

Niddah, Laws of

Can you tell me anything about the laws of *niddah*?

The laws of *niddah* (נִדְּוָה) in the Torah relate to a person's sexual purity and proper cleanness, and among the commandments relating to sexuality, the bulk of them relate to women. This is an area that for obvious reasons, can be embarrassing to many, and as such often goes unaddressed in the Messianic community. But, if there is anything that is absolutely imperative for Believers to understand in today's world, it is proper sexuality according to the Bible, as Satan has done his best to pervert something that God gave to a husband and wife.

One of the commandments related to *niddah* is in Leviticus 12:2-4: "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying: 'When a woman gives birth and bears a male *child*, then she shall be unclean for seven days, as in the days of her menstruation she shall be unclean. On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. Then she shall remain in the blood of *her* purification for thirty-three days; she shall not touch any consecrated thing, nor enter the sanctuary until the days of her purification are completed'" (NASU).

During a period of uncleanness for a woman, which specified here would include the time after a woman has given birth, or during her menstrual cycle, no sexual contact with a man is to take place. When a woman is not pregnant, after her menstrual cycle she must wait seven days before she can have sexual contact with her husband.

One thing we should note about the laws of ritual purity, relating to both men and women, is that they pertain to one entering the Sanctuary or Temple. There is no Temple presently to go to in Jerusalem, so there should be no worry about being unclean in this regard. However, simply because those who were ritually unclean were not permitted to go into the Temple complex, does not all of a sudden mean that a ritually unclean person cannot go anywhere, contrary to what some in Orthodox Judaism may teach. It is notable that there are many other things given in the Scriptures that can make a person unclean. If a man and a woman have sex in the confines of marriage, they are considered unclean (Leviticus 15:18). All this means is that until they bathe in water they are not permitted to go to the Tabernacle or Temple. There is no Temple to go to today, so there is nothing we can do about entering it. We do the best that we can to stay clean and proper in regard to our sexuality. This includes unmarried people as well, as they can also make themselves ritually unclean (Leviticus 15:16-18).

Many of the commandments relating to sexual purity and uncleanness have to do with proper bathing. During the Middle Ages in Europe, bathing was considered something to be looked down upon and unnecessary. It is said that Queen Elizabeth I of England only took three baths in her entire lifetime. It is no surprise why disease was rampant in many parts of Europe. The Jews of Europe, in contrast, maintained basic cleanliness and did not have many of the diseases of their non-Jewish neighbors.

In traditional Judaism, the belief is that because there is no Temple, and that no one can be fully cleansed, has resulted in the premise that by default all are unclean. Just by touching something that was touched by a ritually unclean person you are unclean. This means that if a person boards an airplane and a woman going through her menstrual cycle had previously sat down in your seat, you become unclean by sitting there. Orthodox Judaism has made the laws of *niddah* very complicated when you read the Mishnah and the Talmud, which adds many things to the basic Scriptural instructions, and then among those extra-Biblical regulations there are differing and contradicting opinions. One thing that we need to understand as Believers is that Yeshua's sacrifice indeed covers us from any ritual uncleanness, which prior to His sacrifice could have limited individuals' contacts with God in the Temple. Most of the basic instructions on ritual uncleanness that can be followed in the Diaspora pertain to married men and women, appropriate sexuality, and bathing.

Obviously, as the Messianic movement grows and refines its *halachic* orthopraxy, so will our knowledge, understanding, and application of these commandments (and the whole subject of sexuality) be improved.