

## **Read Through the Bible**

Week 6 – February 8-13.

Readings: Leviticus 1-17 and Matthew 24:23-27:31

### **Introduction to Leviticus**

One of the stubbornly enduring habits of the human race is to insist on domesticating God. We are determined to tame him. We figure out ways to harness God to our projects. We try to reduce God to a size that conveniently fits our plans and ambitions and tastes.

But our Scriptures are even more stubborn in telling us that we can't do it. God cannot be fit into our plans, we must fit into his. We can't use God—God is not a tool or appliance or credit card.

"Holy" is the word that sets God apart and above our attempts to enlist him in our wish-fulfillment fantasies or our utopian schemes for making our mark in the world. Holy means that God is alive on God's terms, alive in a way that exceeds our experience and imagination. Holy refers to life burning with an intense purity that transforms everything it touches into itself.

Because the core of all living is God, and God is a holy God, we require much teaching and long training for living in response to God as he is and not as we want him to be. The book of Leviticus is a narrative pause in the story of our ancestors as they are on their way, saved out of Egypt, to settle in the land of Canaan. It is a kind of extended time-out of instruction, a detailed and meticulous preparation for living "holy" in a culture that doesn't have the faintest idea what "holy" is. The moment these people enter Canaan they will be picking their way through a lethal minefield of gods and goddesses that are designed to appeal to our god-fantasies: "Give us what we want when we want it on our own terms." What these god-fantasies in fact do is cripple or kill us. Leviticus is a start at the "much teaching and long training" that continues to be adapted and reworked in every country and culture where God is forming a saved people to live as he created them to live—holy as God is holy.

The first thing that strikes us as we read Leviticus in this light is that this holy God is actually present with us and virtually every detail of our lives is affected by the presence of this holy God; nothing in us, our relationships, or environment is left out. The second thing is that God provides a way (the sacrifices and feasts and Sabbaths) to bring everything in and about us into his holy presence, transformed in the fiery blaze of the holy. It is an awesome thing to come into his presence and we, like ancient Israel, stand in his presence at every moment (Psalm 139). Our Lord is not dwelling in a tent or house in our neighborhood. But he makes his habitation in us and among us as believers and says, "I am holy; you be holy" (1 Peter 1:16, citing Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7).

Once we realize this, the seemingly endless details and instructions of Leviticus become signposts of good news to us: God cares that much about the details of our lives, willing everything in and about us into the transformation that St. Paul later commended:

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. (Romans 12:1-2)

### ***Reflections & Questions for Thought***

**By Tim Fletcher**

In these chapters of Leviticus there are two over riding themes that I was able to pull out. The first is exemplified by the stories of the different types of offerings made on the alter at the meeting tent which are given to the Lord. Each type of offering refers to giving the best of the best. It speaks of Lambs and Bulls all that must have nothing wrong with them. If someone was unable to offer the larger animals it refers to the offerings of a dove or pigeon. But again, these are the young, tender, unblemished birds. These gifts were also given to the lord sacrificially. They went without something so that they could give it to the Lord.

This resounded to me that we must give our first and very best to the Lord. So many times we make a half hearted effort to attend Church on Sunday and give only what is left over of our time, talent, and treasures. This is not giving glory to God nor is it Holy to think of ourselves first and God second. We must give our very best and not just on Sunday but all the time. This leads into the second main point that I personally got out of these chapters in Leviticus and that is what it means to be Holy.

In order to be Holy which is to be like the Lord intends us to be we must remain clean and apart from all that is unclean, we must keep what is Holy from what is un-holy. This tells me that we need to follow God's laws and separate ourselves from what is considered un-holy. This does not mean that if we know someone who has not accepted Christ in their life that we avoid them, it simply means that we do not partake of things which are not in line with the will of God. This was exemplified when God destroyed Aaron's sons Abihu and Nadab when they burnt incense in a manner contrary to what the Lord had commanded. Since they had gone against the will of the Lord they were struck down.

In the book of Matthew in the 24<sup>th</sup> Chapter verse 23 it is in the middle of the story of the Second Coming of Christ. It is explained that no one knows when the Lord will come again. Only the Father knows and so it makes the point that we must always be ready. The story of the Ten Bridesmaids is then told where five were prepared with lamps with extra oil and 5 were not. The 5 that were prepared went into the house while the others were left outside. This is similar to what will happen when the Lord comes again. Those that are ready and have accepted Christ as their savior and have done as the Lord commanded will be raised up.

This does not mean that we live sequestered waiting for the second coming of Christ. In the book of Matthew we are instructed to make something out of what God has given us. The story of the three servants is told in which three servants are each given a sum of money. The two that used their money and made more by investing it wisely were rewarded while the other servant that was scared and simply buried his money until the Master's return was scolded for being lazy and not making something more with what he was given. This says to me that everything we are given was given by the Lord. This includes our time, talents, and treasures. We must thank God always for the gifts given to us but then use those gifts to Glorify the Lord and give back more than what was given to us. This can be giving monetarily but can also be tapping in to our talents to give back.

This reading in the book of Matthew continues through the plot to kill Jesus, his last supper, his arrest, and bringing him to Pilate before the people. It was astounding to me how the most loyal followers of Jesus Christ left him and denied him when Jesus was arrested and things were going very badly for Jesus. We all hope that if given the same circumstances that we would not deny Jesus and would suffer along side him, but unfortunately all too often many who are Christians (or claim to be) only profess their beliefs when it is convenient or in a setting in which they feel they will not be ridiculed or persecuted. I believe as Americans it is hard for us to imagine that people in other parts of the world that profess their belief in Christ are actually punished simply for what they believe in. We need to stand firm in our faith in Jesus Christ and continue to witness to the miracles God has performed in the world so that all will know the Good News of Jesus Christ.

So in what ways do you think you can give more to the Lord and also remain Holy and within the will of God?

How can we be prepared and at the same time assist others in being prepared for when the Lord returns?