

Holiness in Service (Leviticus)

The giving of the Law began at Mt. Sinai when Moses received the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19-20; Deut. 5). This was just the beginning. The specifics of God's requirements, both for priests and all the people, were revealed also. Leviticus contains many of these specifics regarding God's Law.

God had already made clear whom He had chosen to be His priests. From the Levites, God chose the family of Aaron. Aaron would be the first High Priest, and his sons would be the priests. Many of the regulations in Leviticus were directed to them. These regulations also had much to do with the tabernacle and temple (the earthly sanctuary), which was given as an indicator of God's presence among the people. Consequently, any work associated with this sanctuary was to demonstrate holiness.

The book begins by giving laws relative to offering up sacrifices. There were five different sacrifices to be offered by the priests: 1) whole burnt offerings (Lev. 1), 2) grain offerings (Lev. 2), 3) peace offerings (Lev. 3), 4) sin offerings (Lev. 4), and 5) guilt offerings (Lev. 5). Together, these demonstrated praise and devotion on the one hand (burnt, grain, peace), and forgiveness of sin and guilt on the other. These showed the cost of sin, but also served as types of the greatest sacrifice of all



through Jesus Christ (the book of Hebrews discusses this in more detail).

To offer these sacrifices, the priests (Aaron's family) had to especially prepare themselves, indicating their own devotion and holiness.

Sadly, there were some priests, like Nadab and Abihu, who did not honor God properly, so they paid for this with their lives (Lev. 10). This served to reinforce the importance of dedicated holiness before God when serving at His sanctuary.

Perhaps the most significant passage of Leviticus is found in chapter 11, verses 44-45. This passage captures the essence of God's purposes in giving the Law: "For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth. For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy" (NASB).

To be holy means that one is devoted to God and separated for His purposes and glorifying Him. God set apart His nation, but also set apart the priests and Levites as special servants. God's intent for the people was that they be a holy nation. To be what God wanted, they had to keep the Law as He instructed them. However, it was not just a

list of commandments God wanted them to keep. He wanted their hearts. He wanted them to love Him as He loved them (see Deut. 6:4-6).

There were also seven feasts or festivals that were given by God for the people celebrate every year (Lev. 23). These included: 1) the Passover, 2) the Feast of Unleavened Bread (associated with Passover, celebrating freedom from slavery and a new life out of Egypt), 3) the Feast of Firstfruits (celebrating the initial harvest), 4) the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost, a celebration of the harvest, Acts 2), 5) the Feast of Trumpets (the civil new year, thanksgiving), 6) the Day of Atonement (removal of sin), and 7) the Feast of Tabernacles (or booths, celebrating God's protection and care in the wilderness). Three of these feasts later required pilgrimages to Jerusalem (Deut. 16:16: Unleavened Bread, Feast of Weeks, Feast of Tabernacles).

Only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, could the High Priest enter the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary (Lev. 16). He would offer a sacrifice for himself first, then for the people. He would take the blood of the offering into the Most Holy Place and sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. The sacrifice would atone for the sins of the people that they may continue in fellowship with God.

As the sacrifices foreshadowed the Messiah (Jesus Christ), so the feasts also foreshadow Him. For example, Paul says that "Christ our Passover has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7). Jesus Christ fulfilled the purpose of the sacrifices as well as the feasts. "For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect

those who draw near" (Heb. 10:1). The sacrifice of Jesus perfectly fulfilled God's plans in bringing about forgiveness.

Leviticus gives many rules by which the people were to live, but the purpose remained that through these they could remain holy and bring glory to God. God's people today are, likewise, to maintain holiness (1 Pet. 1:13-16). Christians are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" purposed to proclaim His excellencies (1 Pet. 2:9). Christians fulfill the role of priests, with Christ as the High Priest, serving God through the new and better covenant brought about by the blood of Jesus (Heb. 8).

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