LEVITICUS 12 thru 27: You Shall Be Holy, Part 3

[show the Leviticus cover slide]

This morning we’re going to wrap up our study of Leviticus focusing our attention on the last 16 chapters. For the sake of time we’re not going to go into a lot of depth, but I’ll give you a brief overview. Let me begin by reminding us of the overriding theme of Levit…HOLINESS.

READ Leviticus 19:1-2

Because God is holy, He expects His people to be holy. And this expectation wasn’t just for O.T. Israel back in Moses’ day. Peter applies this concept to us N.T. believers as well…

READ 1 Peter 1:14-16.

Peter quotes from Levit. As God’s people, as those who have been redeemed, saved, reconciled, regenerated, we are to pursue holiness, God-likeness, Chris-likeness. In 1 Timothy 6:11 Paul instructs believers to “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.”

There is a tendency as we study Levit to become focused on, to get bogged down by, confused by, all of the details of the sacrifices, Levitical priesthood, God’s various instructions to His people. What we need to do is to look beyond all that and see the message that God has for us in it. So far we’ve seen that God is holy while man is unholy, sinful. This is a problem because God cannot fellowship with sinful man as He desires to do. The sin must be dealt with somehow. It must be dealt with in the way that God Himself has established by His grace. Man cannot himself become holy and approach God thru his own effort or his own invention. He can only come to God the way that God ordains. And what we see in Levit is that the way to God comes by blood sacrifice, a substitutionary sacrifice (Lev 1 thru 7); and thru a mediator, one who intercedes on behalf of sinful man before a holy God (Lev 8 thru 10). We’ve noted that all of these things we see in Levit points to Jesus as their ultimate fulfillment. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, the unblemished Lamb of God. He was the substitutionary sacrifice for our sins once for all by His voluntary death on the cross. And He, our great High Priest, has risen and ascended back to heaven and now lives to make intercession for us before the Father.

Levit Chaps 11 to 27 are instructions to God’s covenant people and show them how they must live as the people of God. They are to be separate, different from the world, not like the pagan nations that surround them. They are to live holy lives pleasing to the Lord. They are to have clean hands and pure hearts. Last week we looked at Ch 11 which dealt with the various food laws and we noted that God was interested not just in the spiritual but also the physical. God doesn’t tell the people why certain foods are OK to eat while others were not. All they know is that this is God’s will and they’re expected to follow it. I mentioned how this points to the sovereignty of God – He’s the Creator and He chooses what He chooses and is not obligated to explain Himself to us, His creation. Why did He choose Israel? Why does He choose us? Divine grace!

Ch 12 deals with purification for women following childbirth. Males born are to be circumcised on the 8th day of their life. Of course circumcision has been God’s requirement for all Israelite males since Gen 17. Now a specific time frame for doing this is given. READ Leviticus 12:4. After the period of purification is complete the priest offers a burnt and sin offering…READ Leviticus 12:8. Well, is childbirth a sin? Why is it necessary to make these offerings? This points to a principle that we see repeated in the following chapters, that physical impurity can make someone “ceremonially” unclean. In other words until they are made clean thru an act of purification specified by God, they cannot participate in the corporate fellowship of God’s people. They are in effect separate from the rest of the people, quarantined. God never gives the people reasons for this but undoubtedly it has something to do with personal hygiene and the protection of God’s people from diseases. Again, we see that God is concerned about the physical.

Ch 13-15 deal with skin diseases of all kinds from a simple rash to full blown leprosy (what we call today Hanson’s disease). God gives specific instructions how to detect and then deal with these. READ Leviticus 13:45-46. One was considered to be unclean until they followed God’s timetable and instructions for being made clean. Certainly this offers a picture of sin, being defiled by the world and how it must be dealt with. But in a real sense God wants His people to have clean houses, clean bodies and clean clothes. What I observed as I read thru all of these chapters is that there are so many things in life, just in the normal course of living, that can defile us. And this is true whether you are talking about the physical or spiritual. Both our sin and our physical defilements must be dealt with on a regular, even daily basis. And they must be dealt with in God’s way. There is an expression that says, “We must keep short accounts with God.” In other words, we must keep everything paid up. In regard to our sin, 1 Jn 1:9. In regard to our physical, 1 Cor 6:19-20: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

Sandwiched in between all the various instructions regarding Israel’s social life and relationships is Ch 16 dealing with the Day of Atonement. It comes up again in Ch 23. We know from our previous study that sin is something that’s being dealt with throughout the year by various offerings. But there was one special day a year that is set aside when the high priest enters into the Most Holy Place, the Holy of Holies, and sprinkles the blood of a sacrifice (sin offering) on the mercy seat. Right in the middle of dealing with the issues of everyday life is this reminder about the need for a blood atonement. There is no holiness apart from the blood. READ Leviticus 16:34. But we don’t have to do this anymore because Jesus Christ became our sacrifice for sin, once for all. READ Hebrews 9:11-12, 22, 24-25, 10:10, 17-18. We have victory over sin, death, hell and the grave because of what Jesus did for us!

Ch 17 deals with the diet of the O.T. Israelites. Specifically it talks about the sanctity of the blood. The blood has significance and should not be treated as common or with disdain. READ Leviticus 17:11. There is value in the blood. For an O.T. Israelite blood symbolizes that an innocent life has been taken, the life of an animal, in payment for the sins of a guilty person. So God does not want His covenant people to eat or consume the blood.

Ch 18-20 deal with proper social conduct, issues regarding purity and morality. You wonder as you read these chapters, why does God even have to remind them not to do these awful things? It should be obvious. But just as sin and evil, sexual immorality, are a part of our culture, so it was in Moses’ day. Read about the various Canaanite and Hittite practices. It will make your skin crawl. Evil practices were integrated into the culture of Israel’s neighbors – sexual practices, child sacrifices, religious prostitution and so forth. So God has to remind His people, “I don’t want you to be like them. I want you to be different, holy. I want you to act differently and look differently.

READ Leviticus 18:2-5. God lays out very specific, moral absolutes for His people to follow. God not only tells them not to act like the Egyptians and Canaanites but He tells them the kind of behavior He wants them to exhibit. He emphasizes treating people the way God does – show mercy, be kind, be just, be fair, show compassion and so forth. [READ Leviticus 19:9-10, example of leaving part of the gleanings in your field during harvest for the poor.] Why do this? “Because I am the Lord Your God.” Our relationship with a holy God demands our holy behavior. Our relationship with Him impacts all of our other relationships – those we have with our spouses, children, bosses, coworkers, neighbors, friends, and even strangers and, yes, even our enemies.

Our behavior, the way we live is part of God’s sanctifying work in us. READ Leviticus 20:7-8. We often think about sanctification as a N.T. concept but it goes back to the O.T. It is God’s ongoing work in the life of a believer.

Ch 21-22 address the priesthood again, but it’s somewhat different from what we saw in Ch 8-10. In those chapters the priest was presented as a mediator, as one who admin the various sacrifices. Here in these chapters the emphasis is on the priests as examples of godly lives. They are to be exemplary in their behavior and in their appearance, to be the epitome of holiness, be above reproach. One of the duties of a Levitical priest was to be a teacher of the law. And they were not to just teach by their words, but by their lives. This same concept is applied in the N.T. to elders, pastors, bishops, etc. In 1 Cor 11:1 Paul exhorts the Corinthian believers, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”

I want to read an interesting passage from Levit Ch 21. God is referring to the priests here…READ Leviticus 21:7-8

I find this interesting because in this passage we see that human activity and God’s activity work together in cooperation with each other to accomplish God’s will and His purpose. We have the ability to cooperate because of the redemptive work God has done in us. The whole argument of Romans Ch 6 is that, because of what Christ has done for us, we are no longer slaves to sin. Now we can exercise our will to do what God wants. Of course this is a day-by-day battle requiring that we confess our sins and submit ourselves to Him and His Lordship. But we get to be participants with God in the sanctifying work that He is doing in someone’s life.

Ch 23 deals with the various feasts, special days. Worship is a part of the fellowship of God’s people. There were set times and days for worship. Certain feasts emphasized different aspects of the relationship with God, commemorating what He had done, remembering and reflecting. We do the same thing as N.T. believers. They observed the Passover, Pentecost, Firstfruits, Booths (Tabernacles), Trumpets, Day of Atonement. Each had its own purpose and significance – God’s redemptive work, rejoicing in His provisions, celebrating new life, commemorating God’s care for His people during their wilderness wanderings. It is good to remember what God has done. Today we Christians celebrate Good Friday, Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas one time a year. We also celebrate the Lord’s Supper periodically throughout the year. We remember and we celebrate what God has done for us. It is in Ch 23 that the Day of Atonement is announced as “the 10th day of the seventh month” (Tishri), which would be in Sep-Oct. The Jews still celebrate it today. It is called Yom Kippur.

Ch 24 deals with more of the priest’s duties, rules regarding blasphemy (cursing God) and laws about retaliating against someone for murder or personal injury. An aspect of God’s holiness is that He is unique, different, extraordinary, high and exalted, transcendent, above all others, etc. So to blaspheme the name of the Lord is not just to curse Him or use His name in a swear word, but it is to treat God as unholy, as common, as ordinary. He is holy God and as such we owe Him all honor and reverence.

Ch 25-27 again deal with various aspects of Israel’s social life. It’s a reminder that God is present with His people in their everyday life. We tend to compartmentalize our lives – we have our church life, our work life, our home life, our circle of friends, our social life. But the reality is that God is involved in all aspects of our lives. How we view God impacts all of our other relationships. God isn’t just interested in what we do here at FBC Rockwall on Sundays. He wants to be personal, with us, every day, every hour, every minute of our lives.

READ Leviticus 26:45. God tells His covenant people that He will keep His promises, His covenant with them. He reminds them that He brought them out of the land of Egypt, He placed them in the midst of these various nations in order that He (God, Yahweh) might be their God. He says, “I am the Lord.” And He’s not just their Lord during their Sabbaths and their feast days, but every day of the year. To us Christians the message hasn’t changed much. God will keep His promises. He “will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.” The Holy Spirit seals us for the day of redemption. We have been redeemed, saved from our sins. He placed us here in this place surrounded by neighbors who don’t know Him so that we can be a testimony to them by our words and our lives. Finally, He wants to be our Lord, our Savior, our great and awesome God not just on Sundays and at Easter and Christmas, but every day.

There you have it, a relatively quick overview of Leviticus. That’s all we have time for. So, tell me, give me some reasons why we should study Leviticus.

Let’s sing: “Because He Lives”