

Exodus/ Leviticus

Week 1

Monday: Exodus 35-38

Tuesday: Exodus 39-Leviticus 2

Wednesday: Leviticus 3-7

Thursday: Leviticus 8-11

Friday: Leviticus 12-14

Introduction

If you have ever tried to read through the Bible in a year before, then you know that in this week's reading we are heading for "The Wall." Many eager Christians have started on New Year's resolutions determined to read through the entire Bible from cover to cover. Things start out well since Genesis is a fascinating story from beginning to end. The beginning of Exodus is equally exciting as we watch Moses' showdown with Pharaoh. Things get a little cumbersome at the back end of Exodus when we start reading about the details of the Tabernacle, but the momentum of the previous readings is still carrying us along. Then it happens...WHAM! We crash head first into Leviticus! With the exception of one interesting story about Aaron's sons getting toasted in the middle of the book, Leviticus is just one detailed Law after another. How many times can you read about burning the fat attached to a kidney before your eyes start glazing over?

Granted, Leviticus is a tough book to read, but don't give up. There is a lot of really interesting stuff after Leviticus. However, we should not be too quick to dismiss Leviticus as a worthless drudgery. Given the right perspective and understanding of the context of this book, reading Leviticus can be a life changing experience.

Leviticus is best thought of as “**A Handbook for How Unholy People Can Approach a Holy God.**” As we have already discussed in last week’s devotional, the children of Israel were a wily bunch, still in the infancy of their spiritual development. They had just crawled out of the pit of slavery in a pagan nation. God needed to establish, in concrete terms, the purity of His holiness, the extent of man’s depravity, and the means for reconciliation between the holy creator and the defiled creation.

Leviticus can be divided into two major sections:

Sacrifice: The Key to Connecting Unholy People to a Holy God (ch. 1-10)

Civil Law: The Key to Connecting Unholy People in Holy Community (ch. 11-27)

In part one we read detailed instructions on how the priests were to perform the five major types of sacrifice: Burnt, Grain, Fellowship, Sin, and Guilt. Notice on the chart how these five categories can be divided into the vertical relationship between man and God, and the horizontal relationship between man and man.

Important Note regarding the blood and guts of sacrifice: *To our highly sanitized, freeze dried, vacuum sealed lifestyles, the blood bath of levitical sacrifices seems little better than a cheap horror flick. How could it possibly be of God? There are three important things to keep in mind when reading about the sacrifices.*

1. In the ancient world the people butchered animals all the time. If you wanted a nice steak dinner you didn’t drive down to the Outback

Steak House and make your order. You had to
out back, catch the cow, slit its throat, drain out
the blood, cut it open, rip out its guts, skin it,
chop up the meat, cut off the fat, then roast it.
By the time you were done you were a bloody
mess, elbow deep in putrosity. To those
people it wasn't disgusting; it was just part of
life.

2. In the ancient world talking about animals
and grain was equivalent to the modern man
discussing dollars and cents. In our culture,
unless you are a farmer, we are far removed
from the reality of crops and livestock. We
deal in currency that represents actual goods.
In fact, we are quickly becoming even further
removed from reality in that we no longer even
touch actual currency. Today we just press
a virtual button on a computer screen and
transfer money through light beams carried
on fiber optic cable to pay for something, like
a service, that we never actually touch. In the
ancient world they didn't deal with currency.
They dealt with cows, goats, sheep, and grain.
3. In light of number two we can make the
real application point for the first section of
Leviticus. When an ancient man burnt up the
best cow in his herd it was like a man today
taking the first \$1000 of his income, piling it in
\$20 dollar bills on top of the grill, and lighting
it on fire. How would you feel as you watched
the smoke and ashes of that hard-earned
money rise up to the sky? That's the point.
When God asked for sacrifice He was asking
for His people to bring the BEST of what they
EARNED and burn it up as a demonstration of
faith and devotion to God as their provider.

Two Kinds of Sacrifice

Loving God: Sacrifice to heal the broken relationship between God and man.

The first type of sacrifice was the burnt offering. This offering was designed to atone for the sin of the person. The fire would completely consume the animal, and its blood was sprinkled on the sides of the altar. The flames of the altar were to never stop burning.

Notice that this sacrifice is set apart from the other four. The Burnt offering atoned for the sins. On this side of the cross we realize that Jesus' sacrifice of Himself on the cross was the once-for-all sacrifice that healed the rift between God and Man. The eternal flames of the altar are burning in the Spirit of God as the Sacrifice of Jesus is an eternal sacrifice. We no longer have to make that sacrifice and bring something to the altar to receive salvation.

However, the other four types of sacrifice still exist. Don't misunderstand. I am not referring to the specific ritual of the Tabernacle and the Levitical priests. I am referring to the spirit of the sacrifices and the vertical and horizontal orientation of the sacrifices.

Loving God sacrifices. There are two types of offerings that God requires of His people. The Grain Offering represents the firstfruits. When the people would bring in a harvest they were to bring the first portion of that income to the tabernacle. A portion of it was burned and the remainder was used to feed the priests. God still asks His people to bring the firstfruits of their income to their place of worship. We call this the tithe, or 10%. From the tithe the needs of the community and the spiritual leadership

can be met. The tithe demonstrates a trust in God as the ultimate provider.

The Fellowship Offering was an opportunity to go above and beyond the tithe and show to God how much He is loved. The fellowship offering was like having a dinner party with God. Because we love Him, we want to share what we have with Him.

Loving Others: Sacrifices to heal the broken relationship between people.

The two remaining sacrifices have to do with human relationships. When we sin against each other we must sacrifice our own pride and confess our sins to each other and be reconciled. When we take something from another, then we need to make restitution and repay the offended party with more than we took. These offerings remind us that if the church is going to be a whole and holy community it will require self-sacrifice to achieve that end.

Monday: Bring Out the Artists!

Exodus 35:30-36:1

What was special about Bezalel and Oholiab?

Where did this special quality come from?

What was the purpose of this special quality?

Food for thought:

There are some observations that can be made from this passage.

1. An artistic expression was considered a gift of God's Spirit. (At this point all the Christians artists of the world stand and rejoice!) Isn't it interesting that in the heart of God's process of developing a tangible vehicle through which He can communicate His nature to His people, God called upon artists to get the job done. That is, in my opinion, speaking as an artist who is a Christian, the chief purpose of art. Art exists to provide a window for mortal man to be transported beyond the calculations of raw numbers and the rationality of words, into a supra-rational place where concepts like beauty and truth can be explored in a tactile, experiential way. In the process of meditating on these ideals we can connect with God, the author and sustainer of beauty and truth itself.

That was a pretty esoteric paragraph, sorry. Here's another way to look at it. When you see a great piece of art it causes you to think about the majesty of God, the ultimate creator of all things. Art is a vital part of the worship experience and should be readily utilized in both the individual and the group worship experience.

2. The skill was a divinely given gift. Many times the purpose and practice of art can be distorted. As with most other professions and vocations, when the motive of the task becomes self-serving the spark of the eternal is snuffed out and the work becomes profane. Art for art's sake is profane. Business for money's sake is profane. Sex for pleasure's sake is profane. Yet, art for God's sake, removing the ego of the artist, is divine. God gives gifts to His people. We

all have them. They are gifts. We did not earn them, nor do we deserve them. God gave them to us to use for His glory. Art is no different. When an artist realizes that her gift is from God and she decides to dedicate the artistic process to the glory of God, great and beautiful things can happen.

If you are an artist, be encouraged. Many times art can get shoved aside in the church as a superfluous endeavor. This is not the truth. God wants you to use your gifts for Him to communicate deep truths about simple beauty. Art is the language that communicates beyond cultural boundaries. The next time you pick up your brush or pencil, remember that you are an artistic ambassador for the Kingdom of God!

If you are not an artist, remember two things. First remember that God has given you an equally wonderful gift to be used to edify His body. Second, remember to encourage the artists in your community to use their gifts to bring glory to God and to help others connect with God's presence.

Tuesday: Sfumato!

Leviticus 1

What was the purpose of the burnt offering? (v. 4)

What was to be done with the blood of the sacrifice?

How much of the animal was to be burned?

Food for thought:

It is a very rare and wonderful occasion when my wife and I are able to take an actual overnight get away alone, without the kids. On one such occasion we were slowly browsing through the quaint shops of a little lakeside village in Minnesota and we happened into a little book store. As soon as I entered the shop the book began to call my name. It sounds strange, I know, but it was as if I was drawn directly to this book from across the shop. I followed this urge and walked right to the lonely white book on the bottom shelf, picked it up, and read the title, How to Think Like Leonardo Da Vinci. Without hesitation I knew I had to have this book, so I purchased it and began reading.

Being an artist and a lover of learning, Leonardo has always been one of my heroes. This book was marvelous. The author was also a Leonardo fan and had spent much of his life in the study of this great Renaissance thinker. Through the study of Leonardo's life and writings, the author observed seven principles by which Leonardo lived, and through which he was able to unlock his creative genius.

So, what does that have to do with Leviticus 1? One of the principles that Leonardo lived by was what he called *Sfumato*! This is an Italian word that means "up in smoke." Say the word out loud in the best, expressive Italian accent you can muster...its just fun to say...*Sfumato*! The principle is based upon the realization that nothing in life is permanent. Things constantly change. Even the best and most wonderful things will eventually come to an end. You could be in the most wonderful, mutually edifying marriage relationship. You could even be married for 75 years. Yet, even that, as truly good as it was, will eventually

end when one partner dies. Leonardo observed that most people spend their lives clinging on to things that won't last. They believe that things like money, power, position, and pleasure will bring them great happiness. This observation makes great sense when we realize that Leonardo was living in Northern Italy during the time when the Medici family was ruling the financial and political climate. Even then, in the late 15th century people were chasing after and holding onto temporary things in an attempt to fill an eternal hole.

In light of this observation, Leonardo said that the only way to experience true freedom, peace, and creativity is to realize that everything in life is *Sfumato!* it will go "up in smoke." You think you have a sure thing and then, poof! it's gone. Most people experience depression and despair because they have placed their assurances on these smoky shadows and have watched everything disappear in the puff.

So, if everything will go up in smoke, then where is the hope? Why should we put any effort into living at all? The answer to this is found in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. If we cling to the eternal Kingdom of God, and build our lives on the things that will not pass away, then we will know true peace. Leonardo's practical principle was that we should do everything we do in life with the intensity of believing it is the most important thing in the world, but then step back and say, *Sfumato!* it doesn't really matter. What was important about the project was the creative process of working on it, not the product itself. It was in the creative process itself that the image of God was being realized and the intersection between God and Man could take place.

So, the question still remains. What does this have to do with Leviticus chapter 1? The first half of Leviticus is all about burnt offerings. Why did God require burnt offerings from His people? Why did He ask each family to take their most prized bull, a real cash cow (literally), bring it to the altar, and then to watch the entire thing be burned into a puff of smoke and ashes? I believe God was trying to connect His people, and us, to the principle of *Sfumato*! That bull, that thing that you think is so important, that thing that you think will provide for your family and bring security to your life, that thing is nothing more than a puff of smoke in light of eternity. As Christians we need to be willing to take all the things that we hold on to in this life -- our financial, relational, and emotional security -- and light them on fire. Yes, those things are necessary for living in the physical world. Yes, we need to be good stewards of them and work hard at them. But we also need to be able to authentically step back and say "*Sfumato*! God, I lay all these things on the altar. They came from you and they are for you. Take my stuff and burn it up if you want to. All I want to do is be obedient to you."

What are your "sacred cows" that you cling to; those things that you are just not willing to give up out of fear of being without them? God looks at you and says, "Do you trust me enough to lay that thing on the altar and strike the match?" Poof...*Sfumato*!

Wednesday: The Eternal Flame

Leviticus 6:8-13

What instruction was repeated about the fire on the altar that is repeated in v. 12 and v. 13?

Food for thought:

In the introduction to the devotional this week we discussed the 5 different types of sacrifices that were to be brought to the tabernacle. We highlighted the fact that the burnt offering was a special offering, different than the other four, in that it was a blood offering designed to atone for the sins of the person. We discovered that Jesus is the burnt offering. Yesterday we also discussed the reason behind a burnt offering; God desires us to torch our physical desires and fixations and trust in His eternal Kingdom plan.

Today there is one more aspect of the burnt offering that will be helpful for us. God told the priests to make sure that the fire never went out on the altar. When the pillar of cloud moved and it was time to tear down the Tabernacle and migrate across the desert, the priests would take the embers of the fire and keep it burning until the new location could be established and the offerings resumed.

There is a deep truth in the fact that God required an eternal flame to burn at the door of His entrance.

1. **Jesus' sacrifice for our sins is eternal.** We do not have to sacrifice Jesus over and over again in order to receive redemption from sin. The sacrifice has been made and we are reconciled to God...eternally.
2. **The flame is a representation of the Spirit of God.** The physical flames of the altar in the Tabernacle during the Old Testament have been exchanged for the spiritual flame of the Spirit of God in our hearts. Our bodies are the Tabernacle of God and His Spirit burning within us is the altar of sacrifice. The only way that we can worship God authentically and offer up our "stuff" to him as a burnt offering is if the Spirit of God is burning brightly within us.

This is the task of spiritual formation and the role of the Spiritual Disciplines in our lives. The Apostle Paul said in Galatians 6:8

The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

If we want to grow spiritually and be able to pass through the Tabernacle into the Holy of Holies, then it is vital that we focus on keeping the fire of the Spirit burning in our souls. I realize that it is a stretch to draw the analogy this far, but it may serve as a nice visual for us. Think of the Spiritual Disciplines as the process of keeping the fire burning. The priests had to remove the ashes from the fire, walk them out to the edge of the camp, come back and add logs to the fire, and then change into clean clothes. This ritual, tedious as it was, was an important part of the sacrificial system. In our lives the Spiritual Disciplines can seem to be tedious. That's because sometimes they are. Yet, without the discipline of Bible Study, Prayer, Silence, Simplicity, Fasting, Worship, and Service, the fires of the altar would get choked out by the ashes of laziness and neglect.

The priests didn't live to take out the ashes. They lived to keep the fire burning. Yet, without the ash removal there would be no flame. We do not live to be good spiritual-discipline-doers, we live to worship in the flame of the Spirit. Yet, without the disciplines in place to keep the ashes out, we will slowly kill the flame and the altar will become dull.

Let's remember to ask God to light the fire in our hearts today and do our part to keep the flame of the Spirit burning brightly in our lives today.

Thursday: Bad Boys!

Leviticus 10:1-3

Who were Nadab and Abihu?

What was their job?

What did they do wrong?

What was the consequence of their action?

How did their father react? How would you have felt in that moment if you were the people of Israel? if you were Aaron?

Food for thought:

There are three thoughts for today.

1. **God takes disobedience seriously.** In our age of cheap-grace we often forget that the God who incinerated Aaron's boys is the same God that we worship today. He has not become less holy or more tolerant of sin and disobedience. Fortunately, as Paul says in Romans 5:9, "*God has poured out this all-consuming wrath onto His son Jesus in our place.*" Never lose sight of the enormity of God's Grace and the severity of God's holiness.

2. **It's God's way or the Highway.** What did the boys do wrong anyway? So they used the wrong fire, what's the big deal? The New Bible Commentary has a good slant on this issue.

Unauthorised fire (1) is unexplained. The Hebrew (*zara*) means 'strange', 'from outside'. Perhaps they took fire from outside the sanctuary instead of from the altar (cf. 16:12), as if to say, 'Any fire will do'. Such fire would be unholy, unclean, 'illicit' (*neb*), and therefore, in the context of all that had gone on so meticulously up to this point, wantonly offensive. Their action with it was also usurping the role of the high priest, and therefore included presumption, or perhaps jealous impatience. Their behaviour was not just an accidental slip in a minor detail of ritual, but a cavalier disregard for the most serious meaning of the events they were part of. It is as if a Christian minister in the middle of celebrating the Holy Communion were to inject rites or objects associated with the occult.¹

We must remember that we don't get to make up the rules. In our culture we have a sort of "Spirituality Smorgasbord" idea about approaching God. We walk up to the kaleidoscope of religions that sprinkle our cultural scene and choose a little of this and a little of that. "Oh, I really like the loving and kind God, I'll take two of those. Ooh, I need to stay away from the wrath bar, I'm allergic. Ah, over here is tolerance, I'll take three, please." Zap! Sorry, it doesn't work that way. We don't get to make God up, rather, our job is to figure out what God has revealed to us through scripture, what He expects from us, and then line up our lives with that. It's HIS highway, not ours.

3. The leader's job is to honor God. There is a profound and startling leadership lesson in this story. The priest's job was to represent God to the people. He was the go-between. Notice what God's indictment against the boys was all about. They did not honor God. The word translated "honor" is a rich Hebrew word, *kabod*, which means "to be heavy, be weighty, be grievous, be hard, be rich, be honourable, be glorious, be burdensome, be honoured."² When you are the representative of someone you carry an important responsibility to present an accurate picture of that person to others. When you represent the heavy weight of the glory of the Almighty God, you had better have your ducks in a row. God will not be mocked by flippancy or sloppy work on the part of the leaders of His church who feel that it is "no big deal" and want to just "let it slide". Being a minister of the gospel is a job that requires a sober mind. This doesn't mean it has to be boring and like a funeral dirge. It does mean that the minister should think seriously before teaching people about God before he has done his homework. The minister needs to be sure that his cup is being filled with the authentic flame of God's Spirit before he tries to light

fires in other's hearts.

Therein lays the real sin. The boys brought another fire. The original fire on the altar was started by God Himself, not by some guy in the back of the tabernacle with a bic lighter. Aaron's boys thought they could fake it, and it would be OK. Not so. We, as ministers of the good news (all of us are ministers at some level, so you're not off the hook) need to make sure that we are lighting our fires from the true flame of God's Spirit, not from some humanly constructed spirituality that looks good, but has a faulty foundation.

Friday: Infection in the Camp

Leviticus 12-14

If a person had a sore on their skin, or if they were to have mildew in their house, what was to happen in that situation? Why?

If the infection or the mildew went away, what was to happen in order for the person to be reinstated into the community?

Food for Thought:

In the middle of this passage of Leviticus which deals with the very physical reality of infection in the camp of Israel, there is a spiritual lesson to be learned for the church of today. Infection has disastrous effects on the community. In the Old Testament, physical infection represented sin in the minds of the people. If a person, clothing, or a house, had become infected, it had to be isolated from the Tabernacle (worship of God) and the community (fellowship). If the infection never went away then the infected person essentially became the "living dead" and would have to stay outside the camp, in complete isolation, crying out "unclean, unclean." While this seems like cruel and unusual punishment, we must remember that the person was not necessarily being made to pay for their own personal sin. Rather, they were a living testimony to the reality of the infection of sin and its effects on worship and community.

Sin isolates, there are just no two ways around it. Today, when we allow sin to creep into our lives, we are infected. When this infection is detected by the priest (we are all priests...remember) it is the duty of the priest to take drastic action to isolate the infection and get rid of it. What would have happened if the priests in Moses' camp had just let the infection slide out of "grace and compassion"? The tabernacle would have been defiled, God would have been dishonored, and the infection would have spread like wildfire throughout the camp, perhaps killing everyone. So it is with sin. Sin in the camp of God is serious business. It is a spiritual infection that goes way deeper than any skin disease, it worms its way into the soul of a person and kills him with eternal death. Sin must be identified and isolated.

Is that where it stops? Should we just take anyone who is a “sinner” and throw them out of the camp? Not at all. Yes, we must isolate the sin. We must not deal lightly with sin. We must isolate it, but then we must wait “seven days” and see if the infection is gone. In the Old Testament the number seven was a symbol of perfection. It was God’s number. It is during those “seven days” of isolation when the healing can take place. When there is sin in the camp, it is not God’s desire to punish the sinner. God loves the sinner. Yet, sin isolates. Sin cannot come into the presence of God. If it does it throws the whole worshipping community into chaos. God loves the sinner, but He hates the sin that isolates His child from Him. The purpose of the isolation is not punishment, the purpose is healing. If after seven days the person returns and is found to be without infection, if the sin is gone, then they can be reinstated into proper worship of God and fellowship with the community. They must make their sacrifices, shave their head, wash from head to foot, and then they are back.

When we sin, it takes some doing to get back into the swing of things. We need to sacrifice ourselves before God again. We need to ask God to forgive us for our sin. We need to humbly stand before the community and seek forgiveness and restitution. We must be cleansed with the Spirit of God. Then we will be renewed. Never again will that sin have effect on our worship and our fellowship. We are clean. God doesn’t hold it against us. The community doesn’t hold it against us.

Do you see the point here? It’s not that God delights in punishing us for sin and sits around waiting to zap anyone who steps out of line. The natural effects of sin are the punishment in themselves. When you sin you are hurting yourself and everyone else in your

community. You are disrupting your relationship and open worship of God. You are dishonoring His name. You are jeopardizing the health of the community. That sin must be isolated or else everyone, starting with you, is going down. As a community we cannot allow sin to fester in our people. We must deal with it quickly, speak the truth about it, isolate it, repent of it, get healed from it, seek forgiveness, make restitution, and experience the cleansing power of God once again. Too many times, in our Christian perspective, in light of Grace, we think that sin is no big deal and that God will just forgive us automatically. That's not how it works. Grace happened in the fact that God made the once-for-all atoning sacrifice for our sins and made it possible for all people to enter into His presence without a human mediator. That didn't wipe out the effects of sin in our day-to-day lives. Sin is a nasty infection. It must be dealt with in truth and in love.

What infection do you have today? Is there cherished sin that you hold on to? Perhaps you struggle with lust and private fantasy in your thought life. Perhaps you harbor resentment or bitterness toward someone. Perhaps there is an act that you have done in secret that haunts you. Perhaps you have an addiction that seems "safe and harmless" but hangs around your neck like a 100 pound chain. That infection is destroying your fellowship with God and your fellowship with others. Oh, you may be able to go through the churchy motions, but deep down inside you know you are already standing outside the camp screaming "unclean, unclean". Remember that Jesus went outside the camp. He touched the unclean one and said, you, too, can be forgiven. God loves you. He does not want you to suffer from this infection. Your community loves you. If you want to be clean, here's what you need to do.

1. Find at least one godly person who will sit down with you and listen.
2. Verbally name the sin and confess to that person that you have been committing that sin.
3. Pray, verbally, with that person and ask God to forgive you for the sin.
4. Commit to God that it is your desire to not go back to that sin in your life.
5. Verbally speak the name of Jesus and claim that it is through His blood sacrifice that you have been forgiven and through the power of the Holy Spirit that you can be set free from your sin.
6. Ask God, verbally, to give you the strength to move away from that sin.
7. Ask the person to hold you accountable through regular follow-up conversations to not repeating that sin.
8. Make any restitution to offended people that need to be made.
9. Publicly, in the context of your true spiritual community, confess (not necessarily in the same level of detail as with the individual) that you have sinned and would like to re-enter a healthy relationship with the community.

If we, as the church, would function in this way, we could begin cleansing our camp, and the Spirit of God could be unleashed to do His work in us and through us.

(Footnotes)

¹ Carson, D. A. (1994). New Bible commentary : 21st century edition. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.) (Le 10:1). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.

² Strong, J. (1996). Enhanced Strong's Lexicon (H3513). Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship.