LEVITICUS

Chapter 15

*Discharges Causing Uncleanness*

**The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 2 “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When any man has a bodily discharge, the discharge is unclean. 3 Whether it continues flowing from his body or is blocked, it will make him unclean. This is how his discharge will bring about uncleanness: 4 “ ‘Any bed the man with a discharge lies on will be unclean, and anything he sits on will be unclean. 5 Anyone who touches his bed must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. 6 Whoever sits on anything that the man with a discharge sat on must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. 7 “ ‘Whoever touches the man who has a discharge must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. 8 “ ‘If the man with the discharge spits on someone who is clean, that person must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. 9 “ ‘Everything the man sits on when riding will be unclean, 10 and whoever touches any of the things that were under him will be unclean till evening; whoever picks up those things must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. 11 “ ‘Anyone the man with a discharge touches without rinsing his hands with water must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. 12 “ ‘A clay pot that the man touches must be broken, and any wooden article is to be rinsed with water. 13 “ ‘When a man is cleansed from his discharge, he is to count off seven days for his ceremonial cleansing; he must wash his clothes and bathe himself with fresh water, and he will be clean. 14 On the eighth day he must take two doves or two young pigeons and come before the Lord to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and give them to the priest. 15 The priest is to sacrifice them, the one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. In this way he will make atonement before the Lord for the man because of his discharge. 16 “ ‘When a man has an emission of semen, he must bathe his whole body with water, and he will be unclean till evening. 17 Any clothing or leather that has semen on it must be washed with water, and it will be unclean till evening. 18 When a man lies with a woman and there is an emission of semen, both must bathe with water, and they will be unclean till evening. 19 “ ‘When a woman has her regular flow of blood, the impurity of her monthly period will last seven days, and anyone who touches her will be unclean till evening. 20 “ ‘Anything she lies on during her period will be unclean, and anything she sits on will be unclean. 21 Whoever touches her bed must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. 22 Whoever touches anything she sits on must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. 23 Whether it is the bed or anything she was sitting on, when anyone touches it, he will be unclean till evening. 24 “ ‘If a man lies with her and her monthly flow touches him, he will be unclean for seven days; any bed he lies on will be unclean. 25 “ ‘When a woman has a discharge of blood for many days at a time other than her monthly period or has a discharge that continues beyond her period, she will be unclean as long as she has the discharge, just as in the days of her period. 26 Any bed she lies on while her discharge continues will be unclean, as is her bed during her monthly period, and anything she sits on will be unclean, as during her period. 27 Whoever touches them will be unclean; he must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. 28 “ ‘When she is cleansed from her discharge, she must count off seven days, and after that she will be ceremonially clean. 29 On the eighth day she must take two doves or two young pigeons and bring them to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 30 The priest is to sacrifice one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. In this way he will make atonement for her before the Lord for the uncleanness of her discharge. 31 “ ‘You must keep the Israelites separate from things that make them unclean, so they will not die in their uncleanness for defiling my dwelling place, which is among them.’ ” 32 These are the regulations for a man with a discharge, for anyone made unclean by an emission of semen, 33 for a woman in her monthly period, for a man or a woman with a discharge, and for a man who lies with a woman who is ceremonially unclean.**

**15:1–33** The chapter deals with (1) male uncleanness caused by bodily discharge (vv. 2–15) or emission of semen (vv. 16–18); (2) female uncleanness caused by her monthly period (vv. 19–24) or lengthy hemorrhaging (vv. 25–30); (3) summary (vv. 31–33). (CSB)

**15:2–15** Abnormal male or female genital discharges are addressed. (TLSB)

**15:2** *bodily discharge.* Probably either diarrhea or urethral discharge (various kinds of infections). The contamination of anything under the man (v. 10), whether he sat (vv. 4, 6, 9) or lay (v. 4) on it, indicates that the bodily discharge had to do with the buttocks or genitals. (CSB)

**15:3** *uncleanness*. Infections disqualified individuals from contact with holy things, making them ritually impure. (TLSB)

**15:4–12** Uncleanness could be transferred through contact with an infected person’s bed or chair (vv 4–6), body (v 7), spittle (v 8), saddle (v 9), or vessels (v 12). Those made unclean remained unclean until their ritual bath at sundown. (TLSB)

**15:4** *bed.* Something like a mat (cf. 2Sa 11:13). (CSB)

Perhaps an actual bed; most likely padding for sleeping on a dirt floor. (TLSB)

**15:12** Porous nature of earthenware retained infections. Breaking the object and removing it from the camp could prevent a transfer of the infection. Wooden vessels could be thoroughly cleansed, removing any infection. (TLSB)

**15:13** *cleansed.* God brought about the healing; the priest could only ascertain that a person was already healed. (CSB)

**15:14–15** The eighth day marked a new beginning in the purification process. For information on sin offerings and burnt offerings. (TLSB)

**15:16–18** Any emission of semen during sexual intercourse made both the man and woman ritually unclean, requiring the washing of themselves and their bedding. After sexual intercourse, normal daily functions could occur without contaminating others, unlike the rules for an infectious skin disease (14:1–9). After intercourse, the couple was required to bathe, and they remained unclean until their ritual evening bath. (TLSB)

**15:16** *semen.* Normal sexual activity and a woman’s menstruation required no sacrifices but only washing and a minimal period of uncleanness. (CSB)

**15:19–24** Menstruation made a woman ritually unclean and unable to come into God’s presence in worship. If a man had sexual intercourse with a woman during her monthly period, her menstrual blood made him ritually unclean for seven days. These rules did not prevent women from their normal work routines, but placed restrictions on items that could come in contact with menstrual blood. No rite of purification is presented in this text, which implies that she need only count off seven days after the beginning of the issue of blood and take a ritual bath on the eighth day to become clean again. (TLSB)

**15:19** *seven days.* See 12:2. This regulation is the background of 2Sa 11:4 (Bathsheba). (CSB)

**15:20** See note on Ge 31:35. (CSB)

**15:24** A case of the woman’s period beginning during intercourse. This is different from 18:19 and 20:18. (CSB)

*flow.* During her period a woman was protected from sexual activity. No offering was required for uncleanness contracted by a man in this way, but the uncleanness lasted seven days. (CSB)

**15:25–30** Abnormal menstrual blood flow is addressed in these verses. Once the abnormal flow ceased, the woman was to mark off seven days. On the eighth day, she presented the required doves or pigeons to the priest. (TLSB)

**15:25** *discharge of blood for many days.* As, e.g., the woman in Mt 9:20. (CSB)

*beyond her period.* An unnatural discharge, possibly caused by disease, was treated like a sickness and required an offering upon recovery (vv. 28–30; see vv. 14–15). (CSB)

**15:29** Under normal circumstances, a woman did not bring a sacrifice at the end of her monthly flow. Women performed these sacrifices when an abnormal menstrual flow ended. (TLSB)

**15:31** Addressed to the priests, thus emphasizing the importance of the regulations. Since God dwelt in the tabernacle, any unholiness, symbolized by the discharges of ch. 15, could result in death if the people came into his presence. Sin separates all people from a holy God and results in their death, unless atonement is made (see the next chapter). (CSB)

In grace, God provided ordinances to prevent deaths like those experienced by Nadab and Abihu when they brought “unauthorized fire” into the Lord’s presence. Cf 10:1–2. (TLSB)

**Ch 15** Ritual impurity separates God from His people. God’s declaration that semen and menstrual blood cause uncleanness prevents His people from engaging in ritual prostitution. Lv 15 provides specific examples of how God provides a means to remove impurity and to make His people clean again. His Word, which threatens by the Law, also cleanses hearts by faith in the Gospel. • Lord, You alone have the power to make us clean in Your sight through the washing of Holy Baptism. Renew us by Your grace. Amen. (TLSB)