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Preparing for the Triumphal March

5:1 to 10:10

The preparations for beginning the march toward the Promised Land now move out from the Tabernacle and its Levitical and priestly personnel at the center to issues of **purity** and holiness among all **the people** of **Isra'el** and **the twelve tribes** who were gathered around the center of the camp. The focus shifts from safeguarding the holiness among **the priesthood** to safeguarding the holiness among **the people**.



The concern for **purity** is an important concept in the TaNaKh that many modern readers do not understand. **Purity** in ancient **Isra'el** meant being free from any physical, moral, or ritual contamination. **Impurity** came about through such things as conduct with a corpse, the involuntary flow of blood or semen, certain skin diseases (see the commentary on **Leviticus**, [to see link click By - The Test of Tsara'at](#)), or the eating of prohibited foods. **Impurity** was not sin and could always be removed through various ritual washings, waiting periods, and offerings. These **purity** mitzvot touch on matters involving food, sex and marriage, family relationships, business practices, physical abnormalities, and abhorrent worship practices of other gods and nations. No single principle or concept can explain all the aspects of these **purity** mitzvot, but they all relate in some way to preserving certain boundaries of holiness within the community of **God's people**, which was sacred by virtue of **God's** presence in its midst.

Purity mitzvot did not make distinctions strictly along the lines of class, ethnicity, gender, or race. All segments of Jewish and Gentile society were capable of being rendered pure or impure. **Yeshua** is certainly portrayed in the B'rit Chadashah Gospels as reaching out to



heal and restore people whose condition had rendered them unclean: he cleansed lepers, healed the woman who had suffered from a flow of blood, raised the dead, and ate with sinners. But as the early Messianic community moved out of the orbit of Jewish society and became more and more a religion of Gentile converts, the specific Jewish mitzvot of purity became less and less applicable in the emerging Gentile communities (see **Acts 10** and **Galatians 2**).

Our modern inability to appreciate or even understand how purity systems work is a barometer of how far away we are as a culture and society from having a notion of the reality of a holy **God** as a truly defining center in our lives and communities. We are not able, nor should we try, to reconstruct the ancient biblical purity system in our modern society. But as faithful **people of God**, we need to find ways by which the holy reality of a living and loving **God** at the center of **our** lives and our universe may more deeply shape and guide **us** as individuals and communities.⁷⁸