

Leviticus – this is who we are, this is what binds us

Intro: God had a problem. He had his people gathered together, but how to keep them together? What glue could He use to make sure that they were a separate, distinct people – knowing who was part of the family and who wasn't? How could He center them so that they could move together as one mighty nation of faith?

I. Enter Leviticus

- A. I've gone into the scientific wisdom found in this book twice before. I'll refrain from doing that yet again.
- B. Leviticus had a message for the people (11:45): *“I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.”*
 - 1. Genesis concerns our origins, our fall, and the promise of God to Abraham.
 - 2. Exodus shows how God stayed faithful to Abraham's children and delivered them from Egypt.
 - 3. Leviticus shows how God kept them together, made them a unique people, and taught them how holy their God was.
 - 4. This book was delivered to the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai.

II. The Lessons of Leviticus

- A. There is a lot of discussion of sacrifices in this book. Sacrifices started back during Cain and Abel's time, but they are never detailed as thoroughly as they are in this book.
- B. Lev. 17:11 – God's system says that blood is atonement for sin. People had to understand:
 - 1. We need God. He is not optional. We are sinful and, therefore, in need of a way to make peace with a God that sees and knows everything.
 - 2. Our lives are to be centered around ensuring we have a good relationship with God. Burnt offerings, cereal offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, and trespass offerings marked their days as surely as they were later marked by the bells calling people to prayer, or by the factory whistle. It was the central part of life – make sure you are all right; that you are acceptable to God.

- C. The priesthood was established to make sure the sacrifices and worship continued and that they honored God. They also prayed to God for the people – another line between sinful people and a holy God.
- D. Holy days and festivals were established to mark the calendar, bringing special emphasis to an historical event, or an act of God, or a need of man.
- E. Rules about hygiene and diet were established. Most of these had scientific backing that only became evident thousands of years later. Others were designed to remind them that they were a people under God -- and that that came with rules and limits.

III. Enter Jesus

- A. Jesus enters the world – a world that was in turmoil, yes, but that also had the Word of God in written form. He and his community would have known Leviticus well. They also knew that much of it wasn't being followed by their day. Wars, occupation, politics, and weariness had taken away the urgency of holy sacrifices, holy days, and holy lives. While they were – by and large – in obedience to Leviticus they knew they did not keep it well. (Paul would use this in his arguments later)
- B. How could faith in God leap from this small, divided tribal people to the whole world and still stay together – unified as a people?
- C. Jesus sat down on the Mount of Olives and began the work of drawing us together as a worldwide people of God – moved from one ethnic tribe to every tribe under heaven.

IV. The Day Everything Changed

- A. Matthew 5-7. We have often reduced the Beatitudes to poetry or familiar (and therefore powerless) platitudes. We have even perverted them into the “Be-Happy Attitudes.” What occurred on that mountain was nothing less than a reordering of the religious world – a cosmic shift that would have no equal until the stone was rolled away just over three years later.
- B. 5:13-16. We are, like the people in Leviticus, to be markedly different from the people around us. “Different” is easy. “Different for a reason” is a little harder. But “different” because we have been transformed – that is something else entirely.

- C. 5:17-20. Jesus came to fulfill the law and to bring us a level of righteousness that surpassed legalism. He went on to teach us:
1. We aren't marked by refraining from murder. We are marked by loving each other – even our enemies.
 2. We aren't marked by keeping our bodies from adultery. We even keep our minds from adultery. We keep our word to our mate and to each other.
 3. We are a people identifiable by prayer, fasting, and by our generosity to the needy.
 4. We are known by our refusal to stack up treasures on earth. We don't worry about earthly matters nor do we judge each others or others harshly. Watch what we say and do and you will see who we are.

V. The End of the Cycle of Sacrifice

- A. Hebrews 9-10:18 tells us in great detail that Jesus came to make the ultimate sacrifice – mediating a new covenant between us and God. This one would include every man, woman, boy and girl on the planet, of every race, station, rank, and culture.
- B. Hebrews 10:5-7, 11-18.
- C. This is the message we take to the streets. Marked by our love for Jesus and for each other, marked by our integrity, our commitment to each other, our generosity, by our prayers, and by our relationship with God – we take the gospel to the streets in the Name of Jesus Christ.