

# A Holy People for a Holy God

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Date: 25 May 2022

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] chapter 19 and we'll read again at the beginning. Leviticus 19 and we're looking at the first four verses. And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, you shall be holy for I the Lord your God am holy. Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father and you shall keep my Sabbaths. I am the Lord your God. Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves any gods of cast metal. I am the Lord your God.

I'm sure it's true that the book of Leviticus is one that we don't attend to as often as we should or as often as we do with other books of the Bible. It's probably one of the least read books of the Bible and not one that we would be ourselves inclined to actually go towards most of the time.

And we can appreciate why that is because the nature of the book is one that has a lot of ritual in it, a lot of rules and regulations given to Israel, certain laws, certain things to do with the way in which God had arranged their lives as his people in this world. But one of the reasons that even Christians don't find it easy to or a natural thing they do as Christians to go to the book of Leviticus is that wrongly we may have the impression that there isn't much of Jesus in it, that there isn't much of Christ in the book of Leviticus. Therefore, we can look at it as certain regulations and laws that God gave to Israel, but well, where is Jesus? Where is the Lord? Where is salvation in the book of Leviticus? But it need not be so, and it should not be so, because I hope even from this study this evening that we'll see that actually there is no book in the Old Testament in which you find as much of Jesus as you do in the book of Leviticus, because it has to do with the sacrifices, the rituals in terms of relationship with God that God gave to Israel for him to dwell amongst them, for them to have access to him, and for him to make an atonement for that possibility to take place. There are three big themes in the book of Leviticus, and all I'm going to do this evening is to look at is to look at these in relation to the passage, especially the first part of the passage, you shall be holy for I, the Lord, your God, am holy. And the three big themes in Leviticus are that this holy God dwells in the midst of his people. Secondly, that this holy God requires his people to be holy, and thirdly, that God has made a provision for both of these matters, a provision to enable him to dwell in the midst of his people, a provision to actually make it sure for us that we can be holy people. And that's really, in a sense, that's the essence of the book of Leviticus. A holy God dwelling among his people, a holy God requiring holiness of his people, holy lives, and a holy God providing an atonement to make his dwelling and our holiness not just possible, but as God administers his salvation to make it something that will undoubtedly be achieved.

Let's look at these three in turn. First of all, looking at this one here, the holy God dwelling in the midst of his people. Now, the holiness of God, which is mentioned here just in the space of one verse, is really something that runs through the whole book of Leviticus. And in fact, you could say the holiness of God is actually something that runs through the whole of the Bible. In many respects, that's the starting point for us when we think about God, when we think about a relationship with God, when we think about what we must be in the presence of God and in the presence of the world.

Holiness is absolutely essential for ourselves as a matter that God requires, but holiness, first and foremost, is what God himself is marked by. I am the Lord your God.

[ 4 : 46 ] You shall be holy, for I, the Lord, am holy. And really, we can't begin to understand any of the other aspects of our relationship with God, of the salvation that he has provided for us, of the requirement that he has of us being holy. We cannot really begin to understand anything of that unless you begin with the holiness of God himself. Now, we know that holiness and what he requires of us is essentially being set apart for God, being set apart or devoted to God. And that's why you find holy, the word holy, the adjective holy describing not just people, but objects in the Old Testament.

The temple had to be holy. The vessels used in the sanctuary had to be holy. They had to be set apart for use by God, for God exclusively in his worship by the people. So they're being set apart. They're being made distinct by that was an aspect of holiness. They were set apart. They were different in that sense in their use of it. Now, when you think about God, God is set apart eternally from everything else.

God is uniquely holy. His holiness is not something given to him, just the way he gives holiness to us.

Holiness is essential to God's very being. It's impossible to think of God as he's revealed in the Bible as other than holy or to think of God without holiness. Without that unique distinctness, holiness, this set apart, what some people would call, theologians might call, the otherness of God.

The otherness of God in terms of him being eternal in his being and set apart in that unique way eternally from everything else. He is holy in that sense. And related to that is holiness in the sense of being perfect in everything else. Holiness, holiness, moral purity, spiritual perfection, all of those things apply to God as the one set apart from everyone else and everything else as the holy God. And the holiness of God is something that runs through everything, every single aspect of our relationship with him.

[ 7 : 24 ] You know, it's a mark of, it's a mark of grace. It's a mark of being in a right relationship with God, that you see the holiness of God as something beautiful.

Because it doesn't come to us naturally, it doesn't, to think about holiness, to think about this otherness of God, to think about moral purity, to think about something that is so entirely pure and consistently pure. We tend to think of holiness in terms of it's something that really stands there almost stiffly, if you like. But there is nothing more beautiful than holiness once we begin to understand something of what it's about. And although for many people, thinking about God as the holy God is something that they think of in terms of distance from him, something that repels them, something that they really don't want to come close to at all, something that they don't find attractive.

Of course, there is an awesomeness to the holiness of God, of course there is, but that doesn't make it attractive. And the more God is at work in your heart, and the more you think of what you need to be like, and I need to be like, and what God requires of us, and what God has provided for us, and the more you think of Jesus, and the more you think of what's revealed in Jesus, and the descriptions of Jesus in the Bible, especially in the Gospels. Then you see, you begin to think of holiness as something really to be admired, something to be loved, something to be cherished. Because not only does it mark God as to who he is and what he's like, but it has to mark us as well in the likeness of God.

That holiness of God, as you see it, is really how you come to see, well, you come to see everything else in relation to it. For example, if you think about what is sin?

Well, sin, as the catechism puts it, is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.

[ 9 : 34 ] In other words, sin immediately makes you think of what is entirely opposite to God. Holiness is sinlessness. Sinfulness is the absence of holiness.

And you kind of believe in or appreciate sin, except as you appreciate something of the holiness of God.

Now, I'm saying this knowing full well that the holiness of God and God in his holiness is beyond our complete comprehension. You cannot understand all of it, neither can I. You can't really get into the very essence of it so as to be able even to describe it.

But you appreciate it. You love it because that's what God is like. And the same when you see the Bible's account of the death of Jesus.

Why did Jesus have to die that death of the cross? Well, of course, the answer to that, you could say, is to provide salvation for us. Yes, but why did he have to die? What was it that sent him to the cross?

[ 10 : 43 ] What was it on God's part that required or demanded that this son of God himself in his perfect, his own perfect moral purity should die the death of the cross?

Well, it's because we could not possibly be reconciled to this holy God without God's own provision and a provision that dealt with his holy demands.

See, everything about him is holy. All his requirements are holy. All his acts are holy. Everything that he does is marked by holiness.

And that's why he's saying here, you shall be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy. And God in the midst of his people. And interesting, when you go to chapter 26, for example, you can see that more specific chapter 26.

And at verse 11. Here is where God is saying, I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you.

[ 11 : 52 ] And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt so that you should not be their slaves.

And I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect. But especially that first part, I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.

I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. I will not be inclined towards you with anything of hostility or anger or wrath or abhorrence.

And that's a strange thing for a God who is so holy that he cannot bear to look upon sin without burning in indignant anger towards it. And as we'll see, a provision has been made so that God would dwell in the midst of his people.

And that provision is by God himself through sacrifice. But that is really our greatest privilege, friends, that we can actually have God dwelling in our midst and not actually be dealt with as we deserve to be dealt with.

[ 13 : 05 ] And that makes it obvious that there has to be a certain provision by God to enable the holy God to dwell in our midst.

It's interesting that the arrangements, the arrangement they had for the tabernacle in the Old Testament, whenever they camped anywhere, the tabernacle was central.

That's where the sacrifices, the worship and so on was carried out. But the tabernacle, as it was in the midst of the people, the tents of the people were arranged around that tabernacle.

And God gave specific directions as to how they were to keep that. Why was that? Why couldn't they just pitch their tents somewhere near without really that sort of arrangement?

Well, because there itself was an indication. As you walked around the camp of Israel and all their tents, you could see them arranged in a circular fashion around this one tent, this sanctuary, this place where God dwelt.

[ 14 : 05 ] Where God himself had set in the midst of the tabernacle, that which indicated his presence above the mercy seat. The arrangement was such that it taught them, God is in our midst.

And God is in our midst by way of the provision he's made in sacrifice. As that, of course, represented the sacrifice of Christ that was to come.

So there is the holy God dwelling in the midst of his people. And all the way through Leviticus, as you go through and read the book of Leviticus, that's something that again and again comes through.

Not just that he's the holy God, but he's the holy God who's chosen to dwell in the midst of his people. Tonight we are gathered here.

We cannot see God. But we know that through the provision he's made in Jesus Christ and the way that he has come to provide an atonement, to meet our needs and to meet his demands, that God dwells in our midst.

[ 15 : 10 ] Why does God take up residence in your own heart? How is it that God lives in your life, in your person, in your very being, in your heart? Because as the holy God, he has made provision towards that in Christ.

Otherwise, you and I couldn't have God in our midst. But here's one of the great truths of the Bible. God dwells in the midst of his people. And he does so as chapter 26 reminded us, I will not abhor you.

I will not treat you any other way but in my love and mercy. Secondly, the holy God requires his people to be holy. Now, you see, this is what he's saying in verse 2.

Speak to all the congregation and say to them, you shall be holy for I, the Lord, your God, am holy. They are to be like that holy God.

They are to be holy because he is holy. And that's really reason enough for us, isn't it, that we should follow holiness of life, that we should seek daily to put sin behind us, something regretfully that I and you confess we don't do as much as we should with a keenness to actually put it behind us once and for all.

[ 16 : 30 ] But this is what he says to us. You shall be holy because I am holy. And everything that was given by way of serving God in the sanctuary was to be marked by holiness.

Holiness with the animals. Holiness with the priests. Holiness with the vessels of the sanctuary. Holiness with the holy God. Holiness with the Holy God. Holiness with the holy God.

Holiness with the holy God. Holiness with the holy God. Because it was for the use of their worship of this holy God. And that's true, therefore. Inwardly and outwardly.

He required them and it requires us to be holy. Because holiness is not something that just is a mere external formal thing.

You find, as you well know, certain people of a religious bent saying that the likes of the Dalai Lama or the Pope are holy people.

[ 17 : 29 ] Because what they see is someone that outwardly has the appearance of being a holy man. Of course, a holy man, you find that in other religions as well. People that are eminently religious in the way that that religion is followed through.

But holiness really begins inwardly. Holiness begins with being born again. Holiness begins with being renewed in the image of Christ. Holiness begins with that work of God in our hearts through his Holy Spirit, by which we come to love him and to love him for his holiness.

And by which we want to be like him. That's the root of holiness in our experience, in our own persons. And you can see there in verses 9 to 18, as we read through it, that God's dealings with his people in mercy and in truth and in justice and in love.

It's all part of how they understood him to be their holy God. Because all of these things are holy as far as God is concerned. When he deals with us in mercy, that mercy is holy.

It is pure. It is clean. There's no corruption about it. There's nothing about it that's untrue. And it's the same with his truth and his justice and his love.

[ 18 : 49 ] It is holy. They are holy. They are marks of who God is and what he's like. And five times throughout this passage, verses 1 to 18, you find him insisting, I am the Lord.

In other words, when you think of mercy, when you think of truth, when you think of justice, when you think of love, you are thinking of the holiness of God. You are thinking that these are marked by holiness.

How far short we come as human beings to holiness of life. We don't need to go outside of ourselves.

But when you look at society and when you look at our political leaders, even the last few days have shown you, it's as far removed from holiness and from truth and from integrity sometimes as you could get.

Holiness marks the Lord's people. You shall be holy for I, the Lord, am holy. And of course, what separates us from God, what makes us unholy, is our sin.

[ 20 : 01 ] And our sin is not just something that we do outwardly. It's not just our acts, our sinful doings. Our sin is something that marks us inwardly in our hearts, our very being, in our fallenness.

That's why David, in Psalm 51, prayed his prayer of repentance. And he began with the inside. Lord, create in me a clean heart.

I want to be holy. I have sinned against you. I've done wrong. At the beginning of that Psalm, that is what he says. Lord, I have done this. Against you.

Against you only. I have sinned. Be merciful to me. Create in me a clean heart. And isn't that what leaves you tonight saying, Lord, make me holy because I need to be like you.

I want to be like you. I want to deal with this sin because this sin that I still find in my life, this wretched heart of mine, even though I acknowledge you have come and made yourself a home there, it's still not pure.

[ 21 : 06 ] It's not as it should be. Lord, I want it to be purer than it is. Create in me a clean heart. Where does that desire come from? Where does that element of repentance come from? Comes from your acknowledgement that God is holy.

From your realization that the holiness of God is such a beautiful thing that you need to be like that in the beauty of holiness for yourself. And that can only come about through dealing with the problem of sin.

And as you go through the book of Leviticus, you'll find so many times that certain things are called unclean. Certain categories of human disease, for example, or other things are spoken of as unclean.

And they're unclean because God regards them as polluted. It cannot come into his presence until something is done to clean them, to make them clean, to make them pure, to make them holy.

And that's really how God comes to live in the midst of his people. The uncleanness has to be dealt with. And it has to be dealt with, first of all, by God objectively.

[ 22 : 16 ] Before anything starts in our hearts, something else has to take place to deal with the problem of sin. And that's the third point. A holy God provides an atonement, an atonement through sacrifice, that enables him to dwell in the midst of his people, that enables his people to live holy lives.

And of course, the book of Leviticus is very much a book that deals with the different kinds of sacrifices that God required of the people of Israel in those times.

They were all required, but all pointed forward to the great sacrifice of Jesus and the death that he died on the cross. And what is it that's going to deal with sin?

It's what God himself has designed to deal with sin. What is it that's going to remove God's hostility against sin? Well, again, it's the same thing. It's God's provision.

And all these sacrifices, especially the sin offering that's described in parts of Leviticus, the sin offering especially, is most directly applicable to sin and dealing with sin, to dealing with this great problem that causes the rift between us and God.

[ 23 : 32 ] Now, that, of course, is not a very popular thing to say today, because out in that world, out there, there isn't really much of an acknowledgement that sin is sin or that sin is serious or that sin is what the Bible describes it to be.

But if you take it as we do, that this is God's word and God's view of human life, then this provision that God has made for us really shows the gravity of sin, the enormity of sin, the seriousness of sin.

And after all, why would someone like the sinless son of God die the death of the cross if sin were anything other than of the utmost seriousness and had not caused this rupture between human beings and God?

And that's what Jesus came to deal with, to reconcile us to God, to deal with that great divide, that sin that caused our sin, our human sin, your sin and mine.

And Leviticus really has the most detailed provisions and descriptions of that pretty much anywhere in the Old Testament. And that's why you find so much in it about sacrifices and the high priest and the rituals associated with approaching God.

[ 24 : 54 ] And the equivalent, if you like, in the New Testament is the book of Hebrews. You might say that Hebrews is the companion book to Leviticus in the Old Testament.

There are so many likenesses there because Leviticus deals with, Hebrews deals pretty much with the same main topics as that, offering high priest sacrifices, ransom, shedding of blood, approaching God through sacrifice, all of that.

All of that is tied up with the wonderful explanations or provisions made in Leviticus. And as you come to Hebrews, what you find then, of course, is that actually Jesus is himself everything.

He is the high priest, but he's the sacrifice as well. He is the offering. He is the atonement. He is the atoning sacrifice.

He is the ransom for our sins. He's the means by which God comes to make provision, to reconcile us to himself. And you might say that it applies to Jesus as much as any other book in the Old Testament.

[ 26 : 11 ] Because there in Leviticus, you find Jesus in the holiness of God, making provision of atonement for sinful people, enabling God to dwell amongst them, enabling them to follow through with holiness of life.

Well, that's one of the arguments, too, that we find in the book of, for the book of Psalms and our use of the Psalms. And whatever we think of using other ways by which we praise God, other forms of praise, undoubtedly the book of Psalms is our major main body of songs and psalms and praise items by which we praise God.

And it's very wrong, although you sometimes hear that, people saying an argument against just using the book of Psalms or adding to the book of Psalms.

And I'm not saying you can't do that at all, but what I'm saying is this, the Psalms are actually full of Jesus. I'm not saying you'll find his name just written all over the Psalms.

But they speak of sacrifice. They speak of relationship with God. They speak of God making atonement. They speak of forgiveness. They think of God. They speak of God actually dealing with us, not as we deserve us.

[ 27 : 35 ] Psalm 103 puts it, like a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear him. He remembers that we are dust. He knows our frame. But he made provision for us.

Everywhere in the book of Psalms is marked somewhere or other. If we look carefully enough, you will find the fingerprint of Jesus. You will find the footprints of Jesus.

You will find the image of Jesus. You will find the life of Jesus. You'll find the death of Jesus. You'll find the resurrection of Jesus. He has ascended up on high, led captivity captive, Psalm 16, 68.

And the same argument goes for the book of Leviticus. In that certain way that you find sacrifice and approaching God and God dwelling in the midst of his people and God providing an atoning sacrifice, that's why we're saying there is no book in the Old Testament that has more about Jesus than the book of Leviticus.

I know you'll find prophecies and then the prophets such as Isaiah, Isaiah 53, which obviously is in great detail a description of Jesus and Jesus as the mediator of his people.

[ 28 : 52 ] But you take everything in the book of Leviticus to do with holiness and approaching God and God dwelling in the midst of his people and his people being a holy people and sacrifice and the high priest and the role of the high priest and the taking away of sin on the day of atonement, all of these things and more.

Well, you can see Jesus in that. And that's why it's so profitable to go to the book of Leviticus looking for him and finding him and loving him and seeing him as God's provision for lost sinners like you and I.

God's this holy God dwelling in the midst of his people and this holy God requiring his people to be holy and this holy God providing atonement to enable both of these to be achieved as only he himself could do.

He blessed to us these readings and thoughts on his word. Let's pray. Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks that you are holy, that your holiness is uncompromised, that your holiness is not a barrier to your living amongst your people, for you have made provision in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, we do thank you, Lord, that we know the reality of these things in a measure for ourselves. And we pray that you'd help us to appreciate and admire and love your holiness, to love everything about you that makes you so distinct and so set so far above what we are.

[ 30 : 35 ] We thank you, O Lord, that holiness marks all that you do, that everything you do is in perfection, that there is nothing amiss in any of your work, and that there is no inconsistency with the way that you carry out your acts of mercy and of grace and of judgment, that even the very judgment of sin and the very judgment that will take place at the end of the world is a holy judgment, the judgment of a holy God.

O Lord, we thank you that your holiness is held out before us. Help us, we pray, to love you for all that your holiness means to your people.

And help us to be holy. Help us, as we already heard in prayer, to come before you with that burden, to be more and more like our Lord, to turn away from sin, to leave the things that we find so naturally clinging to us and drawing our attention and drawing us into that way of life that would seek to be very different to what you require.

We pray tonight for our world. Lord, we know that the world lies in sin, for you pronounced your curse over it, and we know that your word teaches us that by the sin of humans, of our first parents especially, so death passed upon all for all sinned.

Be merciful to this world, O Lord. There is so much in it, Lord, that we bring before you that is so unlike you. And we pray that you would send forth your light and your truth, that they might be our guide to your holy hill, that people might come, Lord, to realize what sin really is and to realize the wonder that for such a sinner you have made provision so that they could be holy.

[ 32 : 31 ] And we ask tonight for a love especially for the cross and the resurrection in the person of Jesus Christ. Lord, we thank you for his holiness, for the way that his holiness continued unchanged even through the events of his trial and crucifixion and resurrection and that he bore the sin of his people without himself being made personally unholy.

Nevertheless, we thank you that he took the guilt of his people so that he took our curse as well. Bless to us, we pray, all that your word tells us about our salvation, about our God, about your holiness, about our requirements.

We pray especially tonight, Lord, for those that we have heard about recently in our world that face so many agonies and we pray especially tonight for these families in America who have this terrible tragedy where these young children's lives were so suddenly cut short.

Lord, what can we say in the presence of such wickedness? What can we say in the presence of such an act? We don't know, Lord, what we can say about it other than it is appalling in our sight.

Be merciful, we pray, to all of those families and draw them to yourself to comfort them and help them as they seek to come to terms as much as they are able to these terrible events in days to come.

[ 34 : 11 ] Oh, Lord, we pray for that community, for that school, for its teachers, for those who have relatives there in that community that are related to those families that have lost their children.

Lord, we pray that in your great mercy so you would send peace and prosperity spiritually to this world and we ask that you would continue with us now.

Hear us in these prayers and where we offer to you in the way of our worship cleanse everything that is unholy about us for Jesus' sake. Amen. We're going to conclude our worship this evening in Psalm 111.

Psalm 111. Psalm 111.