

Sermon preached at Woodbury Community Church, Woodbury, MN on Sunday,  
February 12, 2012, by Rev. Brian D. Schulenburg

**LEVITICUS 11:45**

45 For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”

**THE CHALLENGE #7**  
**HOLINESS**

This week, I wrote a poem to help us review what we've read so far in the Challenge.

In the beginning  
'fore time as we knew it  
God was creating  
the world He did knit

Light and Dark  
Water and Sky  
Earth like a park  
Space, where satellites fly

And the lakes, rivers, streams and oceans?  
They were full with living creatures  
While the skies above saw motions  
From the wings the birds did feature.

Then on sixth day of creation  
God made animals large and small  
And finally His summation  
Man to rule them all

To the man He gave the name Adam  
To the woman He gave the name Eve  
Then the serpent came to the Madame  
Husband and Wife sought he to deceive

His crafty ways and clever lies  
Accomplished enemy's mission  
Man and woman's ruined lives  
God's plan, however, would come to fruition

Brother kills brother  
And evil prevails  
One after another  
Embraces sin and all it entails

Until God sends a flood  
Saving only one family  
Sin's curse requires blood  
A world-wide calamity

A new covenant made  
With Noah and sons  
Now earth would evade  
Descending to crumbs

The nations they grew  
Expanding the world  
In speech and technology too

'til blueprints were written  
And pride it expanded  
The tongues they were stricken  
And people transplanted

Then God called Abram  
A great nation He would make  
His name changed to Abraham  
And Sarah was his mate

Two old people, when God called them  
Wondered if God had somehow lost His mind  
So, Abraham approached Hagar and said, "Ahem,"  
"Would you be my partner in increasing mankind?"

Ishmael was born to the woman named Hagar  
But, God's plan was for Sarah to conceive  
Three angels came to tell her God was going to make her  
Pregnant at 90, so hard to believe!

Isaac was born a miraculous baby  
Abraham's faith put to ultimate test  
Up the mountain with hope in a maybe  
Abraham and Isaac saw God at His best

To Isaac, God brought a wife named Rebekah  
Twin sons He did give them Jacob and Esau  
Jacob, a swindler gave Esau vendetta  
So hide, Jacob did, until Esau's anger did thaw

Twelve sons by four women were born unto Jacob  
 Joseph he favored, causing family dissention  
 Brothers sold Joseph as slave, quite a snub  
 The true nature of their crime to Jacob did not mention

Brother's treachery was part of God's plan all along  
 Joseph the slave rose to second in command  
 He who was weak by God was made strong  
 Rescued many nations by faith in God's hand

Generations were born in Egypt's land  
 Israelite people to Pharaoh were a threat  
 Slavery enforced by the whip's hand  
 People crying out to God so upset

Moses, God called in a fiery bush  
 "Take off your sandals, on holy ground you stand."  
 The message delivered, Moses needed a push  
 With God, he'd have the upper hand

"Let my people go," was the message delivered  
 And, Pharaoh's hard heart would have none of it  
 Ten plagues brought down as the people shivered  
 At Passover God delivered the ultimate hit

The slaves who were desperate were finally free  
 But there would be yet one more test  
 Egypt's army pursued to shores of Red Sea  
 Waters arose and then they recessed

Freedom was sweet and God, He provided  
 Manna in morning and manna at night  
 Up to Mount Sinai the people He guided  
 Met with Moses the law He did write

The people lost faith, and created an idol  
 Moses came down, with anger he burned  
 Repentance and sacrifice, their tongues they did bridle  
 And once again to Jehovah God they turned

So, God renewed His promise and spoke His law  
 For Covenant People to know and to follow  
 A priesthood and tabernacle, holy people withdraw  
 No more to live in their sins and to wallow.

And, that is the very place that we find the children of Israel as we enter into the book of Leviticus. Leviticus is the book that derails many people in their attempt to read through the Bible in a year. Some of you, who are joining us the adventure of reading God's Word this year, were tempted like you haven't been tempted all year long, to give up this week. You got to the law in Exodus, which is continued in Leviticus and thought, "What does this have to do with me? The laws seem old, and archaic, and have seemingly nothing to do with Gentile believers."

In a terrific sermon that he preached on Leviticus, Steve Malone wrote, "A somewhat cynical analyst has observed: 'Leviticus is a dust heap containing a single pearl-you shall love your neighbor as yourself.' A casual reading of Leviticus may cause the reader to feel that Leviticus is the epitome of Old Testament irrelevance.

Leviticus is full of ritual and sacrifices, that have not been performed for nearly 2000 years. It goes into great detail describing a priesthood that no longer exists and feasts and Holidays that are no longer observed.

All of these factors are probably why Leviticus is the least read book of the Bible. How many times have we read through this book? Doctor Smith in his survey of the Pentateuch writes:

'The prejudice against it notwithstanding, Leviticus is a Christian book. The Bible of Jesus contained this book. More than 40 New Testament references to Leviticus have been identified. What appears on the surface to be a barren wasteland proves to be a gold mine to those with the patience to plunge its depths.'

As we begin our study of Leviticus I invite you, to COME AND SEE. Come and see what treasures God has for us as we study this book.

Today as we survey the book of Leviticus we will discover that Leviticus is indeed, a relevant book for Christians even today and that it is a book abounding in great teachings. Leviticus teaches God's people about :

## **I. THE GREAT PROBLEM OF SIN"<sup>1</sup>**

Listen, when you and I look at Leviticus as a whole, it gives us an understanding of the holiness of God and the expectation of holiness that God has for his people. The first half of the book speaks about the way to approach God and the second half teaches us how to walk with God.

I love the outline that Malone used when introducing his congregation to the book of Leviticus, and I'm going to use his outline today.

The theme of the great problem of sin is all over the book of Leviticus. The word sin is used over 90 times in the book of Leviticus. I like something that Malone said. "In

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.sermoncentral.com/print\\_friendly.asp?ContributorID=&SermonID=60248](http://www.sermoncentral.com/print_friendly.asp?ContributorID=&SermonID=60248)

Exodus . . . we find God being concerned with, getting His people out of Egypt. God was concerned with releasing them from the bonds of Egyptian slavery. In the book of Leviticus, which covers a one month period of time after the building of the tabernacle, we find God now concerned with, getting Egypt, out of His people. God was concerned with dealing with His people's problem of sin."<sup>2</sup>

I believe that God is concerned with getting culture out of us as well. Sin is anything that we allow in our lives that gets in the way of our relationship with God. It is saying, "No," to God's desires for our life and following a different path. And it's something that everyone of us has to deal with. Romans 3:23 tells us, "23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." There is not one of us who is without sin.

Do you know what Leviticus says about sinners? Malone writes, "in many places in the book of Leviticus we read that those who break God's commands, that those who disobey, that those who are unclean, are to be cut off. This phrase is used 15 times in the book of Leviticus. This terms teaches us that those who are disobedient, that those who sin, are to be separated from God and from God's people.

That is what sin does, it separates us from God. Our God is a Holy God. Four times in the book of Leviticus (Chs. 10, 11, 19, 20), God tells His people to be Holy because He is Holy. When God's people sin they become stained, they become impure, and they no longer can approach or stand in God's presence. The prophet Isaiah, writes in the 59th chapter that 'our sins separate us from God and that our sins also hide God's face from us'. Sin separates us from God."<sup>3</sup>

And we already saw that all of us are guilty of sin. I don't want to be separated from God. I don't want to taste the judgment that comes from walking the path of sin. And that's why the next gift that Leviticus gives us is so beautiful.

## **II. GOD'S GREAT PROVISION OF SACRIFICE**

God knew that there would not be one person in the Israelite community who would not be guilty of sin. So, God provided a way for our sin to be dealt with. And, much of the book of Leviticus deals with the sacrificial system.

I was talking with some pastor friends recently. One of them asked me about what I was reading in my Bible and I told the group that I was in the book of Leviticus. I was struck by just how difficult the job of the priest would have been. These men were responsible for taking the sins of the people before God and sacrificing animals on the altar. They would have continually dealt with blood, the stench that came from killing animals, the pain that came from hearing sins, and the fatigue that came from just doing their job.

God, in the book of Leviticus shows us that sin must be dealt with, and that it would not be forgiven without the shedding of blood. Did you know that the first seven chapters of

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

Leviticus deal with seven different types of sacrifices? It was expected that when the people came to the tabernacle that they would come with sacrifice. Moses uses the words “offering” and “sacrifice” over 90 times in the book of Leviticus.

Malone writes, “The Hebrew word translated ‘offering’ means a thing ‘literally brought near.’ This word provides a clue to the significance of the sacrificial system. The sacrifices provided the means by which a worshiper could come into the presence of God.”<sup>4</sup>

When a worshiper brought an animal to sacrifice, it was usually a domestic animal. They weren’t bringing an animal that they had hunted in the wild. They were bringing a live animal that meant something to the family. It was a sheep or a goat, or a bull or for those who were extremely poor a small bird. The people didn’t bring God something that cost them nothing.

When you read Leviticus you’ll see that the worshiper was expected to take part in the sacrifice. Normally the head of the household would lay his hands on the sacrifice, with the priest, thereby identifying himself with the animal. It was a way to say, “This animal is taking my place on the altar. This animal is paying the penalty for my sins.”

Hebrews 9 is this great New Testament passage on the importance of the sacrificial system. In it we read about how Christ is our permanent sacrifice. In verse 22 we read, “22 Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”

### **III. THE GREAT POWER OF THE PRIESTHOOD**

There is a third great theme taught about in the book of Leviticus. That is the great power of the priesthood. In chapters 8-15, God gives instruction to the Children of Israel as to how they can approach God. And, it is only through the priests, the tribe of Levi, those ordained by God to be the mediators between man and God.

God chose Aaron and his sons to be the priests over the people of Israel. In Leviticus 8:1-4 we read:

1 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments and the anointing oil and the bull of the sin offering and the two rams and the basket of unleavened bread. 3 And assemble all the congregation at the entrance of the tent of meeting.” 4 And Moses did as the LORD commanded him, and the congregation was assembled at the entrance of the tent of meeting.

Skip down to verse 33 and you read, “33 And you shall not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting for seven days, until the days of your ordination are completed, for it will take seven days to ordain you.”

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

God was setting apart Aaron and his sons to serve him. When their ordination is complete they begin their service in the tabernacle. Aaron offers sacrifices for him and his sons. God accepts the offering and then look what happens in Leviticus 9:22-24.

22 Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he came down from offering the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. 23 And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. 24 And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

Malone writes, “This was the first time that Aaron ever entered the tabernacle up until this time only Moses was allowed in. Then Aaron after meeting with God, comes out of the tent and pronounces a second blessing on the people. After which the Glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. And fire came out from the presence of the Lord, consuming the offering that was on the altar. This was God’s way of confirming that both the offering and the High Priest were accepted by God. And the people realizing that the sacrificial system, that would make provision for their problem of sin, and that would allow them to come into the presence of God was now in place. They had a mediator who would take their sacrifices before the Lord. And when the people saw this great display of God’s love and mercy they with overwhelming joy fell to their knees in praise and worship.

No discussion of the power of the priesthood would be complete without mentioning the great Day of Atonement, which is discussed in chapter 16. Once a year the High priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle. This was where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, on which sat two cherubim fashioned out of Gold. And the space between those 2 angels represented the presence of God. The high Priest would enter the Holy of Holies with blood from a sacrificed goat, to atone for the sins of the nation, and of the priesthood. Then the high Priest would leave the tabernacle and place his hands on the head of a live goat, that was waiting outside. He would confess as he laid his hands on the goat, the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites, He would confess all of their sins, and in so doing was putting their sins on the head of the goat. The goat was then driving out from the camp, into the wilderness carrying with him the sins of the people, this symbolized the removal of their sin.”<sup>5</sup>

The priests were a great gift to the people. But, I’m so glad that when Jesus died on the cross, the veil in the temple was torn in two, and Jesus, Himself, became our High Priest, the mediator between us and God. We can approach God’s throne without the need of an priest because we have a relationship with Jesus Christ, the High Priest.

There is a fourth principle we find in the book of Leviticus. That is the great principle of holiness.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

#### IV. THE GREAT PRINCIPLE OF HOLINESS

Leviticus 11:45 is one of the four places in the book of Leviticus where we read these words:

45 For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.

Many of the commentaries that I read in preparation for today's sermon said that if the book of Leviticus had to be summed up in a few words it would be that Leviticus is the book of holiness.

You'll recall that Jesus took the principle of being holy as God as holy to an even greater degree in His Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5:48 we read, "48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

We can't be holy apart from God's work within us. Just like the Children of Israel, you and I are called to live a life that is set apart from the world around us. When I was a youth pastor in Illinois, and again at Wooddale Church, I taught a series entitled, "Generation Set Apart." God has a remnant in every generation that He has called to live like Him. That's you! God wants you to reflect His character to the world around you in every single area of your life. Holiness shows up in the way we treat others, the way we honor God, the way we do our job, the way we act at school, the commitments that we make, the way we treat our enemies, the way we honor our vows. God has called us to be holy in every area of our life.

Malone put it simply, "The principle of Holiness is the basic requirement that God's people must meet and that they must maintain if they are to approach God."<sup>6</sup>

There is one final gift that we see in Leviticus.

#### V. THE GREAT PRIVILEGE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

When Moses, Aaron and the Children of Israel lived as God called them to, they experienced His presence and blessing in their lives. Remember what we read in Leviticus 9:22-24.

22 Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he came down from offering the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. 23 And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. 24 And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

What an amazing privilege. The people experienced the presence of God.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

So, is Leviticus a book that is relevant for us today?

Do we still struggle with sin? Yes we do.

Does God still make provision for our sin through sacrifice? Yes, only now that sacrifice is the permanent sacrifice of Jesus Christ, through whom we have a High Priest.

Look at Hebrews 9:11-14.

11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Are we as Christians still called to live holy lives? Jesus called it a perfect life. The Apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:15-16: 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

And finally, is it possible for us to still experience the presence of God?

In Matthew 28:18-20 we read, 18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Big Idea: God has called you to live a holy (set apart) life. Salvation is not the end of God’s plan for your life, it’s the beginning of his call and purpose for you. Live as His ambassadors in this generation.

D. L. Moody once said, “A holy life will make the deepest impression. Lighthouses blow no horns, they just shine.”<sup>7</sup>

Jesus said, “16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/h/holy.htm>