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DISCIPLESHIP TRACK, YEAR 4

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

GENESIS - MALACHI

SESSION 2

EXODUS-DEUTERONOMY

THE LAW: SANCTIFIED & HOLY; SINFUL & SACRIFICIAL

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EXODUS-DEUTERONOMY

THE LAW: SANCTIFIED & HOLY, BUT SINFUL & SACRIFICIAL

The first five books of the Bible are referred as the Pentateuch, which literally means “five books.” So far, we have gone through the first of book of the Pentateuch, Genesis. The next four books are distinct in that they contain the Law of God.

God’s People are Distinct, so They Must Be Holy

When we left off in Genesis, God’s people were living in Egypt – yet they were still a distinct people from the Egyptians. They did not worship the Egyptian idols, and they even lived in a separate location than the rest of the Egyptians (Gen 46:34). This separation from ungodly people was still a requirement of God, because his people were supposed to be a light to the world by being a distinct and separate people. Those who were to follow the one and true God were to follow a distinct set of laws and ceremonies, and there was a particular group of people that were to be an example and lead the people, the Levites. They were to be a particularly distinct people – clean and pure before the Lord.

The Priests Must be Especially Distinct

Before the Levites were called to serve the nation of Israel as priests, it was the firstborn son of every family who was set apart for God and inherited the birthright, leadership, authority, etc. (Exod 13:2). Later, when God called Israel out of Egypt, he called Israel his “firstborn son” (Exod 4:22-23), and each individual Israelite was called to be holy priestly, and royal (Exod 19:5-6, cf. 1 Peter 2:9). Then, out of the nation of Israel,

God called the Levites to serve him and the sons of Aaron to be priests (Exod 28:1-4).

God had called Aaron and his sons to be set sanctified – *to be set apart* – as priests.

Levi was the third son of Jacob and Leah (Gen 29:34), of the tribe of Moses and Aaron. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments, he saw the whole camp worshipping the golden calf and said, “Who is on the Lord’s side?” Then, we see that all the sons of Levi had gathered around Moses, and the sons of Levi began to take up their priestly duties (Exod 32:25-29).

Special duties. The priests were also distinct in that they were given two distinct responsibilities to carry out within the nation of Israel: making sacrifice and teaching. God spoke to Moses saying:

The LORD called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or from the flock.’ If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD (Lev 1:1-3).”

An Israelite would bring an animal to the tabernacle to be sacrificed, and then the one offering the animal – *not the priest* – would slit the animal’s throat. Once the animal’s blood was drained, the priest would carry the blood to the altar with the special utensils made for the tabernacle. He placed the blood on the altar and the base of the altar, according to the type of sacrifice being made. Then the priest would take the remainder of the animal outside the camp and burn it to demonstrate its uncleanness. The priests were the ones responsible to carry out these duties with the people.

The second special duty God gave to the Levites was teaching:

You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean, and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them by Moses” (Lev 10:10-11).

When you consider the number of people in Israel at the time of the census, which was shortly after leaving Egypt (Num 1:46), and then the size of the tabernacle itself, there were many more priest teaching than offering sacrifice.¹ In the New Testament, the elders of a church are primarily to teach and to pray – *or intercede*. In effect, they mirror the function of the Old Testament priests. So, we see that the priests were given two special duties: to sacrifice – *or to intercede* – for the people, and they were also to teach the people the law of Moses.

Special provisions. God also cared for the priests by providing for them in a special way. They were given special provisions. They Levitical tribe did not have an inheritance in the Promised Land, so they were not able to raise animals, grow crops, or provide for themselves. However, they after performing the sacrifices, they would be able to eat the animal used for the sacrifice (Lev 6:26). So, while the Israelites labored for their food, it was the priests who labored for the Lord via sacrificing and teaching. Therefore, their food was provided by the Lord.

Special judgement. Not only were the priests given special duties and provisions, but they were also given a special judgement. In the New Testament, those who would aspire to hold an office in service to God are given a warning when it is said, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (Jas 3:1). This means and that in both this life and the next – that there is going to be a higher standard of judgement for those who represent God as priests in the Old Testament and elders in the New Testament.

Consider the priests Nadab and Abihu when they did things that God had not commanded them and approached the Lord in a sinful manner:

¹ There are 605,000 men of fighting age – which suggests a population around 2 million (Exod 12:37; 38:26; Num 11:21; 26:51)

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the LORD has said: ‘Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.’” And Aaron held his peace (Lev 10:1-3).

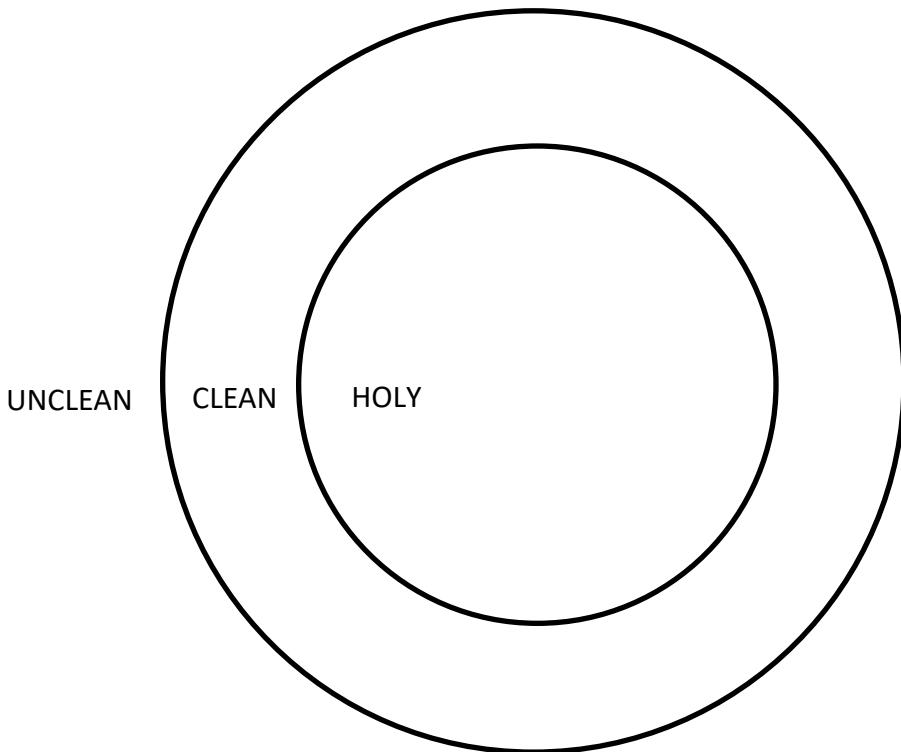
In order to know what to think about this passage, we must understand what God is doing with the Levites. Right at the center of the people that God is creating for himself, he places a whole tribe of priests who are to be *especially* distinct. They were to be ceremonially clean and without blemish (Lev 21:5, 16). Just like elders in the New Testament, their children could not live in such a way that would bring shame upon the name of the Lord (1 Tim 3:4; Titus 1:6). Aaron's children, therefore, were to be faithful – as is fitting for the priest's household. Nadab and Abihu greatly failed to live distinctly and faithfully before the Lord. They failed their purpose as priests: to be distinct and live holy.

The Whole People Must be Distinct

We have seen that the Levites, the priests, were to be especially distinct. But the whole nation of Israel was to be distinct as well. When God calls Israel from Egypt in the book of Exodus, they spent about a year at the foot of Mount Sinai after they received the Ten Commandments. Later, God gives a more detailed set of laws, rituals, and regulations in the book of Leviticus.

If you were to take the first and last verses of Leviticus, they summarize that the entire book is about. At the opening of Leviticus, we read, “The LORD called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them...” (Lev 1:1). Then, the last verse of the book reads, “These are the commandments that the LORD commanded Moses for the people of Israel on Mount Sinai” (Lev 27:34). In between those two verses is God's rules, regulations, and ceremonies for the way God's people are to live: distinct from the rest of the world.

Cleanness and ritual purity. When you read the Mosaic law, you will find that God cares a great deal about cleanliness and purity. God told Aaron that, “You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the clean and the unclean.”² You could think of the common, the clean, and the holy as a set of circles.



So, on the outside you have things which are “unclean.” In the middle, you have things that are “clean,” or “common.” Most everything in the lives of God’s people would fit in this circle. And then, there is a circle in the middle. This is the “holy,” or “sanctified” circle. The main idea here is that there is a barrier between the unclean and the holy; some things should simply never meet. When you try to jump a dead battery

² In the book of Leviticus alone: 10:10; 11:47; 15:31; 18:3, 24-28, 30; 19:19; 20:23-26

on a car, you know that if you touch the jumper cables to the wrong pole it will cause sparks – *violent sparks* – to fly. So it is with the unclean and the holy.

So, if someone who was unclean wanted to come to worship God among God people – they had to do certain things, they had to be “clean” before they could come and worship God. They had to “pass through the barrier.” Therefore, they had to follow purification rituals to ensure they approached God in the way which he said people should approach him. In other words, you must approach God on *his terms*, not yours. If you failed to do that, sparks would fly – *even violent ones*.

This shows us two main things. First, just about everything in life was placed in one of these three categories. So, God cares about all aspects of life – not just ones that are more visible, more public, or more popular. God cares about *everything*. Second, it also shows us that God cares about how he is worshipped. When unholy things touched holy things – sparks would fly.

The main point of this being “clean” and “unclean” was to protect holiness of God's sanctuary. In that sense, being unclean means to be unqualified to enter the tabernacle or temple. In some cases, it was "contagious" (e.g. - a person became unclean by touching a person with a skin disease). After the Israelites settled in Canaan and later lived in the Promised Land, ritual purity became less focused on the sanctuary and more central to daily life. *Through these ritual laws of cleanliness, purity, and holiness, the people were to understand that their purity was essential for coming into and remaining in relationship with him.* In other words, the law taught that every aspect and every part of life should be lived in a way that is pleasing to God. So, the law functioned as barrier that allowed a people who were pure and holy to grow in a sinful and spiritually dangerous world.

Sometimes we can think of books of the law, like Leviticus, to be dry and just a long list of rules. However, did you know that Jesus' favorite verse comes from the book of Leviticus? At least it's Jesus' verse if we count how many times he says it in the

New Testament. It's Leviticus 19:18, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Why yes, that is from Leviticus. Have you ever considered that reading through and understanding God's law would help you to be a more loving person? You could read through each law in Leviticus and ask yourself what each law has to do with loving your neighbor. That is how Jesus understood the laws in Leviticus and the Pentateuch.

Holiness. This God's concern for holiness becomes even more pronounced in the last half of Leviticus (Ch 17–27). So, God goes into further detail about what he commanded them. This reinforces the teaching he gave in Exodus by drawing out the punishments of this earlier teaching. There must be no false worship and idolatry, child sacrifice, or sorcery.³ In Leviticus 18, many sexual sins are forbidden. He calls the Israelites to be concerned for honest commerce,⁴ the poor,⁵ the blind and the deaf,⁶ the elderly,⁷ and justice, even toward foreigners among the Israelites.⁸

God's People are Sinful, so They Must Offer Sacrifice

While a primary purpose of God's law is to show that God's people are to live distinct and holy lives, the law also teaches that God's people are still sinful and therefore must offer sacrifice. We see that Aaron's sacrificial duties started his high priestly duties in Leviticus 9 where it says:

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

³ Lev 17:7; 18:21; 19:4, 26, 31; 26:1

⁴ Lev 19:35-36

⁵ Lev 5:7, 11; 19:10, 15; 33-34; 23:22; 25:35-38; 27:8

⁶ Lev 19:14

⁷ Lev 19:32

⁸ Lev 19:15; 24:22

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 (Lev 9:22-24).

After Aaron's duties began, we then see Leviticus take the next 7 chapters outline how the people are to offer sacrifice. The unclean, the clean, and people who were grateful to the Lord were all to make sacrifice. When they entered the courtyard of the tabernacle, they would inform the priest what they were offering sacrifice for. A very important details that God was careful to point out was that their sacrifice was to be "without defect," as Leviticus says over and over.⁹ The sacrifice was valuable, a loss of goods to the one offering, and also a destruction of life:

"For the life of the creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life" (17:11).

Once the sacrifice was brought into the courtyard, the individuals making the sacrifice would lay their hands on the head of the animal.¹⁰ When they did this, they publicly identified themselves with the animal itself. It was as if they were saying, "What happens to this animal should happen to me because of my sins." And then the person making the offering – *not the priest* – would slaughter the animal. After the animal was slaughtered, the priests would take the blood of the sacrificed animal and sprinkle it on the altar and around the base in whatever way was required for the sin or occasion. Everyone in the community was to follow these laws.¹¹ The purpose of the sacrifices is that God was teaching his people that sins bring about death, and that only shed blood brings atonement for sins.

⁹ Lev 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6; 4:3, 23, 28, 32; 5:15, 18; 6:6; 9:2-3; 14:10; 22:19-25; 23:12, 18

¹⁰ Lev 1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; 8:14, 22

¹¹ Lev 4:13-15

Sinful People Need Sacrifices

The reason God's people need to offer sacrifices is that although his people are to be distinct and holy, they are going to fail; God's people are going to sin. They need a payment for their sin – and sacrifices are they their sins are to be atoned for. These sacrifices clearly point to Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.¹² The sacrifices were regularly scheduled events—daily, weekly, monthly, and annually. They had to be continually performed because the people continually sinned. There was not an end in sight for the need of sacrifice, therefore God tells the priests that the fire on the altar must never go out.¹³

Sinful People Need Atonement

What the law labors to make clear is that sinful people need atonement. The distinctions the law makes between objects that are clean and unclean, holy and common, tell us that even the things we touch become corrupted by our sins (cf. Jude 23). Something must be done, or our souls will be lost! And that's where atonement comes in – and we see the fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who died for the sins of all those who turn from their sin and place their trust in him.

¹² John 1:29

¹³ Lev 6:12-13; 24:2-4

Summary and Conclusion

In summary, why should we take time to learn all these laws in the Old Testament? Well, there are at least six reasons. They are so that (1) God's people can prosper,¹⁴ because (2) he promises to be with them,¹⁵ they (3) should lean and obey because they fear him,¹⁶ they should (5) obey him because they are in a special relationship with him,¹⁷ and they should (6) obey him because they are called to reflect his character.¹⁸ It is important to remember that law of God is good, but it is not safe. It is good in that it teaches us that we are to be sanctified and holy, but we are still sinners that need a sacrifice. But the only safe place is in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who died to atone for the sins of his people.

¹⁴ Lev 18:5; 25:18-19; 26:3-12

¹⁵ Lev 9:4, 23-24; 26:11-12.

¹⁶ Lev 19:14; 25:17, 36, 43

¹⁷ Lev 25:55

¹⁸ Lev 19:12

Discussion Questions

There are two sections of questions: group and personal. Both sets of questions can be covered while at Discipleship Track. However, you are also encouraged to take the personal questions home and think about in your personal life from day to day and discuss with your parents. This way, you can have your parents encourage you, pray for you, and help walk with you as you seek to grow in Christ.

Group Questions and Discussion

1. Consider Jesus. What attributes of Christ enable him to be the perfect high priest? Would you give thanks and praise for each of his attributes?
2. Consider Nadab and Abihu. God cared very much how his people worshipped him, and he showed it publicly. How does the church publicly display that God cares we approach him in worship rightly?
3. Consider honoring God publicly. What steps should Christians take in a church to ensure that God is worshipped rightly in a public gathering?
4. Consider God's law and God's grace. As we have seen, Leviticus lays quite an emphasis on obedience. But do Christians really need to be as concerned about obedience as the Old Testament Israelites? After all, the gospel is a message of grace, not works. How do we think properly about obedience and grace?

(Romans 6:1-3)

Personal Questions and Application

5. Consider Jesus. Think about his attributes that make him a high priest. How are you called to imitate him and be a kingdom of priests (1 Peter 2:9)?
6. Consider Nadab and Abihu. God cared very much how his people worshipped him. What are some personal things to think about in your own heart so that you can approach him rightly when you come to worship him?

7. Consider honoring God personally. What steps should you take personally to ensure that God is worshipped rightly in your own heart?
8. Consider God's law and God's grace. There are some things that only we know about ourselves – our thoughts, our motives, our own heart, etc.. How does God's grace enable you to follow his commandments in your own thoughts, motives, and in your own heart?