

So we are in part seven of our Christ in Scripture series, where we're going through every single book of the Bible and looking how they point to Jesus. And as has been said, this week we are in Leviticus. Who's excited?

I'm excited, but I understand if you're not. If you've ever read Leviticus or if you're following along with the church Bible reading plan, you'll know it's a hefty book.

It's got long lists of do's and do nots and weird rules about clean and unclean animals. Many a quest to read the Bible cover to cover has fallen afoul of the tedium of Leviticus.

But tedious though it is, I'm here to make my case to you that Leviticus is a very significant book in the Bible and that it points to Jesus and illuminates him in several deeply profound ways.

And not just that, that some of the most fundamental biblical ideas are grounded in Leviticus. Think about the idea of sacrifice, the removal of sin, priests, God's dwelling place, holiness, reconciliation with God, justice.

These are all huge themes in the rest of the Bible, and yet they are first clearly established in Leviticus. So today we're gonna look at Leviticus as a whole.

We're gonna sort of pop the hood, look at some of its terminology, and look at what it does and how it points us to Jesus. So everyone, take a deep breath, lock in, as we wade into the murky waters of Leviticus.

And I wanna start by positioning Leviticus within the story so far.

LEVITICUS AND THE TORAH

Leviticus is the third book of the Torah, the Torah of these sort of first five books of the Bible. It's in the middle of the Torah, the heart of the Torah. And I think that's no coincidence.

It really has a central theological role as well, because what Leviticus tries to do is bridge the gap between God and humanity. So let's do a quick recap. If you remember two weeks ago, Jono started with talking about Genesis.

In Genesis 1-2, everything is good. God is dwelling with humanity in the Garden of Eden. So far so good.

Then we get to Genesis 3. Human sin, they rebel. We get kicked out of the Garden of Eden, and we have this problem now where we are separated from God.

Human sin gets worse. In fact, it becomes the default. Genesis 8-21 says, every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.

But God doesn't give up. He chooses the family of Abraham. They have all sorts of adventures.

They end up in Egypt. They multiply and become a nation called Israel. Then they get enslaved.

And as we heard in Ben's sermons last week, they're brought out of Egypt.

They brought into the wilderness to this mountain of Sinai where God himself appears to them and he says, If you'll obey my commands, I will be your God and you will be my people and I will dwell with you.

So we're going back to Eden with God dwelling with them. They say, yes, five seconds later, they break that covenant, but God's merciful. They renew it.

They try again. And by at the end of Exodus, the presence of God comes down into this tent in the middle of the Israelite camp called the Tabernacle. And so God is dwelling within his people.

It looks great, but there's this last sentence at the end of Exodus where it says that Moses could not enter the tent because the glory of God filled it. So we're so close. God is in the midst of these people, but they cannot approach him.

How do we bridge this separation? God is still holy and we are still sinful. That's the problem that Leviticus is trying to overcome.

It is attempting to create a community of people that are able to approach a holy God. It attempts to bridge the chasm that was created in Genesis 3.

And it does this through a series of laws and rituals designed to both set Israel apart and also cover over their sin. To be holy as their God is holy. The laws of Leviticus are meant to make you acceptable company for the creator of reality.

Cause you don't get to waltz into the tabernacle in your PJs. It's kind of like meeting royalty. Has anyone actually had the chance to meet a member of the royal family at all?

Oh, there we go. Okay. I wasn't expecting anyone.

There we go. I haven't, but as I understand, there's a very strict etiquette when you approach a member of the royal family. There's a dress code.

You can't dress in whatever you want. You've got to dress formally, certain terms of a dress, your royal highness. I think it changes depending on which member of the royal family you're talking to.

Who walks first? If you're eating, who eats first? You don't touch the royal person.

And all of that is because we as a society have said this person is set apart. The position they have is special. And so you treat them in a certain way.

Same thing with Leviticus. The difference is that in Leviticus, the stakes are so much higher. Say what you want about the king.

He's the same as me. He's still a human being, flesh and blood like any of us. In Leviticus, we're talking about approaching the God of the universe, who is unlike any human being, for whom sin is abhorrent.

You will die if you mess this up. Make no mistake. Hence the need for Leviticus to make Israel holy.

It is saying these are the things you need to do if you want to approach God. It's worth reflecting that this is the same God we still get to approach. He's not to be treated lightly.

We should not take for granted the access we have to Him. When we come to worship, we should always be remembering that God is holy.

WHAT IS HOLINESS?

But let's talk about that word holy for a second. It's one of these Christianese words that we throw around in church a lot. What does it actually mean?

Well, as you might have heard Jono say before, it means to be set apart or to be set apart for God, to be separate or different in some way, to be aligned with God's design and purposes.

Now the opposite of what we would say is holy is what we might call the ordinary, the normal. But from the biblical perspective, the ordinary is profane. It is corrupted.

It is broken. It is tainted by sin. That is the default setting of the world.

And so Leviticus seeks to distinguish between the ordinary and the holy. As Leviticus 10, verse 10 says, they must distinguish between the holy and the common. Because sin is the default setting of humanity.

And so Leviticus seeks to call Israel out of the ordinary and into the holy. And it does this in sort of three broad areas that we're going to talk about. Ethical holiness, ritual holiness, and priestly holiness.

We're going to look at each one of these, and especially look at how they're connected to Jesus.

ETHICAL HOLINESS

Start with ethical holiness. This is outlined especially in chapters 18, 19, 20, and 24 of Leviticus. And this is being concerned with being set apart by our actions, our behavior, and our morality.

Covers a wide variety of areas, including sexual holiness. Don't commit adultery. Don't sleep with family or animals or the same gender.

It's concerned with social ethics. Don't murder. Don't injure people.

Don't lie. Don't slander. It's concerned with economic justice.

Don't cheat people. Make sure you provide for the poor, for the traveler. Don't charge interest on the vulnerable.

Don't enslave your fellow Israelite. And it's concerned with spiritual practices. Don't consult mediums or spiritists or fortune tellers.

These things make Israel holy. It sets them apart. It pulls them from the ordinary into the holy.

Leviticus 18 verse 3 says this explicitly as Stuart read for us. You must not do as they do in Egypt where you used to live. And you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you.

Do not follow their practices. Kind of like saying you're not to do as they do in Baroura or you're not to do as they do in Lane Cove. Sorry if you're from either of those places.

The point is though you're to be set apart from the ordinary practices of mankind. So how does Jesus fit into this? Well, Jesus takes these laws and he intensifies them.

Leviticus says, don't commit adultery. Jesus says, don't even lust in your heart. Leviticus says, don't commit murder.

Jesus says, don't even call your brother a fool. Leviticus says, care for the poor. Jesus says, give everything you have to the poor and follow me.

Jesus isn't here to abolish these laws, but to reveal their full depth. As Matthew 5.17 says, he is here to fulfill the law. And he also calls us to be holy, to be different from the ordinary.

This is what it means to let your light shine, to let it be visible through your ethics and your actions that you are set apart, made different from the world.

Our distinction as Christians, our holiness of our actions, I think it's most beautifully described in John 13 verse 35. I really can't put it better than this. By this, everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.

That's what ethical holiness looks like for us, to love one another.

RITUAL HOLINESS

So let's look at ritual holiness now. This is the sort of holiness that relates to the worship of Israelites and how they to approach God. And it's outlined in Leviticus chapters 11 to 15.

And it's really concerned with these categories of clean and unclean. If you are clean, you may go, you may worship God, you may offer your sacrifices, you may pray. And if you're unclean, you may not.

Now this is really important to get. Being clean and unclean is simply about the appropriateness of your worship to God. The things that are unclean are not inherently evil, they are just inappropriate for the worship of God.

So there's kind of two categories that fall into this. The first thing is human sexuality and reproduction. These are the first unclean category.

Real quick on this. Unlike the gods of Israel's neighbors, who were very sexual beings, Yahweh is not sexual. Sex and reproduction is a gift that he gives to humanity, but he himself is not sexual.

Therefore, anything to do with the reproductive cycle or reproductive fluids goes into the unclean category. It's not appropriate for his worship.

Now, the second, I think, more important area is anything that is associated with the brokenness and ordinariness of the world falls into the unclean category. Many of the unclean animals are associated with death.

Vultures, birds of prey, a lot of the animals are predators. Any corpse or carcass that you touch will make you unclean. It's because these things are symbolic of the ordinary broken world which is scarred by sin.

And they cannot be allowed to contaminate the sanctuary, which has been set apart from this brokenness. This next little bit is a bit hard, but I promise it gets better.

If you have a disease or what the text calls a defect, the law is clear that you are to be cared for. That's that ethical law. But you cannot enter into worship of God.

You cannot enter the presence because that brokenness cannot be brought into the holy or else it ceases to be holy. It ceases to be set apart. Now, all of this uncleanness is contagious.

If you touch someone unclean, you become unclean. And then you need to wash yourself, and then you need to wait until evening. Kind of like COVID, if you remember back, constantly putting on hand sanitizer.

And if you've got symptoms, you've got to isolate. You can't go to the big community events because you'll spread the disease. Uncleanness works the same way.

It is contagious. This is where Jesus comes in. Let me read you a story from Luke 5 verse 12 to 15.

While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.

Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. I am willing, he said, be clean. And immediately, the leprosy left him.

Did you see what happened there? Jesus touched this diseased, unclean man. And instead of Jesus becoming unclean, the man was healed.

He was made clean. And that is because Jesus brings a contagious holiness flowing from himself. His whole ministry is one of cleansing the unclean.

What does he do? He heals the sick. He raises the dead.

He redeems sinners. And every time he does this, he's drawing on those images from Leviticus as a sign of his mission, that he is here to make people acceptable to God, to truly reconcile God and humanity, that dream of Leviticus.

Any that come to Jesus, no matter their physical or spiritual condition, become ritually clean. In Mark 7, he declares all food clean. And he does this because the brokenness that these things represent is itself passing away.

Creation is being redeemed. We as Christians have received this contagious holiness. Instead of the many washings of Leviticus, we have one washing, baptism, which we saw last week.

Our job is to spread this holiness as it was spread to us. To seek those who feel broken, who feel sinful, who feel tainted and dirty, who feel unworthy of God.

And to invite them to be cleansed, to be washed, to be pure and made welcome in God's presence. Not because of what they look like or their health or what they've eaten. But because of the contagious holiness of Jesus Christ who makes us new.

Final point, priestly holiness.

PRIESTLY HOLINESS

We're almost there, guys. Priestly holiness involves those things that have been set apart for service in the tabernacle itself. It involves primarily priests and sacrifices.

Let's look at the priests to start with. Priests are required to be particularly different, particularly holy. They are set apart even within Israel.

And their role is to dwell in and around the tabernacle, the presence of God, to teach the people and to perform sacrifices on their behalf. Now, prose of being a priest. From most of the sacrifices, you get a little portion of the meat or the grain.

So that supports you economically. It supports your family and your household. The cons, it's extremely dangerous.

There are no less than four named priests throughout the Old Testament who died doing this, because they are in greatest proximity to the presence of God. So why do it? Why have priests there at all?

Why have anyone in the tabernacle at all? Well, this is where we come to sacrifices. Now, there are five sacrifices outlined in Leviticus 1-7.

The first is simply a worship offering. The second is an offering of thankfulness and remembrance. The third is a communal peace offering.

And the fourth and fifth are the ones I want to talk about. They are the guilt and sin offerings. Now, the guilt and sin offerings are very important.

They are the final ingredients in bridging God and humanity. Israel already have their ritual holiness to set them apart from the symbols of the ordinary. They have their ethical holiness to set them apart through their actions and morality.

But the problem that remains that even though they have been told what to do in these cases, these laws do not actually enable them to do it. It does not change their hearts, the source of their sin. It doesn't stop their desire to sin.

And so Israel inevitably falls short of these standards. Hence the need for sin and guilt offerings to cleanse their sin. And this works through blood.

Now, we often associate blood with violence and death. But in Leviticus, it's actually the opposite. In Leviticus, blood is symbolic of life.

It says this in Leviticus 17, 11. For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar. It is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.

So blood represents life, and its role is to act as what the NIV translate as atonement. Now, this word atonement, it's used all over Leviticus. And it's this Hebrew word, kaffar, or another way of doing that is kippur.

The most basic meaning is to cover over or to clean. So blood has the function of covering over or cleaning a person's life. Now, do you remember before, when I said that in the ordinary and the unclean is associated with blood and disease, right?

Oh, sorry, death and disease. Well, blood as the liquid of life acts as the cleansing agent for this deathiness. Blood acts as the disinfectant, the Ajax spray and wipe, you know, doing a...

cleaning people's souls. So when someone brings a sacrifice for sin or guilt, the blood gets splashed on the altar, it gets sprinkled in the tent as a way to cleanse them from the deathiness that they have brought into God's community.

It's interesting, isn't it, that sacrifices are not primarily thought of in terms of the death of the animal, but rather in terms of its life and that lifeblood blotting out the deathiness of Israel. And this is what priests do.

They are, in effect, ritual and spiritual cleaners going in with their blood to clean Israel. Now, this whole process finds its apogee in Leviticus 16, called the Day of Atonement.

You could also translate that as the Day of Cleansing or the Day of Purging. A couple of things happen in this. Firstly, the sins of the community are placed on a scapegoat and they're released into the wilderness to be taken away.

You may have heard of that. But I think also, importantly, the priests themselves are cleaned with this blood. As is the Tabernacle, as is the Holy of Holies, as is the Ark of the Covenant.

The entire apparatus of God's dwelling place on Earth is cleansed through blood of sacrifices. It says this in Leviticus 16, verse 16.

In this way, he will make atonement for the most holy place because of the uncleanness and the rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been.

He has to do the same for the tent of meeting, which is among them in the midst of their uncleanness.

In other words, despite all the laws and rituals, the Israelites continue to omit this aura of sin coming from their hearts, so that the entire community and the tabernacle has to be cleansed once a year, because even with the individual sacrifices,

you're inevitably going to miss a spot. And so if Israel does all of this, if they have ethical holiness and ritual holiness and priestly holiness, then they can approach God. Then God can dwell with them. And he does.

In Leviticus 9, 23 to 24, let me read it. Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people.

Fire came out from the presence of the Lord, consumed the burnt offerings and the fat portions on the altar. And when the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell face down. It's working.

The system works. For a while. Actually, not that long.

The very next chapter, some of the priests muck up the ritual and killed, consumed by fire. The history of Israel shows that they were not able to live up to this system in the long run.

Sin runs too deep in the human soul for God to dwell with it for long.

JESUS: HIGH PRIEST AND SACRIFICE

And here at last, we see Jesus fulfilling these holiest of roles in Leviticus, as both High Priest and Sacrifice. Hebrews 9 is a chapter almost entirely focused on this subject. You could read the whole thing.

I'm just going to read a snippet starting at verse 11.

But when Christ came as High Priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through a greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with humans' hands, that is to say, is not part of this creation.

He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves. He entered the most holy place once and for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.

The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean, sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.

How much more then will the blood of Christ, who the eternal spirit offered himself, who through the eternal spirit offered himself, unblemished to God, to cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God.

What the writer of Hebrews is saying there is that Jesus did not enter an earthly tabernacle, but a heavenly tabernacle in the presence of God, acting as high priest, not with the blood of animals, which is an external cleaner, but with the blood of

the author of life, his own blood, his own life, a life so pure, so overflowing with contagious holiness, that it's sufficient not just to clean the outside, but to clean the very source of our sin, our hearts, as Hebrews puts it, our consciences.

And that means that you are set apart intrinsically. Death has no power over you. Sin has no power over you. We can approach God with confidence, reconciled at the deepest level, like it was in Eden.

This is what Leviticus is trying to do. This is what Jesus fulfills. The world is tearing itself apart at the moment.

But if you have given your allegiance to Jesus, you do not belong to that world of death. At the very core of who you are, you belong to the living God. And you don't need to fear because he is with you.

And neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither present nor future nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Leviticus sought to make Israel holy, and in some ways it did. In Numbers chapter 23 verse 9, a foreigner looks at them and says, I see a people who live apart and do not consider themselves one of the nations.

But as much as Leviticus set Israel apart, Christ has set us apart all the more. He has shown us a true ethical holiness through the love of one another. He has given us a contagious holiness to spread to all we know and cleanse them through him.

And he has restored our relationship with God at the deepest level. Jesus is our high priest, our sacrifice and everything that we need. Let me close in prayer.

Oh Father, we thank you for your all-sufficient love, for your pure and holy life that was shed for us. We thank you that you've restored us to relationship with you.

We thank you for your kindness and your love and that you are all that we need and that you are with us. Watch over your people now Lord and set us apart. We pray.

In Jesus' name, Amen.