

The Gospel of the Kingdom

Week 3 - Day 2: Who Shall Ascend to the Lord?

Leviticus 9:22-24 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. 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. 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

As we have seen, our King desires intimacy with His kingdom people! Israel's rebellion, however, sets forth the fundamental problem of humanity: *sin separates us from God*. At the end of Exodus, we discover that the temporary house God instructed Moses to build for His people to have access to Him is now off limits to both Moses and the Israelites until certain conditions can be met.

How can sinful humanity be reconciled into the presence of God's holy kingdom space?

This problem calls for a solution. The book of Leviticus sets forth the path for how undeserving sinners can experience a relationship with a Holy God and live daily in His presence.

Leviticus begins by documenting a series of sacrificial offerings and priestly ceremonies that allow for Israel's priests to make atonement for, and offerings on behalf of, the congregation of Israel. Today, followers of Jesus often miss the simple, yet profound lessons of the sacrificial system in Leviticus. We get bogged down in trying to understand and apply the unfamiliar rituals of sacrifice that Israel had to learn if they were to gain access to God. Between their rituals, requirements and the intricate detail of how these sacrifices were to be carried out, it's easy for the modern reader to miss the point. This is the point: *God's holiness demands that provision be made for our sins or there is simply NO access to God*.

Leviticus 17:11 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.

Quite literally, the lifeblood of the animals were covering for the death we should have experienced because of our sin.

As we saw in Genesis, sin and death did not only have an internal impact, but it also had an impact on our external relationships with creation, with each other, and with God. Therefore, God calls His people to be holy in 3 primary ways: ceremonial cleanliness, living under God's kingdom ethic, and always in remembrance of God's reign. Once again, it is easy for modern readers to miss the point in these chapters as we try to make sense of many culturally specific

commandments. This is the point: *God's holiness demands His people to live a "set-apart" lifestyle free from the intentional and unintentional effects of sin and death or there is simply NO access to God.*

Leviticus 11:45b-47 You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy. This is the law about beast and bird and every living creature that moves through the waters and every creature that swarms on the ground, to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean and between the living creature that may be eaten and the living creature that may not be eaten.

Leviticus 18:1-5 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God. You 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. You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord.

Leviticus 19:18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

Leviticus 23:1 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, These are the appointed feasts of the Lord that you shall proclaim as holy convocations; they are my appointed feasts.

The centerpiece of Leviticus (and also nearly at the center of the book!) is God's instruction about the Day of Atonement. Ceremonial cleansing and individual sacrifices could only take the Old Testament saint so far. A greater sacrifice was necessary that would cover every intricate detail of one's sinfulness. This sacrifice offered by Aaron, the high priest, would occur on the annual day of atonement. On that day, as outlined in Leviticus 16, the priest would finally be allowed to enter the Most Holy Place in the tent of meeting to make sacrifice first for himself, and then for the sins of the Israelite community. After completing the sacrifice for his own sins, the priest was instructed to choose two goats for the atonement for the sins of the community. One goat would be sacrificed and the other (the Scapegoat) sent into the wilderness to demonstrate that the sins of the people would be removed from them forever. In this way, the Israelites would understand that not only were their sins forgiven but also removed from God's presence. Through this one special annual act of worship, God's people could rest in the assurance of knowing both the forgiveness and removal of sin.

Leviticus 16:17, 30 No one is to be in the Tent of Meeting from the time Aaron goes in to make atonement in the Most Holy Place until he comes out, having made atonement for himself, his household and the whole community of Israel...because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the LORD, you will be clean from all your sins.

But keep in mind, this provision needed to be repeated every year. What about today? Do we still need this kind of sacrifice?

This question requires a, “**Yes, but....**keep reading,” response.

Yes, we do need some sort of sacrifice to cover our sins! The proof of our sinful rebellion against God is seen everywhere. While God is often blamed for the brokenness of our world, the truth is that people are responsible for the terrible shape of the world. Turning against God has manifested hurt and pain everywhere. Nations at war, disease, death, violent crime, racial injustice and poverty are just a few of the telling signs that something has gone terribly wrong with humanity. And the troubling part is that if we are honest, our hearts contain the darkness that we see manifest in our world.

Jeremiah 19:7 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Before we can address our own brokenness or even our broken world, we must first address our broken relationship with God. The truth is, our sinfulness has created a vast chasm between ourselves and God.

Isaiah 59:2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

Some people wrongly assume that this kind of indictment doesn't apply to them. But Scripture is replete with reminders of the universality of our sinful condition.

Romans 3:23 ...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...

1 John 1:8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

There is simply no getting around the fact that we are sinful and our sinfulness is our undoing. Perhaps today you are experiencing the deep pain of brokenness in your life because of your sin or the sins others have committed against you?

The **GOOD NEWS** for you found in Leviticus is that God provides a way for sinful and undeserving sinners to experience a rich and fulfilling relationship with Him. That's why a proper understanding of the book of Leviticus is so important. It offers its reader confidence that the condition of being separated from God *can be changed*.

The Levitical code (the laws, rituals, sacrifice and priesthood) was the means God chose for His people to have this kind of access; access He wanted and they needed.

But...wouldn't it be amazing if God provided an eternal cleansing from sin? Wouldn't it be incredible if God swung the doors of salvation wide open for sinners of every era to have full access to God and to live in a deep relationship with Him? Wouldn't it be good news to know that we are no longer bound by a constant cycle of gory sacrifices because there was a way to experience complete and never-ending access to God?

This, then, is the timeless lesson that Leviticus provides in the big picture of God's revelation. Leviticus foreshadows the means by which our savior -- the one who would crush the serpent, the descendant of Abraham, the Isaac-like sacrifice, the King from the tribe of Judah, and the Moses-like prophet -- would lead God's people to their **salvation** from the kingdom of sin into the kingdom of God.

Psalm 103:11-12 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Leviticus leaves us wondering whose sacrifice would be able to *eternally* cleanse us of our sin so that we might be brought into God's kingdom space? Is it even possible to possess an *eternally spotless* lifeblood that would allow God to eternally *pass over* our sins?

Who could this be?

-Larry Vold

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Personal Observations, Reflections, and Prayers: