

Leviticus 12:1 ¶ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
Leviticus 12:2 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean.
Leviticus 12:3 And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.

Leviticus 12:4 And she shall then continue in the blood of her purifying three and thirty days; she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying be fulfilled.

This chapter provides instruction pertaining to a woman who has given birth to a child. Again, it is important to note that these are God's instructions—not Moses'.

When a woman gives birth to a son, she is declared unclean for seven days, the same as during her menstrual cycle. Another 33 days are designated as allowing time for the bleeding caused by the birth to stop. During that time she is not to touch any consecrated or holy thing and stay away from the sanctuary. This time is called her "days of purifying" or natural cleansing.

Every male child is to be circumcised on the 8th day to identify him as one of God's covenant people. We now know that the blood's clotting factor is highest on the 8th day after birth, so this was the safest time to do this procedure.

Leviticus 12:5 But if she bear a maid child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her separation: and she shall continue in the blood of her purifying threescore and six days.

When a woman gives birth to a daughter, she is declared unclean for two weeks, or fourteen days. Another 66 days are allowed to complete the days of her purification. Why the difference? Some speculate that it is because women are the ones that birth more sinners into the world. Others point out that girls are usually smaller and were not valued as highly as boys. The extra time would allow for a better bonding experience conducive to the child's growth.

Leviticus 12:6 ¶ And when the days of her purifying are fulfilled, for a son, or for a daughter, she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtledove, for a sin offering, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest:

Leviticus 12:7 Who shall offer it before the LORD, and make an atonement for her; and she shall be cleansed from the issue of her blood. This is the law for her that hath born a male or a female.

Leviticus 12:8 And if she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean.

Once the woman who has given birth has completed her days of purification, she is to bring a lamb of the first year to offer as a burnt offering and a young pigeon

or turtledove for a sin offering to the door of the tabernacle to the priest. He is then to offer her sacrifices before the LORD to make atonement for her and declare her clean. If she is not able to bring a lamb, she is to bring two turtledoves or pigeons—one for the burnt offering and the other for the sin offering—to be sacrificed for her atonement and cleansing. I am reminded that this is the sacrifice that was brought by Mary after the birth of Jesus. I believe the sin offering was a needed reminder that the beautiful, innocent baby to whom you gave birth is a sinner.

The NIV Commentary made note that during the time she is unclean she could not cook or keep house. The total time allotted to complete her purification also provided some much needed time of gradual recovery from giving birth.

The IVP New Bible Commentary points out that “uncleanness was a state of ceremonial or religious quarantine, not a state of moral sin (except in so far as all were sinners, the clean and unclean alike).”