

THE FRIENDS OF ISRAEL TODAY

November 7, 2015

Chris Katulka, Thinking Differently About Leviticus, Part 2

Last week we started looking at the book of Leviticus and we asked the question “how can we think differently about Leviticus” because let's be honest, Leviticus is often not the book we turn to when we think about studying God's Word or doing devotions. And yet, Leviticus is a foundational book for key theological issues like: holiness, the theology of sacrifice, which gives a basis for Christ's sacrifice, the theology of the high priest, which gives rise for Christ being our mediator, our high priest... standing on behalf of us... all of that great theology comes from the book of Leviticus.

Last week I argued that the title Leviticus can be deceiving because it sounds like it's for the ancient Israelite priests only, when in reality the book was written mostly for the average, every day Israelite who wanted to worship God. Leviticus gave instructions on when an Israelite should go to the sanctuary, what he should bring to the sanctuary, and what he could expect the priests will be doing when they arrive at the sanctuary. It shared about special holidays for the Israelites like Passover and Yom Kippur, and gave instructions on how they should worship on those days. So really when you read the book of Leviticus it's good to remember that this book was written for the average, everyday, Israelite who wanted to know how he could worship God! I like to think if I were an ancient Israelite who loved the Lord and wanted to be more like Him, I would gobble up the contents of this book so that I could know how I could be holy, as God is holy.

And really this is at the center of the entire book of Leviticus, as we think differently about this book. If there are two things to remember about Leviticus whenever you read it, it's this... First, God wants to have a relationship with His people and He is fighting through space, time, and SIN, to make that happen... the book of Leviticus and other sections of Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are simply the mechanism to allow God to interact with mankind despite their sinfulness.

The second, the one I want to focus on today, is "holiness". If God fighting to have a relationship with us... is the theme of the book... then "holiness" is the purpose of the book. If there was one verse that could summarize the entire book of Leviticus it's this... "You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine" (Lev 20:26).

Israel was chosen to accomplish a task that no other nation on earth was given, and that was to be the promoters of God's plan of redemption for all mankind. The whole nation Israel was designed to direct people to God's grace and mercy, and they were supposed to do this through the way they lived as a community... through their own public and personal way of living.

God wanted their lives to be a personal reflection of His character in the ancient world.

Now I can't go through every law in the book of Leviticus... it would take way too long to go through the whole book... but maybe we can take a story and filter the laws through this story so you can see how following God in Leviticus

was designed to benefit the community and spread the message of God through the nations.

I want you to imagine something here for a moment. I want you to step back in time with me. You are an ancient Egyptian tradesman, every year you lead a caravan of camels full of spices, special silk, and other tapestries, food, you get the point... you're like the driver of a big semi-camel bring goods from one area of the world to another, and naturally you had to travel through the land of Israel because at that time it was a natural land bridge between all the known areas of the world. I believe it's the reason God chose Israel because all peoples went through Israel.

So you're traveling this ancient highway system and the sun is about to set in a few hours so you decide you're gonna stop and rest for the evening at a local hotel in Israel... oh yeah... it's Friday night.

You arrive at the front desk of this ancient Israelite hotel and the owner is moving at a quicker pace than normal... you tell him you would like a room for the night. He says to you... "I'm in a hurry for Sabbath preparations, I'll be with you in one moment." You ask him... what is Sabbath... he explains... "it's a day of rest, no work from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday."

Now bear in mind my friends, during the days of ancient Israel, there were no weekends off for the rest of the world... in fact, the Romans called Jewish people "lazy" because they took one day off from work to focus on God! So you

can imagine the surprise of this Egyptian when he finds out Jewish people take a day off.

So you ask him, “Why do you take a day off”... he replies as he’s scurrying around, “To honor our God: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

You finally get the keys to your room, and you tell the hotel owner... I would like some fried catfish for dinner please (that’s for all you southerners who listen to the program). The hotel owner chuckles a bit and says, “we don’t serve catfish”. Ok, you reply, “I’ll take a ham sandwich”... the hotel owner says, “we don’t serve ham!”

You’re perplexed... “Why not?”

The hotel owner replied... “to honor our God: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” “We do have a wonderful falafel though...”

The next morning you set off on your long journey and all along the way you stop and talk to people telling them about the God of the Jewish people... the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who has called His people to live lives separated for His glory.

Be holy as I am holy.

It can all seem very tedious to fulfill all of the laws, and what some of us call restrictions found in Leviticus... but really following all the different laws were

meant to both be an expression of one's love for God because of His presence with His people... and an outward expression to the world of what it means to be set apart... to be sanctified... to be holy as God is Holy!

This concept of holiness, or setting oneself apart, isn't only a way of life for the ancient Israelite community. The Apostle Peter grabs hold of our theme verse for Leviticus, "You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy" in 1 Peter 1:15 when he's talking about the Christian life today. Our love for God as Christ followers should be seen in an outward expression of our dedication to the new law we follow, the law of Christ! This is how we reach whatever culture the Lord puts us in for Christ!

My friends next time you open up the book of Leviticus, don't be burdened by the laws or the cultural differences, and simply think to yourself... I could never live like this... Instead see the value of Leviticus and remember God is fighting to have a relationship with us and as a result we should want to be like His Son, or Savior!