

Leviticus & Hebrews: The Necessity of the Cross

Lesson 12: Set Apart by the Cross

Key Verse: *For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life. ~Leviticus 17.11*

One of the great joys of reading books written by the same author is discovering more about the author themselves. If you met them in person, it would be like meeting a well-known friend. The author educates you about themselves in the small dialogue between characters, the way a plot twists, or a thought held by a character, creating a sense of familiarity and friendship. Leviticus is the only book of the Bible in which God is the only speaker, making this unique in His authorship! As we have studied, you too have noticed that there is very little narration, nor is there a cast of characters that also speak. Rather, God provides the backstory required to bring light and understanding of Himself at the present moment. Rather than geopolitical conflicts or historical characters, God speaks directly, solely affirming what happens next in every chapter of Leviticus. Now, we too have the great joy of discovering more about the author, God! And that is His intention throughout every chapter and section of Leviticus: that He remains the genesis of **Our Joy**. Guilt and shame extinguish His joy in us, even after forgiveness. Jesus' sacrificial death not only provided cleansing and forgiveness for our sins but also demolished sin's hold over us through their weapons of guilt and shame (**expiation**). Now you have the *confidence* and *freedom* of knowing Him fully. What a delight it will be when you meet the Author of this book!

Almighty God, change our vision through the study of Your commands in this lesson. Do not let us see our life as we do right now, as we begin this lesson. Instead, grab our eyes and forever change them to see You in our life. You have graciously secured us in Your Presence – an outstanding gift we cannot hold in our mind. Now keep us steadfast in You – Our Joy.

Leviticus 17.1-18.30 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²“Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the people of Israel and say to them, This is the thing that the LORD has commanded. ³If any one of the house of Israel kills an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or kills it outside the camp, ⁴and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting to offer it as a gift to the LORD in front of the tabernacle of the LORD, bloodguilt shall be imputed to that man. He has shed blood, and that man shall be cut off from among his people. ⁵This is to the end that the people of Israel may bring their sacrifices that they sacrifice in the open field, that they may bring them to the LORD, to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and sacrifice them as sacrifices of peace offerings to the LORD.

⁶And the priest shall throw the blood on the altar of the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting and burn the fat for a pleasing aroma to the LORD. ⁷So they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to goat demons, after whom they whore. This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations.⁸“And you shall say to them, Any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn among them, who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice ⁹and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting to offer it to the LORD, that man shall be cut off from his people.¹⁰“If any one of the house of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people.

¹¹For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life. ¹²Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, No person among you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger who sojourns among you eat blood.¹³“Any one also of the people of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn among them, who takes in hunting any beast or bird that may be eaten shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth.

¹⁴For the life of every creature is its blood: its blood is its life. Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood. Whoever eats it shall be cut off. ¹⁵And every person who eats what dies of itself or what is torn by beasts, whether he is a native or a sojourner, shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening; then he shall be clean. ¹⁶But if he does not wash them or bathe his flesh, he shall bear his iniquity.”

CH 18 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the LORD your God. ³You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. ⁴You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God. ⁵You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.

⁶ “None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. I am the LORD. ⁷ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness. ⁸ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is your father's nakedness. ⁹ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your sister, your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether brought up in the family or in another home. ¹⁰ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your son's daughter or of your daughter's daughter, for their nakedness is your own nakedness. ¹¹ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife's daughter, brought up in your father's family, since she is your sister. ¹² You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's sister; she is your father's relative. ¹³ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, for she is your mother's relative. ¹⁴ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother, that is, you shall not approach his wife; she is your aunt. ¹⁵ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law; she is your son's wife, you shall not uncover her nakedness. ¹⁶ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness. ¹⁷ You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and of her daughter, and you shall not take her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter to uncover her nakedness; they are relatives; it is depravity. ¹⁸ And you shall not take a woman as a rival wife to her sister, uncovering her nakedness while her sister is still alive. ¹⁹ “You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness while she is in her menstrual uncleanness. ²⁰ And you shall not lie sexually with your neighbor's wife and so make yourself unclean with her.

²¹ You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD. ²² You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. ²³ And you shall not lie with any animal and so make yourself unclean with it, neither shall any woman give herself to an animal to lie with it: it is perversion.

²⁴ “Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, ²⁵ and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. ²⁶ But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you ²⁷ (for the people of the land, who were before you, did all of these abominations, so that the land became unclean), ²⁸ lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. ²⁹ For everyone who does any of these abominations, the persons who do them shall be cut off from among their people.

³⁰ So keep my charge never to practice any of these abominable customs that were practiced before you, and never to make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God.”

Diamonds: Chapters 17-22 are confusing to us today. However, to the people of this time period (Ancient Near East, “ANE”) these chapters provide the hope of holiness leading to *residence* with God. This is accomplished by the following divisions of the final books of Leviticus:

- Chapters 17-20: the nation and its peoples set apart by God/unlike the other pagan-god nations
- Chapters 21-22: God's priesthood set apart from His people as holy
- Chapters 23-25: the people communing in God's Presence through His feasts and festivals
- Chapters 26-27: the promises found in living holy as God is Holy

The first fifteen chapters of Leviticus educate God's people on what is required for entry in His Presence. Now that the people may enter His Presence, through the installation of the priesthood and its initiation from the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16), God reveals His nature to His people through His expectation of their holy living.

1. A distilled understanding of God's nature is discovered in His broad expectations of His people. Read Leviticus 17.5 alongside 18.1-5, 30. What were His people to avoid, and instead what were they to do? What was the result of current pagan practices (18.30), and what is accomplished when the people obey God's instruction of worship (last phrases of both Leviticus 17.5 and 18.5)?

God's safeguards against idolatry (ungodliness) are established in these chapters to prepare His people for entering His promised land, Canaan (Leviticus 18.1-5). His requirement that they sacrifice only before Him and

exclusively through His meeting place (the tabernacle) reveal His desire to maintain His relationship with His people. "...Sabbath engagement with God in His sanctuary is not only the goal of holiness, but also the regular means for Israel to become holy (Exodus 31.13)...Entering into the Sabbath regularly, Israel was steadily growing in its calling of belonging to God."¹

2. According to Leviticus 18.24, what is the current condition of God's people?
3. How did God say His people would become "unclean" before Him? (Find your answer in Leviticus 18.24-30.) What is God's reaction to an "unclean" nation and its people?
4. Finally, what does the Author of Leviticus (God) reveal about Himself through His safeguard against idolatry, as well as His installation of the sacrificial system so that His people may "steadily grow in [their] calling of belonging to God"? How does knowing this create familiarity with God so that when you meet this Author it will be like meeting a well-known friend?

The disgusting sexual deviations and practices in chapters 17 and 18 are rooted in two historical contexts. The first (Leviticus 17 and 18.21-23) is rooted in the people's education and adoption of pagan rituals planted during their enslavement in Egypt (Leviticus 18.1-5).

The second historical context addresses the unfortunate reality of the living situation of God's people (Leviticus 18.6-20). "Typically an Israelite's home housed father and mother and children. Closely situated were the homes of extended family members, involving as many as twenty or more persons! This proximity of family members provided opportunities for unlawful sexual behavior. Also, the marriage of persons within the same family lineage was a practice known among the Hebrew patriarchs."²

God's command to reject and change their daily practices, religious rituals, and societal norms was radical. Now that they have the remarkable privilege and associated blessings of Presence with God, the call to live holy as He is Holy offers a great hope. However, realizing the full potential of God's Presence also means a gut-punching call to change their daily actions, their lifestyle, and their historically established societal norms. This is exactly like the reality the Jewish-Christians were facing in our study of Hebrews! Further, it's what we too experience as God's Presence in us makes us holy as He is Holy (Romans 6).

5. Ponder a time when your increase of the knowledge of God's commands required you to make a radical change. The change can be a mindset change or a change in behavior, or both (or something else!). Focusing solely on God in your sharing, *not the change or circumstance*, how did God come alongside you as He too navigated your costly and difficult obedience to Him? What do you confidently know about God as a result of His command to His Holiness and your obedience?

¹Morales, p. 201 (quote); Also, recall that in order to be holy, the worshipper must first be made clean. Once made clean, the worshipper then may become holy. One who is holy is consecrated, or set apart, for exclusive use and service to God. To recall the sacrifices and finer details of this profound truth, revisit Lesson 6: "Priests through the Cross".

²Mathews, p. 160

Deity: Our Joy³~ (Leviticus 17.5; 18.4-5, 30)

6. On what basis do you think that God is the source of our joy? (Use Leviticus 17.5 and 18.4-5, 30)

7. Notice what isn't the basis of our joy – circumstances, relationships, financial status, possessions, and more. Look up the definition of “joy” in any dictionary. How do you reconcile God’s basis of joy with our definition of joy? Is our definition of joy compatible with God being the source of our joy? What are your thoughts?

“Upon ascending into the heavenly abode of God (Leviticus 17.5), the Israelite enjoys the hospitality of the house of God. This aspect of the cultic journey is highlighted by the communion rite of the peace offering, whereby the Israelite was given a portion of the sacrificial meat to eat with his family and friends in the Presence of God. In the ANE,...friendships were solidified and covenants sealed by a shared meal, and hospitality itself was a serious matter of honor. In the Bible, God Himself is seen to be the model for what it means to be a host. When brought into YHWH’s house, through the way He has opened, the worshipper is treated as a [daughter] and a [princess] (Psalms 23.5). Psalm 36 describes the joys of those who find shelter in God’s house...”

From Psalm 36.8-9, “the word ‘delights’ derives from the same root for Eden. Together with the ‘fountain of life’, as well as the mention of the ‘shadow of your wings’ (Psalm 36.7 – alluding to the cherubim within the holy of holies), the house of God is portrayed with rich Edenic and temple imagery. Entering God’s house is, indeed, much like entering through the gates of Eden; one is fully sated – a token of the satisfaction humanity may find in God Himself (Psalm 65.4).”

“Since eating may sometimes be connected to rejuvenation, some suggest that YHWH’s giving of the meat to the worshipper may also represent the restoration of life, a point that appears to be supported by the psalms referenced above (Psalms 23, 36, 65)...all sacrifices were thought of accessing the life of YHWH...the ascension offering creates life, the peace offering sustains life, while the expiatory sacrifice regains life; in each case the word ‘life’ may be replaced by ‘fellowship with God’. What is worth underscoring lies in the mere suggestion of fellowship with God Almighty. That one may enter the Presence of the consuming fire at all, without immediate condemnation and destruction, is in itself a feat; but to do so not merely to render a tribute (fitting enough) but also to enjoy table fellowship with YHWH is the marvel of the cultus and of Israel’s covenant...this final rite [peace offering/feast] may adequately be labelled ‘union’, for it, along with the theology of Leviticus as a whole, is by the silhouette of the New Testament’s pulsing heart: union with Christ.”

8. Encourage your fellow sisters-in-Christ by sharing an abbreviated story of a time when you learned more of God’s joy even though it was contrary to your (preferred) understanding of joy.
-OR- Perhaps you are experiencing God’s joy even as it contradicts the emotions of your circumstance. Share how your sisters-in-Christ can pray for steadfast sustaining faith in God’s joy over the understandable temptation to seek joy through pleasing emotions and circumstances.
-OR- Ponder a time when you sought joy as defined by dictionaries. How is the journey to being rooted in God as the genesis of your joy deepening your faith in Him?

³Morales, pgs. 137-140

Doctrine: Expiation⁴~ (Leviticus 17.11) In theological terms, expiation is simply the “removal of sin so that the worshipper may be forgiven and accepted by God.” The goal of expiation is “at-one-ment: reconciliation with God, union with Him.” Through priestly obedience to the Law, Israel’s individual and collective atonement was accomplished through the cleansing nature of the lifeblood of the sacrifices (Leviticus 17.11).

The hand-leaning rite performed at the beginning of the peace offering symbolically burdened the sacrificial animal with the sins committed by the individual (Leviticus 1.4). On the Day of Atonement, the hand-leaning rite performed on one of the two unique goats, providing not only the cleansing of sins for the community, but also the symbolic removal of such sins through the banishment and exile of the scapegoat (Leviticus 16.21-22).

9. According to Paul, what were the limitations of the Day of Atonement?

- a. Hebrews 9.7-10
- b. Hebrews 9.13
- c. Hebrews 9.25
- d. Hebrews 10.1-4

In contrast to the severe limitations of the sacrifices held on the Day of Atonement, Christ’s sacrifice holds a permanence that not only cleanses and removes the stains of uncleanness and sin but also severs the guilt and shame sin leaves lingering behind. Christ’s perfect blood not only cleansed of the people’s sins (ushering in forgiveness) and perfected the worshipper so that she may be at one with God (atonement) temporarily, but *eternally*. In addition, His resurrection from death to life permanently absolved His people from the anger of God’s righteous judgement of our sins.

10. In contrast to the limitations of the sacrificial blood offered to God on the Day of Atonement, what freedoms through the sacrificial blood Jesus paid to God do you have today?

- a. Hebrews 9.11-14
- b. Hebrews 9.15
- c. Hebrews 9.28
- d. Hebrews 10.12
- e. Hebrews 10.19-22

11. How does understanding the doctrine of expiation further secure and strengthen your capacity to know God as your Joy? How does a deeper understanding of expiation deepen your knowledge (and affection) for the following verse: Nehemiah 8.10?

⁴Morales, pp 130-132

Your Scripture-Soaked Prayer: Your thoughts through this week's deity, Our Joy, may be an appropriate springboard for your SSP. No matter what is best here, know that you carry no guilt or shame in approaching Your God through your SSP! 😊

Lecture Outline:

Aim: True joy is found in God's sacred presence.

- I. Sacred Blood (Lev 17.1-16) TR1: True joy comes through the sacred blood of Christ.
 - a. How might the reality of Christ's shed blood on the Cross give you the desire and the confidence to enter God's sacred Presence?
 - b. What changes do you need to make to exalt God as the Supreme Lord of your life?
 - c. How might these changes increase your experience of the true joy that is yours in Christ?
 - d. Is God the Supreme Lord of your life? How strongly does His true joy register in your life?
- II. Sacred Bodies (Lev 18.1-30) TR2: True joy comes through the sacred living God prescribes.
 - a. How do you determine what you will and will not do regarding your lifestyle choices?
 - b. How seriously do you consider such things? Who or what guides your lifestyle decisions?
 - c. What do you need to change to ensure your life is guided by the One True and Supreme God of the Bible?

Mathews, Kenneth A., *Leviticus: Holy God, Holy People*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009) pp. 147-169

Morales, L. Michael, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015) pp. 15-107, 185-220

Sklar, Jay, *Leviticus*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014) pp. 217-241