

Old Testament Survey - Part 17

by Dick Woodward

This sermon provides an overview of Leviticus, emphasizing its significance as a guide for worship and the foreshadowing of Christ's sacrifice.

Duration: 27:35

Topics: "Old Testament", "Sacrificial System"

Description

This sermon delves into the book of Leviticus, highlighting its significance as a manual for the priests in the tent of worship. It emphasizes the sacrificial system as a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ's ultimate sacrifice, the importance of obedience for blessings, and the unique laws that set God's people apart. The sermon also explores the symbolism in the rituals, such as the cleansing of a leper and the anointing of priests, pointing to their deeper spiritual meanings and connections to the gospel.

Transcript

Now as we continue our survey of the Old Testament, we come to the book of Leviticus. We've been coming to the book of Leviticus now for several sessions. Before we could hope to understand this difficult book of Leviticus, we felt that we simply had to have perspective on the tabernacle in the wilderness, or the tent of worship.

So we gained, we trussed some Old Testament perspective on the tent of worship, and then we gained some New Testament perspective on the tent of worship. Now having had Old Testament and New Testament perspective on the tent of worship, we're ready to tackle this little book of Leviticus. As we suggested several weeks ago, when people read the Bible, they tend to bog down in the book of Leviticus when they get to the book of Leviticus.

They do pretty well in Genesis and through most of Exodus. Then when they hit those specifications for the tent of worship, and then especially when they get to Leviticus, they just kind of give up. One reason for that is people don't realize that the book of Leviticus was a manual that was used by the priest who officiated in the tent of worship.

Now if you are not an Old Testament priest, you might not understand everything that's in that manual. Frankly, we suggested this in our introduction to the Bible. I believe that the Bible is all-inspired.

I believe it's all-inspired. But I do not believe that all parts of the Bible are equally inspiring. I have some friends who believe that if the Bible is all-inspired, every part of it has got to be just as inspiring as every other part of it.

They say if you just understood it better, you would discover that every part of the Bible is inspiring, even the genealogies. I had an internship with a pastor in California years ago who believed that way, and he preached a sermon one night to prove his point. He called that sermon the most uninteresting verse in the Bible.

It was a verse out of the middle of a genealogy, and he took the Hebrew verbs and parsed them and diagrammed sentences and everything, and it was supposed to really be the most interesting verse in the Bible. But when he finished, I went up to him, and I wasn't very submissive, I suppose, for a young intern, but I said to him, Doctor, I don't know how you found it, but undoubtedly that was the most uninteresting verse in the Bible. I just failed to see why we have to make every part of the Bible as inspiring as every other part.

In the book of Leviticus, the priest's manual will give them instructions about how to slaughter an animal, what to do with the entrails and everything. Well, that's not as inspiring as Psalm 23, and that's not as inspiring as 1 Corinthians 13, the great love chapter of the Bible. But for all of that, please don't feel that there isn't any spiritual truth or devotional application you can gain from the book of Leviticus, because that isn't true.

This book has beautiful truth in it, and I would like to see if we can point you to some of the garden spots of this book at this time. First of all, to give you kind of an overview to the book and an introduction to the book, this priest's manual, I think, is under several headings. Chapters 1 through 7 deals with the sacrifices these priests were to make.

The first seven chapters of the book focuses upon these many sacrifices they made, and it not only tells them how to do these sacrifices, you know, literally and practically what to do, but it does give us some tremendous insight into the meaning of these sacrifices. And since these sacrifices were all fulfilled through the sacrifice of Jesus as the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world, there is much gospel about Jesus Christ in these instructions to the priest and the first seven chapters of Leviticus about the sacrifices. Now, in chapters 8 through 10, the focus is upon the servants or upon the priests themselves.

There is some important instruction in those chapters, 8, 9, and 10, about the priests themselves, the kind of men they were supposed to be, and some of the standards they were supposed to keep. There's a lot of beautiful devotional truth in those chapters. And then the heart of the book, perhaps, is chapters 11 through 22, which I call the sanctification.

Again, this tent of worship and these priests were trying to say to the whole world that the chosen people of God were a holy people because their God was holy. The emphasis in these chapters, 11 through 22, is that they were supposed to be a distinct people. They were supposed to be different.

They were not ordinary. They were supposed to be distinct people. The word holy means that which belongs to God.

Now, these people belonged to God. They were God's offspring, the Scripture says. Now, if your child belongs to you, have you ever said to your child when he's about to go out, now, remember who you are, and remember you're reflecting on this whole family, and just show people that you belong to me by the way you behave.

Well, this is what our Heavenly Father says in the book of Leviticus. Through this whole sacrificial system, this whole priestly system, he's saying be holy for I am holy. You belong to me, now act like you belong to me and show the whole world that you belong to me.

And so in this section, chapters 11 through 22, you have these special laws that make them a distinct people, a unique people, a peculiar people, a holy people. There are dietary laws and there are laws for just about everything, but all of these laws come down to one word, and that word is holiness. And holiness simply means that attribute which says that the people who are experiencing this holiness are holy people, are people who belong to God.

Now, in chapters 23 through 25, you have what I call the services. There are many holy days in the Jewish faith, and you'll find them documented in the first five books of the Bible. And of course, since these priests were the ones who were to officiate during these holy days and these very sacred ceremonies, they needed instruction about these ceremonies.

How do you conduct a communion service? The young minister needs to be instructed in that. Well, in their day, these holy days like Passover, where every bit is sacred, to them as communion, or the Eucharist would be to a minister in one of our churches today. And so you'll find in chapters 23 through 25 instruction to the priest about how to conduct these sacred ceremonies that were held on these holy days.

When you come to that section of Leviticus, always ask yourself these questions. What was it God wanted them to remember when he instituted a holy day like Passover? And then ask yourself this question. Why did God want them to remember that? All of those holy days really kind of sift down to that.

There was something God wanted them to remember. Well, why did he want them to remember it? God's people are so prone to forget, and God certainly knows that. And so he institutes these holy days and these sacred ceremonies and says, don't you ever forget.

And so that you won't forget, do this and this and this and remember. We call that the services, and those are described in chapters 23 through 25. Now, the last two chapters of the book of Leviticus I call the surrender.

The book of Leviticus and the book of Deuteronomy and the book of Joshua close in a very similar way. These books close with a tremendous, and I mean a tremendous exhortation to the people of God to obey the laws of God and be the holy people that they have been called, that they have been delivered, that they have been saved to be. Tremendous exhortations.

They're at the end of the book of Leviticus, and they are, I think, very, very dynamic chapters. You'll find that Moses, even though he said he had a speech impediment or perhaps he didn't articulate very well, apparently as he produces the Pentateuch, you'll find evidences, especially at the end of Leviticus and at the end of Deuteronomy, that he was a very eloquent preacher. Some of the greatest preaching on record comes from Moses, in the book of Deuteronomy especially, and here at the end of the book of Leviticus.

Magnificent preaching exhorting the people of God to live like the holy people that they're supposed to be. Now, that's an overview or an introduction to the book of Leviticus. As you read the book of Leviticus, those are the things to look for.

That's the way the priest's manual kind of broke down. Now, as you look at these headings in the book of Leviticus, I would like to point out some of the devotional blessings that you can find even in a book like Leviticus. For instance, under that first heading, again, the sacrifices.

In the first seven chapters of the book, I believe you'll find some beautiful truth in the way the priests were instructed to offer these sacrifices to God. For instance, when a sinner came down to the tent of worship and he wanted to have forgiveness, as we saw when we looked at the tent of worship, he was met at the gate by the priest, and the priest would instruct him in the meaning of the sacrifice he was going to make. Now, here is some scripture in Leviticus that describes the instruction that was given to the priest, which he was to in turn pass on to the sinner.

Here was the instruction concerning these offerings or sacrifices. The person bringing his animal is to lay his hand upon its head, and it then becomes his substitute. The death of the animal will be accepted by God instead of the death of the man who brings it as the penalty for his sins.

The man shall then kill the animal there before the Lord and Aaron's sons. The priest will then present the blood before the Lord, and sprinkling it upon all sides of the altar at the entrance of the tabernacle. Now, that's in the Living Bible translation.

Here's a little picture of what we have just read. The sinner would come through the gate of the tabernacle and just off from the brazen altar, the priest would instruct him about what the sacrifice meant. You know, the priests were teachers.

In addition to other things, they were teachers. Anything the people of God wanted to know, they could always ask a priest. And a priest was supposed to sit down with them and instruct them in the things of God and in the word of God.

So as the sinner was making the sacrifice of this animal, the priest instructed him to take his hand and put his hand upon the head of the animal. And actually, that animal became his substitute. This was called the scapegoat.

That's where we get the word scapegoat. And all the sin of the sinner was transferred to the head of that animal. And the death that that sinner deserved because of his sin, that happened to the animal and not to the sinner.

Now, that was the significance of that sacrifice. And of course, this gives a lot of significance to the New Testament verses, like 2 Corinthians 5.21, which says, And he made him, meaning Jesus, to be sin for us, he who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Or the verse in 1 Peter 2.24, where Peter said, You see, that's what the Scripture teaches.

I've heard people say the substitutionary atonement is not biblical. And I just kind of get upset when I hear that, because it's intensely biblical. It starts back there in the Old Testament with Passover.

And then you see it in Leviticus. You see it in the Tenet of Worship. It's a fundamental doctrine of the Old Testament worship forms.

And then the New Testament application or the New Testament commentary simply applies it to Jesus. Of course, the Old Testament prophets applied it to Jesus, too. They understood what was going on there.

They knew the Messiah was going to come, and they knew the Messiah would be the fulfillment of the animal sacrifices. Prophets like Isaiah said in Isaiah 53, verse 6, That's a beautiful verse, Isaiah 53.6. It begins and ends with the same word, the word all. Now, it's a good thing to ask yourself these two questions about Isaiah 53.6. Do you believe that you are included in the first all of that verse? When it says, Have you ever acknowledged that includes me? I have turned to my own way.

I have gone astray. I'm a sinner. I believe that's a very important part of confessing your faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The verse also ends with the word all, and so you should ask yourself, do you believe you're included in the last all of that verse? You see, the first all is the bad news. All of us are sinners. That's bad news.

But the verse ends with the good news. The Lord God Jehovah just laid upon him, the Messiah, the sins or the iniquity of us all. Do you believe that you're included in that last all? If you believe you're included in the first all and you're included in the last all, you're saved, in my opinion, because that's what you're supposed to believe to be a believer, to be a saved, born-again Christian, as we call it today.

These are the fundamental facts of the gospel, and they are illustrated for us in this beautiful book of Leviticus. You'll discover in connection with the sacrifices that there are times in the history of Israel where the entire nation has sinned, and so there is to be a national repentance. The priests were instructed, if the entire nation of Israel sins without realizing it and does something that Jehovah has said not to do, all the people are guilty, not just the Republicans or the Democrats, all the people are guilty.

When they realize it, they shall offer a young bull for a sin offering, bringing it to the tabernacle, where the leaders of the nation, now this is important, picture our President, picture our Secretary of State, picture our leaders now. The leaders of the nation, it says, shall lay their hands upon the animal's head and kill it before the Lord, and then they shall follow the same procedure as they would for a regular sin offering. In this way, the priests shall make atonement for the whole nation, and everyone in the nation will be forgiven.

Wouldn't that be a beautiful thing to experience as a nation? National sin, national repentance. This is the principle there in the book of Leviticus. In the priest's manual, you also have the basis for paid clergy, and we find this very interesting, we clergymen.

He says, I have designated the breast and thigh as donations from the people of Israel to the sons of Aaron. Aaron and his sons must always be given this portion of the sacrifice. This is their pay.

It is to be set apart from the burnt offering and given to all who have been appointed to minister to the Lord as priests to Aaron and his sons. I think that's a basis very early in the scripture for what we call a paid clergy. Under the heading of the servants, a very important word is the word anointed.

These priests were anointed men. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is described by prepositions. The Holy Spirit does a beautiful, miraculous work in us.

The preposition in is used a lot in connection with the Holy Spirit's ministry. But the Holy Spirit, especially in the book of Acts, does a mighty work upon us. Notice in the book of Acts, the preposition is upon.

Great grace was upon them all. You shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you. That's the anointing of the Holy Spirit, upon you.

And that's always associated with ministry. You can't minister until the Holy Spirit comes upon you. The proof that the Holy Spirit is doing a work in you is the fruit of the Spirit.

Love, joy, peace, there are nine of them. But the proof that the Holy Spirit is doing his work upon you is called the gifts of the Spirit. There are about 21 of them mentioned in the New Testament.

The Holy Spirit also does a work in our midst, it says, where two or three of us gather together, he's in our midst. These prepositions describe different aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit. But these priests experienced, even in Old Testament times, this is not a New Testament concept, it's Old and New Testament, this concept of anointing or the coming upon us of the Spirit.

These priests were anointed men, and to illustrate that, the blood of a sacrifice was placed upon the ear and the hand and the big toe of the right foot of the priest. And that was beautiful symbolism. It was saying to the priest, you are holy men.

You are to lead the people to be holy. And you cannot be ordinary men. You're called to be anointed men.

Everything you hear should be anointed by the Holy Spirit. Boy, isn't that a challenge today? There's so much garbage today that we hear. And a holy man shouldn't hear anything that isn't anointed by the Holy Spirit.

That's a great challenge. They didn't do as much reading then as we do. They heard the Word of God.

A lot of people were not literate then. So the big emphasis is upon hearing the Word because many people couldn't read it. But everything they heard was to be anointed, the Word of God and everything else.

And then the hand speaks of action. Everything they did was to be anointed. And then the foot spoke of going.

Everywhere they went was to be anointed by God. That's beautiful symbolism. Also in the Book of Leviticus, you find in connection with their being distinct and holy and under the heading of these sacrifices, a beautiful illustration of what we mean when we say that Moses wrote of Jesus when he wrote all of this beautiful law.

Remember in the New Testament when Jesus healed a leper, which he did frequently? He would always say to the leper who was healed, go show yourself to the priest. Why did he do that? Because in the Book of Leviticus you find this instruction. Leprosy was a tremendous problem then.

It was contagious, most forms of it were. And so the leper was quarantined and it was absolutely pathetic, the life of a leper. Now suppose a leper was healed.

Well, that wasn't very likely, frankly, in Old Testament times, but it was possible. It did happen to Naaman the leper. You know, it could happen.

God can always heal. And God healed in the Old Testament period. And of course, God healed lepers through Jesus.

Now Moses made provision, or God through Moses made provision for the healing of a leper. But if a leper was healed, you know, he had to scream unclean, unclean if anybody came near him, and people would run away from him. Just imagine the loneliness of a leper.

What a pathetic life they must have lived. Now suppose the leper is healed. Well, he doesn't just go back home and start going to all the social functions and mixing with people.

He had to show himself to the priest. And in the Book of Leviticus, in chapter 14, you have a greatly detailed ceremony that the priest had to go through by which he pronounced that leper clean and ready to go back and, you know, interact with people. Now this ceremony involved several things.

It involved an earthen pot, a scarlet string, and a piece of cedar wood. If you read this in Leviticus 14, you'll see that. Now the priest was told, if he decided now that the leper is clean, that he was to take two birds.

And the first bird he was to sacrifice over this earthen pot which was filled with water that had been taken from a spring or running water. Now he was to sacrifice it and let the blood drop into the water and then put the bird in the earthen vessel there that was filled with spring water. Then he was to take the second bird and he was to take that piece of cedar wood and that scarlet string and tie that second bird to that piece of wood and dip it, submerge it, in this bloody water in the earthen pot.

He was also to take a branch of hyssop and then he was to sprinkle the leper seven times with that. This may be repulsive to you, but I think the Lord was very graphic in all of this. And then the beautiful thing is after he dipped that second bird tied to the cedar wood with the scarlet string in that pot of water, he was to let it go and fly into the open field.

Now what do you think that was illustrating? I think this is one of the most beautiful illustrations of the gospel of Jesus Christ to be found in the book of Leviticus. First of all, as it applied to the leper there were several applications. I think the water spoke of the fact that he was cleansed of his leprosy.

The cedar wood, they say, would not putrefy and so it symbolized the fact that they believed his flesh would not turn leprous again. There were many applications made to the leper. When the second bird was allowed to fly in the open field, this was speaking of the freedom the leper had from his quarantine.

But in addition to those literal applications to the leper, it's just too obvious when you see the applications here to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The earthen vessel there spoke of the incarnation of Jesus. God became a man.

God took upon himself a body, an earthen vessel, and he came into this world to die on the cross for our sins. So that sacrifice bird in the earthen vessel is a beautiful picture of the incarnation and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. And then that second bird tied to the cedar wood with the scarlet string submerged in the bloody water and then allowed to fly in the open field.

What a beautiful picture of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There are two gospel facts according to the New Testament and they are the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The death of Jesus is only half the gospel.

The resurrection is the other half. The death of Jesus, that tells us how we can have forgiveness. But the resurrection of Jesus tells us how we can have fellowship with the risen, living Christ.

And there you have those two beautiful gospel facts pictured for us in Leviticus chapter 14. Now we said that at the end of the book of Leviticus you had this magnificent preaching of Moses and it is really magnificent and you'll find this at the end of Deuteronomy as well. If you obey all of my commandments, I will give you rains, bumper crops, trees loaded with fruit, grapes that will still be ripening when the sowing time comes again.

You shall eat your fill and live safely in the land and I will give you peace and you will go to sleep without fear. You will chase your enemies. They will die beneath your swords.

Five of you will chase a hundred and a hundred of you ten thousand. You will defeat all of your enemies. I will walk among you and be your God and you shall be my people.

See this is the exhortation to obey and the blessings that will follow in the wake of obedience. But then you have this awesome exhortation. But if you will not listen to me or obey me but reject my laws, this is what I will do to you.

Now here is an awesome thing. Sudden terrors and panic. Tuberculosis, burning fever.

Your eyes will be consumed and never wait. You'll sow your crops in vain. Your enemies will eat them.

And now he begins to predict, I believe, the Babylonian captivity. He says you will flee before your attackers and those who hate you will rule you and you will even run when no one is chasing you. And in the end he says I will scatter you out among the nations, destroying you with war as you go.

Your lands will be desolate and your cities destroyed. And as for those who are left alive, I will cause them to be dragged away to distant lands as prisoners of war and slaves. They will live in constant fear there.

The sound of relief driven in the wind will send them fleeing as though chased by a man with a sword and they will fall when no one is pursuing them. You see prophecy mixed in with his exhortation because he's predicting what actually happens to them and we'll see it as we go through the history books of the Old Testament. When they obeyed the word of God, God blessed them.

And when they did not obey the word of God, they did not have the blessing of God. When they obeyed the word of God, they did defeat their enemies, miraculously. When they went into the land of Canaan, they did turn thousands to flight just like he says here in the book of Leviticus.

But when they didn't obey the word of God, they were turned to flight themselves and ultimately they were led into captivity. Now as you see in the book of Leviticus, the emphasis upon their being unique and distinct, you have all kinds of laws like laws that pertain to diet and the more you look into nutrition today, and we're getting conscious I think of nutrition today, the more you look into nutrition today, the more you come to appreciate these laws. A doctor named Macmillan has written a beautiful book called None of These Diseases in which he points out that if Moses didn't have a revelation, that he scooped medicine by hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years.

Because he knew about sterilization, he knew about the importance of not touching a sick person or a dead person without scrubbing up like a surgeon. There are so many illustrations of this in that book. But the promise to them in the book of Exodus was that if they would obey these dietary laws, they would have none of these diseases.

You'll also discover in the Scripture that things are forbidden like homosexuality. Homosexuality has always been forbidden in the Scripture. And I believe it's forbidden because the banquet of consequences is not good.

That's not a happy lifestyle. That's not a good way to live. That doesn't fit into God's plan about persons becoming partners and parents that produce persons and become partners and parents.

That doesn't build anything. That's just two people meeting each other's needs. And Leviticus doesn't mince words.

It condemns that very, very strongly. It also condemns sorcery and witchcraft and fortune telling and a whole lot of other things because they are to be a unique people. This is the bottom line in the book of Leviticus.

Well, I hope that this introduction or overview of the book of Leviticus will make it possible for you to read it and gain more from it. It was a manual for the priests that was to show them how to be anointed men of God, holy men of God, who could lead the people of God themselves to be holy. Be ye holy, for I am holy, sayeth the Lord.

That's the message of the book of Leviticus.

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