purity and Impurity of Woman in the Greco-Roman World

In the Grecian world, the woman never occupied the high place, and she was not held in high honour,⁴¹ though the position of a woman is better than that of her Roman compatriots, and she was as powerful as her husband.⁴² However, women were not admitted to most civic cults.⁴³ Her husband could make a sacrifice on her behalf.⁴⁴

A woman could not keep her hair unloosed. A woman who has given birth cannot enter the temple even where women are allowed.⁴⁵ One can make an inference from the inscription at the entrance to the temple, which menstruants were not permitted in the temple.⁴⁶ The menstruants could resume normal activities after the period of menstruation and purification they underwent.⁴⁷

Summary

The Greco-Romans were highly religious and therefore took the laws on purity very seriously. For the Greco-Romans, every emission was a source of impurity. These include childbirth and emissions from men and women. These laws were so important to them that they were boldly displayed on the entrance to the temple. Menstruation was regarded as a serious source of impurities in the Greco-

⁴¹S. Angus, *The Environment of Early Christianity* (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1915), 44.

⁴²Ibid., 45.

⁴³Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 187.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Razafiarivony, class notes for NTST 620 New Testament Backgrounds to Early Christianity, June 2017.

Roman world. The menstruant was forced to isolate herself from the public and abstain from all ceremonies. This would prevent the spread of her defilement. This belief system reduced the woman in the Greco-Roman world to domestic attendant.

Purity and Impurity in the Jewish World

The Jewish laws concerning purity and impurity, which encompass the laws regarding menstruation known as *hilkhot niddah*, were regarded by the Jewish people as obligatory statutes. Jonah Steinberg highlights Moses Ben Maimon's assertion that these laws fall under the category of *hukkim*, which are divine rules that are not easily understood by human intellect. Ben Maimon emphasizes that the laws of cleanliness and impurity are explicitly prescribed in the scriptures and should be observed accordingly, as they are beyond the realm of human assessment.⁴⁸ There are many rules governing menstruation, and these are the most frequent *halakhic* (legal) queries addressed to Orthodox rabbis.⁴⁹ Discussions on purity have been on-going for more than a millennium, as Moore suggests.⁵⁰ Issues of menstruation have been on the forefront for a long time. Palpable danger, repugnant, and accompanying fear are the principal markers of Jewish thought surrounding menstruation.⁵¹

The Pentateuchal code stipulates that a woman who is menstruating is unclean, and that any items or people she touches would also be unclean as a result.⁵² Within

⁴⁸Jonah Steinberg, "From a 'Pot of Filth' to a 'Hedge of Roses' (And Back): Changing Theorizations of Menstruation in Judaism," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 13, no. 2 (Fall, 1997), 5, accessed 12 February 2022, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25002311>.

⁴⁹Ibid., 10.

⁵⁰Barrington Moore, *Moral Purity and Persecution in History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 132.

⁵¹Moore, *Moral Purity and Persecution in History*, 11.

⁵²Steinberg, "From a 'Pot of Filth,'" 8.

the Jewish community, individuals afflicted with leprosy, both men and women experiencing abnormal discharges, and those who have come into contact with a dead body are prohibited according to the Levitical code from entering the holy space of the Temple.⁵³ Purity was of the utmost significance during this time in the Temple and around people and items headed there.⁵⁴ Historian of Rabbinism, Shaye Cohen opines that “the holy and profane worlds were clearly separated in Jerusalem as long as the Temple was standing.”⁵⁵

Menstrual Taboo

Taboo can be defined as “a system of placing prohibitions and restrictions on certain acts” and actions in a given society.⁵⁶ The concept of menstrual taboo is derived from biblical teachings and is understood based on the specific instructions provided by the Lord.⁵⁷ There are multiple factors that contribute to the perception of menstruation as taboo. Within Jewish culture, menstruation is seen as a contaminating discharge that diminishes the strength of a woman. It is believed that this contamination and weakening can be transmitted to a male partner and, in extreme cases, may even result in the man's demise.⁵⁸ According to Buckley and Gottlieb, scholars who study different cultures have documented instances where menstrual

⁵³Steinberg, “From a ‘Pot of Filth,’” 9.

⁵⁴Shaye Cohen, “Purity and Piety: The Separation of Menstruants from Sancta,” in *Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue*, eds. Susan Grossman and Rivka Haut (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1992), 106.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Agyekum, “Menstruation as a Verbal Taboo,” 370.

⁵⁷Ibid., 368.

⁵⁸Ibid., 369.

blood and menstruating women are perceived as potentially harmful or objectionable by the communities they have studied.⁵⁹

It can be deduced that the universal perception of menstruation as a taboo exists, with a notable emphasis among the Jewish community, although the specific interpretation and intensity of this belief may vary.⁶⁰ Within the Jewish community, ritual impurity was incurred when individuals came into contact with deceased bodies, experienced menstrual bleeding, had nocturnal emissions, or contracted leprosy.⁶¹ The act of immersing in a ritual bath, known as a mikvah, offered a method for individuals, regardless of gender, to transition from a state of ritual impurity to one of purity.

Later Purity Practice

During the period of the Talmud, purity practice had come to an end, and it was associated with public life and cultic practice; it had become a matter of private sexual life and a primary concern of women.⁶²

Purity/Impurity of Woman in the Jewish World

According to the book of Leviticus, a woman would experience ritual impurity for a duration of seven days while menstruating, and sexual activity was prohibited during this time. The rabbis later extended the period of sexual separation to 12 days, specifying at least a five-day menstrual period followed by seven subsequent “clean”

⁵⁹T. Buckley and A. Gottlieb, eds, *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 53.

⁶⁰Agyekum, “Menstruation as a Verbal Taboo,” 374.

⁶¹Wenger, “Mitzvah and Medicine,” 176.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 179.

days.⁶³ According to biblical guidelines, a woman in the state of menstruation is deemed impure, and it is forbidden for a man to have any physical contact with her.⁶⁴

In the Middle Ages, the arrangements of Jewish law, the rabbinic debarments on women during menstruation and the days afterward, evolved to include the following, for example: “When she anticipates the beginning of her period, a wife must let her husband know. Husband and wife are not allowed to contact each other or transmit items between them while they are menstruating, not even through an intermediary object. They are not allowed to share a bed or a movable chair without a barrier between them. To remind the couple of the wife's state at the dinner table during the menstrual cycle, some evident divergence from custom (such as a change in seating arrangements or place settings) must be made.

The husband is restricted from various actions involving his wife, including eating directly from her leftovers, smelling her perfume, looking at her clothing (regardless of whether she is wearing it), listening to her singing, and engaging in sexually stimulating conversation with her.⁶⁵

Now the ritual for purification is that the menstruant has to undergo the ritual bath after nightfall and immerse in the ritual pool. Any foreign objects must be removed, she must comb her hair, blow her nose, and have herself washed thoroughly. All these must be supervised by an older and more experienced woman.⁶⁶ One thing that must be brought to the fore is that because the husband of the

⁶³Wenger, “Mitzvah and Medicine,” 179.

⁶⁴Biblical injunctions regarding *niddah* can be found in Leviticus 15:19-31, 18:19, and 20:18.

⁶⁵Saul Wagschal, *Taharas Am Yisroel: A Guide to the Laws of Taharas Hamishpochoh*, 2nd ed. (New York: Feldheim Press, 1982), 60.

⁶⁶Steinberg, “From a ‘Pot of Filth,’” 10.

menstruant is the only man who would know when she is ritually impure, every other man deals with her as if she were in her menses every time.⁶⁷

Before the Temple's destruction, the laws of ritual purity and impurity (*tumah and taharah*) were more extensive and widespread, closely associated with the Land of Israel and Temple practices.⁶⁸ However, after the Temple's destruction, the rabbis reduced many of the purity laws, but the laws pertaining to women and menstruation remained intact and became more intricate.⁶⁹

The rabbis conceptualized and readdressed the laws of *niddah* within a newly discovered permissible classification, family purity (*taharah hamispahah*), "a term that implied a direct connection between a woman's individual ritual observance and the purity of her entire family."⁷⁰ The Talmud explains: "Why did the Torah decree that menstruation's uncleanness should last for seven days? Because he is always in touch with his wife, a husband might grow to despise her. In order for her to continue to be adored by her husband as she was at the moment of her initial entrance into the bridal chamber, the Torah commanded that she stay unclean for seven days."⁷¹

The Jews had a very interesting idea on menstruation, it was taught of as a destructive force.⁷² One authoritative rabbi has stated: "If a menstruous woman passes between two [men] during the beginning of her menses," commented one rabbinic

⁶⁷Steinberg, "From a 'Pot of Filth,'" 11.

⁶⁸Wenger, "Mitzvah and Medicine," 179.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Rachel Biale, *Women and Jewish Law: An Exploration of Women's Issues in Halakhic Sources* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 156.

⁷¹Talmud *Niddah* 31b.

⁷²Wenger, "Mitzvah and Medicine," 180.

authority, “she will slay one of them; and if she is at the end of her menses, she will cause strife between them.”⁷³

Another rabbi declared:

The air is tainted by a menstruating woman's sight. She kills with a single look, like a serpent. How much more pain can she inflict on a man if they have sex? She is a pariah; men and women will avoid her, and she will sit by herself and converse with no one. She is walking on filthy dust, similar to that which has been tainted by the remains of the dead. The rabbis then said, “Even her sight does damage.”⁷⁴

Summary

In the Jewish mind-set, the uncleanness of the menstruant is recognized within the context of ritual impurity. Trafton defined ritual impurity as that “which is a threat to or opposes holiness,” and for this reason, one must make every effort to avoid it as far as practicable.⁷⁵ The people of the Jewish world did not take for granted the effects of impurity and its associated repercussions. Critical steps were taken to keep it away and steer clear of it. This session has brought to bear the thoughts, understanding and the reason for the way the Jewish people acted towards menstruous. They had a conviction in the jeopardy the discharge of the female blood. And this emanated slowly yet was heightened, more vigorous in later Judaism.⁷⁶ When it comes to a discussion of menstrual purity the Mishna, Tosefa, and Talmud are even more incisive than the Bible itself.⁷⁷

⁷³Mishnah Pesachim 111a.

⁷⁴Charles B. Chavel, *Ramban (Nachmanides) Commentary on the Torah, Leviticus* (Brooklyn, NY: Shilo Publishing House, 1974), 56.

⁷⁵Joseph L. Trafton, “Unclean and Clean,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary (ABD)*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Yale, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 6:729.

⁷⁶A. Brenner, *A Feminist Companion from Exodus to Deuteronomy* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 152-64.

⁷⁷Neuser, “The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism,” 15.

CHAPTER 3

PURITY AND IMPURITY IN THE BIBLE

Purity and Impurity in the Old Testament

Ritual impurity is one of the themes of the Old Testament. These rules and regulations were written to guide the children of Israel against sin, and most importantly to present themselves undefiled before a holy God. These rules are most predominant in the books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It appears that the argument for these restrictions in all cases of impurity is 'death'-motif.¹ And this death is not physical but spiritual.² In addition to this death is the idea of human sinfulness, and how people always want to hide it.³

Contact with various natural sources, such as childbirth (Lev 12:1-8), skin disease (Lev 13:1-14:32), genital discharges (Lev 15:1-33), the carcasses of specific impure animals (Lev 11:1-47), and human corpses (Num 19:10-22), can lead to ritual impurity or uncleanness.⁴

The concepts of both ritual and moral impurity had a significant place in the daily lives of the people.⁵ The people at the time accepted this as the only way to be

¹Kiuchi, *Leviticus*, 38.

²Ibid., 39.

³Ibid.

⁴Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism*, 23.

⁵Eyal Regev, "Abominated Temple and a Holy Community: The Formation of the Notions of Purity and Impurity in Qumran," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 10, no. 2 (2003): 266, accessed 25 August 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4193275>.

clean and to please the Lord. It was a means of meeting the requirements of God. As stated in Leviticus 11:46, the Lord says, “I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt; I am holy and must be holy.” Ritual uncleanness can be explained as that “which is a threat to or opposes holiness, and hence must be kept separate from that domain.”⁶ Impurity is simply perceived as the absence of God’s presence, that is, the presence of that which is contrary to God’s will and character.⁷

In the Old Testament, ritual impurity is more or less unavoidable.⁸ Certain contacts are relatively avoidable.⁹ For instance, the Israelites were cautioned against touching corpses and carcasses which defile; however, this is avoidable. But there are impurities such as bodily discharges from men and women, skin diseases, and deaths that cannot be avoided.

Types of Impurities in the Old Testament

Trafton observes that there are two categories of impurity, which he calls permitted impurity and prohibited impurity.¹⁰ Prohibited impurity is extremely severe, arising out of sin, or sinful situations.¹¹ Trafton sorts out impurities into two classifications: permitted and prohibited impurities.¹² It is evident through four distinct attributes: firstly, it is triggered by a tangible substance or state; secondly, its

⁶Trafton, “Unclean and Clean,” *ABD*, 6:729.

⁷John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 183.

⁸Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism*, 24.

⁹*Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁰Trafton, “Unclean and Clean,” *ABD*, 6:729.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*, 6:731.

occurrence does not amount to a transgression of divine instructions; thirdly, its purpose is to prevent contamination of the sacred domain centered around the sanctuary; and fourthly, it can be remedied through ritual practices like purifications and offerings.¹³

Permitted impurities. Though any form of this impurity can harm the sacred by contact, it is allowed because of its natural and necessary occurrence.¹⁴ It includes impurities relating to death, sex, disease, and the cult. This is allowed simply as a result of the fact that it cannot be controlled. No woman can indeed prevent menstruation. It is a monthly cycle and that even makes her a woman. Discharges from men cannot also be prevented. It is a natural occurrence. When a person dies, he or she must be buried by their loved ones and that is unavoidable. The human corpse is the most severe of all the permitted impurities. It is called the father of uncleanness.¹⁵ Also included are the carcasses of animals. Skin diseases like leprosy, psoriasis, etc., and certain fungal growth in houses and in fabrics are permitted impurities.¹⁶ The author by dealing with leprosy and genital discharges has the intention to bring to the fore the state of the humans before a holy God and wants God's people to set themselves apart from every sinful behaviours.¹⁷

Prohibited impurities. While the impact of this impurity can be significant, its consequences may be more severe when compared to permissible impurities. This

¹³Roy E. Gane, "Prohibitions of Homosexual Practice in Leviticus 18 and 20: Moral or Ceremonial?" *Reflections* 47, July 2014, 2, accessed March 5, 2022, <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/2334>.

¹⁴Trafton, "Unclean and Clean," *ABD*, 6:730.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Kiuchi, *Leviticus*, 39.

form of impurity arises from circumstances that are within our control, rather than being natural or essential.¹⁸ When a person becomes unclean for whatever reason, it is imperative for him to undergo certain purity rites. When this purification is delayed, its consequences are dire. Sexual immorality is another case that, falls under prohibited purity. Jonathan Klawans has shown the distinction of ritual impurity and moral impurity. According to him, moral impurity occurs as a result of sin while, ritual impurity occurs as a result of bodily functions such as menstruation or contact from source of ritual impurity.¹⁹

Purification and Rectification

Rectification of permitted impurities is achieved by four methods: ablutions, sacrifice the passage of time, and disposal.²⁰ Purification varied with the severity of the uncleanness. Prohibited impurities cannot be rectified by ritual purification, it has serious consequences.²¹ This could lead to “exile, or obliteration from the face of the earth.”²² Major defilements require bathing, laundering, shaving, and sprinkling with the water. Others involve anointing with oil or blood, and the sprinkling of blood. It must be noted that, the cleansing of a major impurity always involves sacrifice, this uncommon minor impurity.

¹⁸Trafton, “Unclean and Clean,” *ABD*, 6:730.

¹⁹Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism*, 64.

²⁰Trafton, “Unclean and Clean,” *ABD*, 6:736.

²¹Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism*, 48.

²²*Ibid.*

Purity/Impurity of Woman in the Old Testament

There are a few scholars who believe that the regulations in Lev 11 are instructed by God and this would make Israel distinct and separate from the rest of the people in the Ancient Near East.²³ With this background, it is imperative for the woman to remain reclusive during this period until the days are over and purification is undergone. Ezekiel 36:17 affirms the notion of impurity of a woman in her customary period. The Lord forbade men to lie with menstruants, and anyone who violated it was unclean for 7 days period, and whatever he touched also became unclean (Lev 15:24). The instructions outlined in Leviticus 15 cover various conditions, including *zav* (male discharges), *zavah* (female discharges), menstruation, and nocturnal emissions. Specifically, for individuals experiencing *zav* and *zavah*, a seven-day purification period is prescribed after the symptoms cease. In biblical and early rabbinic eras, menstruating women counted their seven days from the beginning of menstruation rather than from its conclusion, as it later became the practice.²⁴ The impurity of the woman can even defile the temple from afar.²⁵ It must be noted that because the purity of a person was very important to the ordinary person, steps were taken by each member to guard against being the cause, or spreading it.

²³Kiuchi, *Leviticus*, 38.

²⁴Thomas Kazen, "Jesus and the Zavah: Implications for Interpreting Mark," in *Purity, Holiness, and Identity in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Memory of Susan Haber*, eds. Carl S. Ehrlich, Anders Runesson, and Eileen Schuller (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 113.

²⁵Jacob Milgrom, *Israel's Sanctuary: The Priestly Picture of Dorian Gray, Leviticus 1-16* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 254.

Summary

The purity laws in the Old Testament were enforced to the letter, especially the laws on discharges from women. It was considered a major source of impurities. The menstruant in the time of the Old Testament was to recluse herself during the entire period and thereafter to go through the rite of purification. During her impurity, whatever or whoever she touches becomes unclean. She was therefore careful not to defile others. The women were not permitted to come near the temple or anything holy, lest they face the consequences of this neglect.

Issue of Purity/Impurity in the New Testament

In the time of Jesus, purity rules were at the heart of the worship of the Jews.²⁶ The Jews believed that a person must be ritually clean before that person can come before God and the temple of the Lord.²⁷ This practice hindered most women's freedom as they viewed menstruants as impure.²⁸ The menstrual taboo has been a reason for the exclusion of women from many activities, even in positions of honour.²⁹ Menstruating women were excluded from the temple until the days of their impurities were over and purification was done.³⁰

The correlation between ritual purity and moral purity is of appreciable significance for grasping the springing up of Christianity within its Jewish model.³¹

²⁶Razafiarivony, "The Concept of Purity/Impurity in the Church," 185.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Phipps, "The Menstrual Taboo in the Judeo-Christian Tradition," 298.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰E. P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 158.

³¹Regev, "Moral Impurity and the Temple," 383.

Jesus, John, and Paul, who are New Testament figures and were very instrumental in setting the base of early Christianity might have consented to some ideas and not others, or they might have set their own trails with regard to purity and impurity issues.³²

To Jesus, moral purity was more important and significant than ritual purity. Paul many years later in Romans 14:14 taught the same.³³ Jesus' view on purity is demonstrated in his miracles. The healing of lepers and haemorrhaging women, and raising the dead by touching them would undoubtedly make Him impure according to the law.³⁴

Rudolf Bultmann states that "Jesus' message is a great protest against Jewish legalism."³⁵ Jesus disagreed with the status quo of His day. "The key stories that have been interpreted by scholars as showing Jesus disregarding purity concerns are: the healing of a leper (Mark 1:40–5), the healing of the haemorrhaging woman and the raising of the girl (Mark 5:21–43), and the hand-washing controversy (Mark 7:1–7, 14–23)."³⁶ The woman with the issue of blood touched Jesus (Matt 9:20–22), having in mind that her touch would move impurity to him.³⁷

A closer look at the Markan narrative reveals that Mark was very much aware of the existing purity laws yet he makes no mention of them in dealing with the story

³²Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism*, 138.

³³Regev, "Moral Impurity and the Temple," 383.

³⁴Razafiarivony, "The Concept of Purity/Impurity in the Church," 186.

³⁵Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 1:11.

³⁶Cecilia Wassen, "The Jewishness of Jesus and Ritual Purity," *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 27 (April 11, 2016): 11–36, accessed July 12, 2021. <https://journal.fi/scripta/article/view/66567>.

³⁷Razafiarivony, "The Concept of Purity/Impurity in the Church," 186.

of the *zavah*.³⁸ Thomas Kazen has established that Mark interrupts his narrative on the eating of bread to explain the washing of hands by the Pharisees, however he did not give any explanation on whether or not Jesus was affected by the woman's touch or by touching the dead.³⁹ Mark never informed his audience on Jewish practices especially on the touch of the *zavah*.⁴⁰ It is safe to infer from the narrative that the woman with the issue of blood transmitted no impurity to Jesus or the crowd that followed Jesus.

The readers of Mark gospel were not interested in the purity issues, but the healing power transmitted by the Lord. Kazen explains:

“A Christological framework is used to allow the faith of the mother who has been unwell since she was twelve years old to pour over onto the father of the girl, who is twelve years old. Mark in *Facts* sandwiched two narratives that both had implied purity difficulties.”

“Therefore, it is best to think of the topic of what happened to Jesus' purity when the *zavah* touched him as a hypothetical pre-Markan subject that is not further examined or addressed on the Markan level.”⁴¹

One may speculate that issues of purity may have been present in the mind of Mark, but it is quite obvious that he did not want his audience to be bordered by those. To Mark, it was not important. Clearly, he simply wanted the readers to know the power of Christ.

³⁸Kazen, “Jesus and the Zavah,” 12.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., 10.

⁴¹Ibid., 12.

Certain laws or halakhic traditions were invoked when Jesus addressed the healing of the *zavah*, highlighting his unique authority in matters of purity and the liberation from rigid interpretations.⁴² It also proved that “Jesus advocated compassion before cult.”⁴³ Bock and Webb even claim that Jesus through his own powers was cleansing the impure.⁴⁴ Jesus’ association with the highly derogative label “glutton and a drunkard” proves that He came to save sinners and the impure.⁴⁵ An investigation of the Markan narrative teaches that “Jesus countered the contagion of impurity with the contagion of purity.”⁴⁶

But these ritual purities were done away with, became irrelevant and inconsequential to the Christians and were no longer practiced.⁴⁷ Thus, in Acts 10, when the Gospel has crossed beyond the Judean borders, the Lord said to Peter not to call anyone common unclean.⁴⁸

What Defiles a Person?

Jesus said that moral impurity has serious consequences, much more than ritual impurity. Just as before entrance to Canaan the promised land, the Lord gave specific instruction to the Israelites “Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you. For the land

⁴²Kazen, “Jesus and the Zavah,” 10.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb eds., *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 244.

⁴⁵S. McKnight and J. B. Modica, eds., *Who Do My Opponents Say I Am? An Investigation of the Accusations against Jesus* (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 56.

⁴⁶Wassen, “The Jewishness of Jesus and Ritual Purity,” 24.

⁴⁷Razafiarivony, “The Concept of Purity/Impurity in the Church,” 189.

⁴⁸Ibid.

is defiled; therefore, I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants” (Lev 18:24–25).

So, to the Lord, what defiles a person is sin, which is an abomination to Him. The New Testament has not drifted from that course of action and behaviour as an emerging church on its understanding of purity/impurity.⁴⁹ This is so foremost in the New Testament that in drawing to a close, there is a deterrent that the morally impure are excluded from the New Jerusalem:⁵⁰ “Outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters and whoever loves and practices a lie” (Rev 22:15). To the New Testament (NT) church, the issue of the woman being impure during her menstruation is neither here nor there. It is inconsequential to one’s salvation.

Jesus and Ritual Purity Laws

There are divided views as to the question of how Jesus takes and practices the rules of purity.⁵¹ Some believe Jesus was as a faithful Jew who was imbibed and thus, upheld his own culture and therefore accepted it.⁵² Others believed that He was indifferent towards the rules on purity.⁵³ Jesus has been very critical on the status quo concerning purity laws (Mark 7: 19, 20).

⁴⁹Razafiarivony, “The Concept of Purity/Impurity in the Church,” 191.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid., 185.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

The teachings of Jesus sought to release women from social stereotype.⁵⁴ “Jesus taught that moral purity was a more important concern than ritual purity, or that ritual impurity was unimportant.”⁵⁵ According to Sanders, Jesus did not break any commandment yet clashed with many over customs.⁵⁶ Jesus’ treatment on the subject of washing of hands before eating shows his casual approach to the purity laws in tradition.⁵⁷

To Jesus, one cannot achieve purity through the ritual washing of hands. Purity was a state of one’s heart or completeness before God.⁵⁸ Jesus had a radical and deeper understanding of purity compared to the people of his day.⁵⁹ The action of Jesus touching the impure and defiled might have signified that He was transferring purity to the impure, and that would support His divinity.⁶⁰ Jesus’ encounter with the woman with the issue of blood in Matthew 9: 20-22 shows that He was not offended by her touch, and He probably touched and raised her from the ground.

The healing of the woman with the issue of blood subtly pulls down the legal purity system and its constraint “social conditioning.”⁶¹ The story in Mark 5: 25-34 is also about a woman who was set free from physical and social suffering by Jesus. Fonrobert states that “what is disregarded in all these speculations is the fact that the

⁵⁴Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus: A Study of Jesus’ Attitudes to Women and their Roles as Reflected in His Earthly Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 50.

⁵⁵Regev, “Moral Impurity and the Temple,” 384.

⁵⁶E. P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 2.

⁵⁷Wassen, “The Jewishness of Jesus and Ritual Purity,” 23.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., 24.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Marla J. Selvidge, *Woman, Cult and Miracle Recital: A Redactional Critical Investigation of Mark 5:24–34* (London: Associated University Presses, 1990), 623.

woman does not commit a transgression by touching Jesus, neither according to the priestly writings, nor according to Mishnaic law.”⁶² The woman in the Markan story does not spread any impurities to begin with.⁶³ Amy-Jill Levine argues along the same line that “uncleanness is not a disease, and it implies no moral sensor; it is a ritual state which both men and women likely found themselves most of the time.”⁶⁴

Again, Jesus was more concerned about moral impurity than ritual impurity. He prioritized the maintenance of moral purity over that of ritual purity.⁶⁵ As Booth states: “The evidence that Jesus dined and associated with tax collectors and the unobservant accordingly shows that the obligation of the law was for him subservient to the moral obligation to save men by calling them to repentance before the onset of the kingdom of God.”⁶⁶

Jesus demonstrated his willingness to take the risk of becoming ceremonially defiled by approaching individuals believed to be dead, as depicted in the passages of Mark 5:35-42 and John 11:43-44. In these instances, Jesus prioritized moral obligations over concerns of ceremonial defilement.⁶⁷ To a greater extent, Jesus did,

⁶²Charlotte E. Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 194.

⁶³Charlotte E. Fonrobert “The Woman with a Blood-Flow (Mark 5:24-34) Revisited: Menstrual Laws and Jewish Culture in Christian Feminist Hermeneutics,” in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals*, ed. by Craig Evans and James Sanders (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 131.

⁶⁴Levine Amy-Jill, “Discharging Responsibility: Matthean Jesus, Biblical Law, and Hemorrhaging Woman,” in *Treasures New and Old: Recent Contributions to Matthean Studies*, eds. David R. Bauer and Mark Allen Powell (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1996), 387.

⁶⁵Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism*, 156.

⁶⁶Roger P. Booth, “Jesus and the Laws of Purity: Tradition History and Legal History in Mark 7,” *Journal for the study of the New Testament*, Supplement Series, 13 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1986), 111.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 112.

as a general rule, observed the cultic law in the Pentateuch, but ignored that law if moral assertion demanded it.⁶⁸

Women in the Ministry of Jesus⁶⁹

Women in the NT time were to be respected and loved by their husband.⁷⁰ It was evident that Jesus expressed His concern for the woman by associating with their sorry condition during His time.⁷¹ Women loved to associate with Christ because He never sent anyone away from His presence. “That Jesus taught women and allowed them to follow Him reveals how very different He was from other rabbis in His treatment of women.”⁷² Women had freedom and equality in the presence of Jesus and in the midst of His community.⁷³

Women were the first to tell of the resurrection of our Lord (Matt 28:5). It was a woman who first saw our Lord after His resurrection (Matt 28: 10). The women during the ministry of Christ offered their time, and resources serving the Lord.

Paul

Paul in 1 Corinthians 6: 9, 10 says:

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed you were sanctified; you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

⁶⁸Booth, “Jesus and the Laws of Purity,” 112.

⁶⁹Witherington III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, 4.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid., 49.

⁷²Ibid., 123.

⁷³Ibid.

Paul's teaching emphasizes moral purity. But it is different when it comes to ritual purity. "Paul's position and conduct toward ritual purity in the church is in sharp contrast to his former conduct in Judaism. He himself talks of his "former conduct in Judaism" (Gal 1:13).⁷⁴ Unlike in the temple (and maybe synagogue), the issue of ritual purity observances was not raised in private home meetings for worship of early Christians. It is then, without surprise, that the practice of ritual purities was set aside, if not denigrated.⁷⁵ In Colossians 2:17, Paul affirms that these were "shadows of things to come." (See also Hebrews 10:1). Elias Brasil de Souza further clarifies:

The greater framework for determining bodily impurity and subsequently banning people afflicted by them from the tabernacle system is provided by the Hebrew ceremonial system. But Christ's fulfilment of the Levitical system's ceremonial requirements on the cross (cf. Heb 9:11–28). These ceremonial regulations are no longer binding on us since Christ's death rendered them obsolete. It is crucial to remember that Israel had to follow specific ritual laws in order to respect and honour God's presence among them because the tabernacle served as God's earthly home.⁷⁶

Summary

The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, make clear distinction between ritual purity/impurity and moral purity/impurity. These laws were meant to teach spiritual truths, and transform God's people from carnality to spiritual giants. Menstruation is related to the idea of death. When menstruation happens it means that fertilization has not occurred. Something that was designed to give life is now dead. So, this concept is related to the idea of sinfulness only in general sense. It must be

⁷⁴Razafiarivony, "The Concept of Purity/Impurity in the Church," 190.

⁷⁵Ibid., 189.

⁷⁶Elias Brasil de Souza, "Ceremonial Uncleanness and Contemporary Application," accessed 24 May, 2022, https://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/Ceremonial_Uncleanness_and_Contemporary_Application.pdf.

noted that New Testament believers are saved by the precious blood of Jesus who fulfilled every aspect of the law in their behalf. Christians are saved not by what they have done but by what Jesus has done for them. Jesus did what both the Old Testament people as well as the New Testament Christians could not do.⁷⁷

⁷⁷Kiuchi, *Leviticus*, 48.

CHAPTER 4

PURITY/IMPURITY OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

Issues of impurity of women during their menstruation did not spare the Christian Church after the time of the New Testament. Testimonies from the early centuries of the church, and modern church abound about the subject. Women of Prince of Peace Church are also concerned.

Issue of Menstruation in the History of the Church

Phipps writes that Dionysius the Great, an Alexandrian bishop who lived in the third century, is the first known Christian figure to support restrictions on menstruating women. He warned Basilides in a letter that such impure people should not rush up to the communion table.¹ Medieval Byzantine canonist Theodore Balsamon, as cited in Phipps, claimed that “the uncleanness of menstruation banished the deaconess from her role before the holy altar.”² Jerome, as cited in Phipps, made a remark that was later supported by Thomas Aquinas that explains why marital intercourse during menstrual periods were viewed as evil during the Middle Ages. Because deformed, blind, lame, and leprous babies can be conceived during

¹Phipps, “The Menstrual Taboo in the Judeo-Christian Tradition,” 300.

²Theodore Balsamon, *Interrogatio* 35, quoted in William E. Phipps, “The Menstrual Taboo in the Judeo-Christian Tradition,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 19, no. 4 (1980): 300, accessed 25 August 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27505592>.

menstruation, husbands should avoid their women during that time.³ Jerome referred to menstruation as “God's curse” and claimed that “nothing is so unclean as a menstruant.”⁴

Theodore, a seventh-century archbishop of Canterbury, as quoted in Phipps, ordered that “women shall not in the time of impurity enter into a church, or communicate.”⁵ John Calvin, as cited in Phipps, called menstruation a “foul disease.”⁶ Furthermore, Alla Bozarth-Campbell, as quoted in Phipps, submits that “the resistance to ordaining women as priests may be due to an unconscious male fear of menstruants who bleed without dying, thereby producing signs of both death and life.”⁷

The issue of preventing the menstruating women from partaking or officiating in sacrament such as the Lord's Supper and baptism has no basis in Scripture. The New Testament Church did not consider menstruants as unclean. The contemporary Christian must understand that the bleeding of the woman has a special way of ensuring a thorough health and vitality. The bleeding ensures rejuvenation to her person. No wonder menopause comes along with many complications.

³Jerome, *Against Helvidius* 20, quoted in William E. Phipps, “The Menstrual Taboo in the Judeo-Christian Tradition,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 19, no. 4 (1980): 300, accessed 25 August 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27505592>.

⁴Ibid., 300.

⁵Theodore, *Penitential of Theodore* 14, 17, quoted in William E. Phipps, “The Menstrual Taboo in the Judeo-Christian Tradition,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 19, no. 4 (1980): 300, accessed 25 August 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27505592>.

⁶John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 3:95, quoted in William E. Phipps, “The Menstrual Taboo in the Judeo-Christian Tradition,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 19, no. 4 (1980): 301, accessed 25 August 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27505592>.

⁷Alla Bozarth-Campbell, *Womanpriest* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 108, quoted in William E. Phipps, “The Menstrual Taboo in the Judeo-Christian Tradition,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 19, no. 4 (1980): 301, accessed 25 August 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27505592>.

Advertisement and promotions are aired on television alongside the news every day, but the issues with menstruation is less talked about or discussed.⁸ Issues on menstruation is whispered in the church, no one simply talks about it.⁹ Students in senior high schools are advised to wear slim sanitary pads so as not to attract attention, and this is true in the walls of the church.¹⁰ People simply will not talk about it yet this is a topical subject which also deserves attention. Since menstruation is classified as unclean, education on menstruation is insufficient and menstrual hygiene is practiced in secrecy.¹¹

The Church, since its beginning, is made up of people from all walks of life. As the gospel message spread across the then world, different castes and races embraced it. So, the Church had people from various backgrounds with varied understanding of issues. This old-fashion and archaic restriction against menstruating women persists and has fundamentally reduced the capability and freedom of Christian women, including those of the Prince of Peace SDA Church.

A. D. Frimpong affirms that “the concept of menstruation as somehow ‘unclean’ and ‘impure’ is found principally, in the teachings of both the Jewish faith and the Akan religious culture.”¹² People hardly talk of menstruation, and usually prevalent between woman-to-woman conversation.¹³ In some instances, mothers are

⁸Buck, “Healing Story,” 11.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Margot Radding, ““It’s Not Important for You to Speak”: The Perception of Purity and Its Power over Women’s Reproductive and Sexual Health,” *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*, 2515, accessed 6 February 2022, https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/2515.

¹²Frimpong, “Purity and Impurity,” 251.

¹³Ibid., 298.

unable to provide the relevant information to their daughters on menstruation because of the societal stigma attached to the subject.¹⁴ How should Adventist Christians, especially Prince of Peace Church, deal with the issue in our days?

Dealing with the Issue of Purity/Impurity and the Adventist Woman in Prince of Peace Church, Dansoman, Ghana

A Bible study discussion brought out the idea of a woman being impure during her period of menstruation. The members present were divided on the issue; some argued that the Adventist woman in Prince of Peace was unclean during her menstruation and needed to seclude herself from every religious activity. After one Sabbath service, a deaconess approached the researcher and confided in him that she had often missed out on the Lord's Supper because she felt impure when she was menstruating. The sermonette just before the foot washing usually asks the congregants to examine themselves. Another lady asked the researcher whether or not it was right to participate in the Eucharist during her period. There was another young woman who approached the researcher's wife and asked if she could partake in the then-upcoming Lord's Supper during her period.

The Issue during a Sabbath School Discussion

During one adult Sabbath School discussion, an elder disagreed with a member on the issue that the woman could approach the church during her period or at any other time. It was discovered that, the said elder prevents her wife from attending church during her period.

¹⁴Frimpong, "Purity and Impurity," 298.

Disagreement during a Bible Study

An issue cropped up during a bible study that resulted in a heated argument that the Old Testament system was still very relevant today and that some of the practices which include exclusion of the menstruant must be enforced. Much of the discussion centred on whether or not the Adventist woman at Prince of Peace Church must be allowed to partake in the Lord's Supper. There was also another discussion of proselytes undergoing baptism in their period. Some opined that it was a grave mistake to allow them to be baptized.

Leadership in Limbo

Unfortunately, the leadership has done nothing to address the problem on the ground. It appeared that even the leadership was divided on the issue. On one side are those who honestly believe that it does not matter what state anyone is in and that all that matters is for the individual to be baptized. On the other hand, there is a section that also believes that it is sacrilege for the church to allow menstruating women to participate in these sacraments. The leadership has divergent views and is looking at the issue from different perspectives. Each preference is based on the individual's prejudices and biases, as well as the proposition with which they approach the issue.

The Effect of Purity/Impurity on the Adventist Women at Prince of Peace

The researcher's personal observation is that only a handful of the women at Prince of Peace Church partake in the Lord's Supper. But little did the researcher know that their abstinence was due to the notion of the woman being impure during her period. On another occasion, a young lady who had decided to baptize was not present on the day of the baptism. The researcher later found out that a deaconess had

restrained her from baptizing because she was in her period. The lady had her baptism at a later date.

It was realized that some women refused to partake in church activities because they believed the Lord would be angry with them if they showed up. It was discovered that some men refuse to sleep on the same beds with their wives when menstruating. One woman recounts that her husband slept in their guest room throughout her period of menstruation.

Participation of the Adventist Women at Prince of Peace

Quite a number of the women at Prince of Peace Seventh-day Adventist Church keep away from religious activities in the church. This belief in a woman's impurity during her menstrual cycle has shut her out of church attendance. An update of the church records in recent times showed that there has been a drastic reduction in the participation of women in church activities. The issue is supported by the most recent nominating committee reports, which were read out in church. The report indicated that some competent and up-to-the-task women declined to accept any leadership roles. When asked about it, it was learned that these women did not feel comfortable leading out in services while on their period.

It was at this point that I realized that the purity of women during their menstruation was a real issue at Prince of Peace Seventh-day Adventist Church. The researcher had other personal interactions with some women. One newlywed told the researcher in confidence that she had always absented herself during the Lord's Supper and once postponed her baptism. As a result of such encounters, the researcher realized that there may be more people who believe in the Adventist woman's impurity during her menstruation than has been revealed.

Ways to Deal with the Issue

It has been established from the interactions with the groups involved (leadership, women's groups, the church board, and the general congregation) that education on the issue of purity is needed and would be helpful. The issue is being educated through bible study, teaching and preaching, a seminar on today's woman, and public lectures.

Practical Theological Implication

There is no scriptural support and no biblical link in the Old or New Testaments for preventing menstruants from participating in any sacrament. Scripture is very clear on the issue being discussed, that sin and only sin makes a person unclean, man or woman. Such immoral impurities call for expulsion or exclusion (for instance, 1 Cor 5:1–11). But aside from immoral impurities, there is no explicit command or reason to exclude anyone in the New Testament. This was not practiced in the New Testament period. Exclusion has been implied in Scripture. It has been conjectured and assumed. But the church does not deal in conjecture and assumption but in facts from Scripture. This practice must therefore stop, for it is unbiblical and lacks merit.

Recommendations

A way of dealing with this issue is education. Educating the various target groups is essential and important. The church needs to come to terms with the real issues. They must be informed of the implications of this prohibition. Education will go a long way toward correcting the idea and notion of the Adventist woman's impurity at Prince of Peace Church. The church needs to know that women play major roles in the affairs of the church. They must lead and participate in the many facets of church activities. In other words, increase the number of women appointed

to positions in the church. Women played major roles in the early church, and that must continue at Prince of Peace SDA Church.

Education on Purity Issues of Church Leadership

Leaders have an important role to play in any field of endeavor. The leaders of the Prince of Peace Seventh-day Adventist Church must grasp the true nature of the issues at hand. The leaders must understand that the Adventist woman is pure even during her menstrual period. There is nothing to demonstrate that menstruants were excluded from participating in worship and other sacraments in the New Testament Church. One can safely say that a menstruant cannot be prevented from partaking in church oracles simply because of a monthly flow of blood.

The importance of purity laws in the Levitical period, which were centered around the temple and the services that went on there, must be recognized. But since the temple no longer exists and all the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament came to an end with the death of Jesus on the cross, these purity laws should no longer be enforced. Leaders need to know that a woman created in the image of God cannot be called unclean or impure. It is natural for her to be in her menstrual cycle, and she should not be excluded from church activities. Such an exclusion is an unbiblical application of the law.

Education on Purity Issues with the Church Board

The Church board is the representation of the church and takes decisions on the issues affecting the church and members. It is therefore important for the members of the board to put the issues into proper perspective. The board would be made to comprehend the historical and theological events that lead to the purity issues of the

Adventist woman. The board would be educated on how to deal with every text of Scripture and to interpret it. Who was the original audience? How did the original hearers understand the text? How do we understand it and apply it today? The board will recognize that, while purity laws were required to be followed and enforced at the time that should not be the case today. The board members must begin to adjust their minds and address the topic of purity laws in a new way (Mark 5.35-42 and John 11.43-4). Once again, he was more concerned with moral obligation than with ritual contamination.

Educating the Congregation as a Whole

The congregation is the most powerful group in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The members of the congregation have varied understandings of theological issues. Educating the entire congregation needs time and serious reflection. The best way to educate the congregation is through teaching and an opportunity given for questions to be asked. It is important for the church members to grasp the idea that, no member of the Lord's church on earth can be declared impure in any state. It is also very important to note that every member was procured with the blood of Christ, and it is Christ who sanctifies him or her. It is important to know that what defiles a person is not what comes out of any part of the body, but particularly what we do with our bodies.

Members must take note that a person's body is the temple of God, and that body temple must be kept pure and clean. Members need to know that no amount of emissions can make a person unclean or impure. Christians of the twenty-first century, who have more information than previous peoples, must understand and behave differently. It is immoral to separate her because she is having her menstruation. The menstruant has the ability to cook, clean, and care for her husband

and family. It is not advisable to have intercourse during her period for health reasons, but she is capable of doing all a typical woman or man can do. And nothing bad would happen to her, her family, or anybody she knows.

Women Groups

The purity regulations in the law are not in favour of the idea of an overtly repressive, anti-feminist tradition.¹⁵ The purity laws were not burdensome and discriminatory, but only sanitary.¹⁶ The Adventist woman is not subservient to the Adventist man or the Adventist man purer than the woman. These laws of prohibition in the Levitical period had a different meaning, and God had a very good reason for the laws. The Adventist woman at Prince of Peace has a special place in God's church, and must have the belief that the Lord purifies her and only sin, not the flux, can make her impure.

Women were accommodated by the Lord. The Saviour never separated himself from them, and we must do the same. Because we have all been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, the Christian must not call anyone unclean or common. Moral cleanliness took precedence over ritual purity for Jesus.

Menstruants Not to Be Excluded

The temple and its services were done away with when Christ died. Persecutions led many Christians in the early church to meet in homes and other places outside the temple.¹⁷ In these homes of the believers, the issue of purity was put away. It was immaterial and not germane. In Acts 10, Peter had an encounter with

¹⁵Carol Meyers, *Households and Holiness: The Religious Culture of Israelite Women* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 4.

¹⁶Eyzaguirre, "Nephesh," 31.

¹⁷Razafiarivony, "The Concept of Purity/Impurity in the Church," 189.

Cornelius, a Gentile, and was instructed by the Lord not to call any human unclean. This also proves that no man or woman in any state should be regarded as unclean. In Col. 2:20–23, believers have been admonished not to subject themselves to the prohibitions “do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” and these essentially had something to do with ritual purity laws.¹⁸

The types of services offered in the earthly sanctuary are not relevant, and besides, the sanctuary services has been transferred to the heavenly sanctuary where our Lord is the High priest Hebrews 8, 9, 10. If the ritual purity was connected to the temple services and these services are no longer important, then there is also no reason to maintain that purity, and prevent women in their monthly period from accessing church services.

The Adventist woman of the Prince of Peace SDA Church in Dansoman, Ghana, has every privilege to partake in the sacraments of the church. These sacraments include baptisms, the Lord’s Supper, and also officiating in church activities. Our Lord Jesus Christ preached a radical message of repentance—one that challenged the status quo of the so-called piety and holiness of the day and of the ancient world in general.¹⁹ He proclaimed that it is only the evil intentions that come out of our hearts that defile us (Mk 7:15ff).²⁰ Jesus released the true followers from the prehistoric fear of impiety or impurity through natural discharge.²¹ Our Lord reveals the woman to the crowd to encourage all to imitate her faith.²²

¹⁸Razafiarivony, “The Concept of Purity/Impurity in the Church,” 190.

¹⁹Sergei Sveshnikov, “‘Ritual Impurity’: In Response to Sister Vassa (Larin),” accessed 13 February 2022, https://www.pravmir.com/article_663.html.

²⁰Ibid., 278.

²¹Ibid., 279.

²²Ibid.

Similarly, the Apostle Paul deviates from the conventional Hebrew perspective on Old Testament regulations concerning “purity” and “impurity,” emphasizing the importance of Christian love and unity above all else, as expressed in his letter to the Romans (Rom 14).²³ “It is well-known that Paul generally prefers the word “holy” (αγως) to the word “pure” to express a Christian’s closeness to God, thus avoiding Old Testament preconceptions (Rom 1:7; 8:27; 1 Cor 6:1; 7:14; 2 Cor 1:1, etc.).”²⁴ The Mosaic Law has become alien and unfamiliar to contemporary Christian thought, and Church Fathers interpret it as symbolic.²⁵

Methodius of Olympus (ca 300), Justin Martyr (ca 165), and Origen (ca 253), all these Church Fathers interpret the purity laws as symbols of virtue and sin, and state categorically that baptism, and the Eucharist are sufficient sources of “purification” for Christians.²⁶ Clement insists, “The Lord has cleansed the faithful through baptism.”²⁷ “The Syriac Didaskalia, a third-century witness to Christian polemics against Judaic traditions, forbids Christians to observe the Levitical laws, including those concerning menstruation.”²⁸ The document goes on to state that: “If you think, woman, that you are stripped of the Holy Spirit during the seven days of your menstruation, then if you die at this time, you will depart thence empty and without hope.”²⁹ The author further affirms to the woman that she possesses the Holy

²³Sveshnikov, “Ritual Impurity,” 279.

²⁴Ibid., 278.

²⁵Ibid., 279.

²⁶Ibid., 280.

²⁷Clement of Alexandria *Stromata* III/XII 82, 6.

²⁸Sveshnikov, “Ritual Impurity,” 282.

²⁹Ibid.

Spirit within her, granting her the ability to participate in prayer, readings, and the Eucharist.³⁰

Menstruation Is Normal for the Adventist Woman

Daniel Light et al. say that “menstruation is normal for girls and women”, and that it is a part of what makes them female.³¹ Sadhana Shrestha et al. also state: “Menstruation is a natural part of the reproductive cycle of females, and menstrual management (MM) is a necessity on a monthly basis.”³² One needs to know that to be unclean “principally relates to their being outside of God’s reign rather than merely some ritual idea of impurity.”³³

Seminar on Today’s Woman

In spite of the fact that menstruation is good for women’s health and notwithstanding its consequences for reproduction, most adult females also see it as ‘embarrassing’.³⁴ Even when no one discriminates against them, women feel that

³⁰Sveshnikov, “Ritual Impurity,” 282.

³¹Daniel Light et al., “Improving Students' Knowledge of Puberty and Menstruation in Rural Zimbabwe: an Evaluation of Sesame Workshop's Girl Talk program,” *Journal of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for Development* 11, no. 1 (2020): 173, accessed 13 February 2022, <https://doi.org/10.2166/washdev.2020.286>.

³²Sadhana Shrestha et al., “Situation of Menstrual Management Facilities in Schools of Peri-urban Areas of Nepal: Wash, Privacy, and Healthcare,” *Journal of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for Development* 12, no. 1 (2021): 41, accessed 13 February 2022, <https://doi.org/10.2166/washdev.2021.100>.

³³James W. Voelz, *Mark 1:1-8:26* (St. Louis, CO: Concordia, 2013), 163.

³⁴Liamputtong, “Being a Woman,” 163.

way.³⁵ Menstruants in modern times are not segregated to a secluded place, yet periods are said to be taken care of quietly and in a better way.³⁶

Medical practitioners would be invited to give a talk on the benefits of the monthly flow of blood and the health of the Adventist woman at Prince of Peace SDA Church. This talk would include the physiology and the make of the woman, and relationship between the issue of blood and the overall health and wellness of the woman. This talk would also deal with how men should treat the menstruating women, and the support that must be given to them. Also, the woman would be educated on how important it is to maintain good hygiene during her period.

Experts will brainstorm the woman to understand that, there is nothing to be shameful of during her menses. And that, it is a part of womanhood. A woman who does not have her menses may look very pale, like a person who is always sick.³⁷ Menstruation is one of the things that differentiate women from men and gives women sameness and makes them relatable.³⁸ She must therefore not feel inferior, unclean, or unworthy to come before the True God.

“Globalization and modernization” must impact the way of life of members.³⁹ The world has moved on and so must we, that idea of exclusivity must be weeded out

³⁵Tomi-Ann Roberts et al., “Feminine Protection: The Effects of Menstruation on Attitudes towards Women,” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2002): 135, accessed 26 February 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-6402.00051>.

³⁶Mindy J. Erchull et al., “Education and Advertising: A Content Analysis of Commercially Produced Booklets about Menstruation,” *The Journal of Early Adolescence* 22, no. 4 (2002): 455, accessed 22 February 2022, <https://doi.org/doi:10.1177/027243102237192>.

³⁷Liamputtong, “Being a Woman,” 160.

³⁸Agyekum, “Menstruation as a Verbal Taboo,” 384.

³⁹Chopra and Sharma, “Menstrual-Related Beliefs,” 102.

of the minds of members, especially women. Gone were the days where menstruants were seen as impure and must be segregated from the public.

Those moments of exclusion have made way for new moments of inclusion. Elaine and English Showalter discuss how scientific knowledge reflects about menstruation and removes the moral biases held on by peoples of the ancient times.⁴⁰ They continue to say that the importance of such a practice was in fact “exaggerated by the prevailing superstitions, prejudices, formation, and medical opinion.”⁴¹

More Practical Suggestions

The Adventist woman in Prince of Peace SDA Church should be educated on the rationale behind ritual purity and the prevention of women in their monthly flow of blood. Now on-going debates on menstruation also stress the diversity of attitudes in different cultures toward the phenomenon and prove that cultures and attitudes are being changed toward menstruation with its related customs.⁴²

There is no biblical support for the notion that when a menstruant partakes in the sacrament, she will incur the wrath of God. It must also be understood that a woman in her period is holy and acceptable to the Lord. The issue of blood is for her good health and not a curse against women. In fact, the monthly flow makes her a woman. The reasons being that she can have children, and it is a cleansing process leaving the system healthy.⁴³ Liamputtong states that the period is a natural

⁴⁰Elaine Showalter and English Showalter, “Victorian Women and Menstruation,” *Victorian Studies* 14, no. 1 (1970): 88, accessed 24 February 2022, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3826408>.

⁴¹Showalter and English Showalter, “Victorian Women and Menstruation,” 88.

⁴²Inbal Cicurel and Rachel Sharab “Women in the Menstruation Huts: Variations in Preserving Purification Customs among Ethiopian Immigrant,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 23, no. 2 (2007): 71, accessed 24 February 2022, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/20487899.pdf>

⁴³du Toit, “Menstruation,” 400.

occurrence for women,” she continues. It is a gift from God, and it is only available to women.”⁴⁴

Advice to parents. Parents should educate their children about rejecting these traditional, non-scientific views, myths, and superstitions prevalent in human societies, which impose restrictions on females during menstrual periods and view menstruation as a polluting phase that renders the affected female impure.⁴⁵ Parents must lead the way in teaching their children that menstruation was very normal and that girls need not be embarrassed about it.

Advice to deaconesses. Head deaconesses themselves must come to the realisation that those moments when women were excluded from temple services were done away with and should not be held on to. Once this belief system is established, it will pave the way for an all-inclusive worship where no one is called common or unclean.

Deaconesses should understand that preventing menstruating women from partaking in the sacraments is forbidden, incorrect, and goes beyond what is written. Though practiced in ancient times, Christ came to destroy the dividing wall of separation (Eph 2:14), signalling that worship to God must be inclusive.

Summary

It has been noted that Adventist women at Prince of Peace SDA Church were prevented from participating based on the laws of purity in Leviticus. This compounded the idea that menstruation is somehow “unclean” and “impure” and so

⁴⁴du Toit, “Menstruation,” 159.

⁴⁵Shruti Chopra and Krishan Sharma, “The Development of Menstrual-Related Beliefs and Behaviours during Adolescence in a Semi Rural Haryana (India): A Conceptual and Empirical Formulation,” *Anthropologie* 49, no. 2 (2011): 95, accessed February 13 2022. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26272368>.

has been connected to rituals and prohibitions make a strong assertion to women about their self-confidence and self-respect.⁴⁶

These laws were centred on the provision of the sanctuary services. If these services have been done away with, then it is not biblical to prevent Adventist women at Prince of Peace SDA Church from receiving the sacraments. As Buck rightly asserts “just as God no longer looks for sacrifices in his temple, so God no longer requires purity rules to shut people out.”⁴⁷ Sigvartsen also argues that in the absence of the Temple, all the purity laws of the Hebrew Scripture were at one time tied to the Temple became outmoded or fell into disuse.⁴⁸ Additionally, Jesus’ death on the cross signals the end of the temple, its services, and the observances of ritual laws connected to it.

⁴⁶Frimpong, “Purity and Impurity,” 16.

⁴⁷Buck, “Healing Story,” 18.

⁴⁸Jan A. Sigvartsen, “The Biblical Law of Niddah and Its Muslim Parallels,” *Papers 8* (2017), 65, accessed 24 February 2022, <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/papers/8>.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

There should be clear biblical evidence on a particular subject before acting on it. There is no biblical backing for excluding the menstruant from participating in the sacraments of the church. It is only implied by Scripture. If someone chooses to abide by the requirements of Leviticus 15, they must follow the full legal framework, which states that anyone can become unclean by coming into contact with someone who is impure, and that this can occur anywhere in public. In the New Testament, John the Baptist wore cloth made from camel hair, which is an unclean animal. Modern Jews wear hats made from unclean animals which would make them ritually unclean. The rabbis assert that being unclean is commonplace. Only when a person is getting close to the sancta is purity necessary. Therefore, a man should not worry about keeping himself clean in his daily life.

The subject of menstruation limits women's ability to shape the cultural definition and meaning of menstruation, implying that menstruation is shameful, as if it were something that must be avoided. Menstruation as a subject has become a source of embarrassment that must be concealed and a force that must be subdued by the most technologically advanced product because it conspires against women.¹

There were many laws that were enacted to maintain holiness around the temple. There are no more temples and sacrifices. It is written: “Be holy because I am

¹Mandziuk, “Ending Women's Greatest Hygienic,” 42.

holy”. The story of Jesus and the woman with the issue of blood tells it all as recounted in Mark 5:21, 24, 27, 30, 31. Jesus of Nazareth accepts all people, including the women, when in their menstrual periods. The woman clearly realized that her physical limitations were not a hindrance.²

The narrative teaches that being a follower appears to be defined by courageous faith rather than physiological purity.³ The woman in her menstrual period must therefore come boldly to the throne of God and not allow anything to act as a barrier for her. She must understand that, God is her salvation and that Jesus makes her whole and clean as He did for the haemorrhaging woman.

Jesus cleanses all of us from all forms of impurity. People are still impure today, but because of the blood of Jesus, these people are cleansed. Everything pointed to the coming of the Saviour. In return, a person is exhorted to offer their bodies as sacrifices. Scripture says that “I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom 12:1, NKJV).

Again, it is said, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor 3:16, NKJV) Scripture does not say that menstruants are not holy (or impure) or that the bodies of women menstruating cease to be holy during that period. It therefore stands to reason that every person who has dedicated their lives to God is holy and pure and can therefore approach a holy God, for God Himself purifies all who come to Him. The menstruating women can access the church, take part in every activity, and cannot be prohibited based on the ancient purity laws. Menstruation is a natural process that all women experience at some point

²Buck, “Healing Story,” 19.

³Ibid.

in their lives.⁴ The perceptions, meanings, and actions associated with it, therefore must also change.⁵

⁴Liamputtong, "Being a Woman," 153.

⁵Ibid.

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