

Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet
Exodus (Part 2) & **Leviticus**¹ | *Get Used to Different*
North Center | September 19, 2022
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In March 2006, I was on a mountain in Guatemala working at an orphanage. That was a transformative time in my life:

- *It was on that mountain that God began to give me a passion for orphans – which eventually led to a desire to adopt.*
- *It was on that mountain that God began to teach me what it means for Him to have a plan for somebody's life.*
- *And it was on that mountain that I met a girl.*

21 months later, on a magical winter night in northern Minnesota, I was in a field surrounded by rose petals and gently falling snow as I knelt down on one knee and asked this girl to marry me. As soon as she said yes, the night sky was covered in a grand finale of fireworks.

Then, just over four months later, we were standing in a chapel as we covenanted the rest of our lives to each other. We signed papers, made vows, exchanged rings, and then the pastor declared us to be husband & wife. I was already committed to Elizabeth before that day in the chapel. But that day set in motion a series of events that would officially set Elizabeth apart as my bride:

- *We signed an official marriage license.*
- *She wore the wedding ring that I gave her.*
- *Her last name was officially changed from Beasley to Knoop.*
- *I took her away from her family to live with me in my little shack of a house.*
- *She left her job and trusted her husband to provide for her needs.²*

¹ Here's what we've seen so far:

- **Maker:** God is sovereign over the world that He has made, and all that He does is good.
- **Mankind:** He made humanity in His image:
 - Which means (among other things) that we were made to have a special relationship with God. We were made to know Him and to enjoy Him in a way that nothing else in this created universe (including angels¹) can even fathom.
- **Mission:** And then He gave them a mission to fill the world with the image of God...to put His glory on display all over the earth.
- **Madness:** But humanity has rebelled against God from the very beginning, and this rebellion severed our relationship with God, and it made everything about our life harder – including the mission.
- **Marvelous News:** God promised to send a Hero who would conquer evil by crushing the head of the enemy.
- **Meantime:**
 - He chooses a family.
 - He covenants Himself to this family.
 - He promises to give them a land of their own.
 - He rescues them slavery in the foreign land of Egypt.
 - And now He is leading them through the wilderness into the land that He promised them.

² There's a lot of nuance to the whole "financial provision" part, but it's still a true statement!

Now, I made hundreds of mistakes in those early months together, but it was a season of showing the world that Elizabeth was special to me above all other girls.

That's the same thing that is happening in Exodus & Leviticus:

- God had already chosen a family to be His special people (*Genesis 12*)
- And He had already covenanted Himself to this people (*Genesis 15*)
- But now He is making it known to the world.

**For You separated them from among all the peoples of the earth
to be Your inheritance,
as You spoke by Your servant Moses, when You brought our fathers out of Egypt,
O Lord GOD.
~ 1 Kings 8:53**

This is what God is doing in Exodus & Leviticus, but before we go there – let's go to the Lord in prayer together.

PRAY

Last week, we looked at the Exodus story when God rained down 10 plagues on the land of Egypt as He rescued His people from slavery. One of the things we notice as we read this powerful story is that God isn't just showing the Egyptians that He is more powerful than all their gods (*which is what we saw last week*), but He is also showing the Egyptians that **His people are a special treasure to Him above all the peoples of the world.**

For example, when He is about to send the 4th plague of flies across the land, God says,

**“And in that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell,
That no swam of flies shall be there,
In order that you may know that I am the YHWH in the midst of the land.
I will make a difference between My people and your people.
Tomorrow this sign shall be.
~ Exodus 8:23**

We hear God making similar statements throughout the other plagues,³ but then we reach the final plague (*the death of the firstborn*), and we hear God say,

**...there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt,
such as was not like it before, nor shall be like it again.
But against none of the children of Israel shall a dog move its tongue, against man or beast,
That you may know that YHWH does make a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.
~ Exodus 11:6–7**

Then God brings them out of the land. He parts the waters of the Red Sea, and the Israelites walk across on dry ground (**kind of like a groom and his bride walking down the aisle together!**). But

³ See also Exodus 9:4.

then, as soon as the Egyptians try to walk down the isle after the bride, God lets go of the waters, and every single one of the Egyptians drowned.

...Not so much as one of them remained.
~ Exodus 14:28

Then God leads them on a three-month journey through the wilderness **to the Mountain of Sinai** (19:1) where He renews His covenant with His chosen people. And the language and the imagery in the rest of the book of Exodus is breathtaking. There on the mountain, God meets with His servant Moses and says,

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians,
and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.
Now therefore if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant
then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.
~ Exodus 19:4-5



Now, you remember how reluctant Moses was as first when it came to God's plan for His people. Well, here in the wilderness, on Mt. Sinai, he really begins to see what God is doing in setting apart this people for Himself, and **Moses loves it**. In fact, Moses gets to a point where the Bible says that the Lord spoke to Moses

“...as a man speaks to his friend.”
~ Exodus 33:11

And then Moses has a conversation with God where he says,

“...If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here.
For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight,
except You go with us?
So we shall be separate, Your people and I,
from all the people who are upon the face of the earth.
~ Exodus 33:15-16

There, in that conversation, Moses gets to the heart of what distinguishes God's people from all the other peoples on the face of the earth: *His Presence*.

- The children of Israel were gloriously set apart from every other nation because the Creator of the universe was going to dwell with them!

I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God.
And they shall know that I am YHWH their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt,
that I may dwell among them.
I am YHWH their God.
~ Exodus 29:45-46

That's the ultimate **PURPOSE** of Exodus & Leviticus: *to set apart His people so that He might dwell with them.*

That's the purpose. Now, here's the **PROBLEM**: *God is holy and His people are still sinners.*

What I mean is, even though God has rescued His people from the grip of wickedness, they are still sinners.⁴ Even as they sing about their salvation (*Exodus 15*), they have the same rebellious heart that we read about in *Genesis 3*. Just because we saved from *the power of sin* doesn't mean that we are saved from *the presence of sin*.

Three days after God rescues them from the most powerful ruler in the world by leading them through waters of the Red Sea...they start complaining...*about everything*.

First, they get thirsty...

And the people murmured against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"
~ *Exodus 15:24*

So, God **miraculously** provides sweet water for them to drink (*15:25*)

Then they get hungry...

Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.
And the children of Israel said to them,
"Oh, that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full. For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."
~ *Exodus 16:2-3*

So, God **miraculously** provides quail in the evening and Manna (*which tasted like wafers and honey*⁵) in the morning (*16:12*)

Then they got thirsty again...

...And the people murmured against Moses, and say,
"Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, To kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"
~ *Exodus 17:3*

So, God **miraculously** provided water out of a rock for them to drink.

Then an army comes to fight against them (*17:8-16*), but God **miraculously** gives this untrained group of Israelites the victory.⁶

⁴ Just because they have been set free from the tyranny of sin doesn't mean they are sinless.

⁵ Exodus 16:31

⁶ The captain of this makeshift army was a young man by the name of Joshua (*17:9*), and we'll see him again before his story is over.

Finally, He brings them to Mt. Sinai, and He gives Moses some initial instructions for what it is going to look like for Israel to have a relationship with a holy God.⁷

And the first two instructions are particularly important. God says,

You shall have no other gods before Me.
You shall not make for yourself any carved image...
~ Exodus 20:3-4⁸

Remember, these people were born and raised in Egypt, which was full of idol worship, and so God's first word is to make sure they know that worshipping the true and living God looks very different from what they've been accustomed to seeing their entire lives. It's going to be so much more real. So much more beautiful. And powerful. And intimate. And personal. And meaningful.

He starts this new relationship by teaching them that there is only one God, and He cannot be represented by any of the carved images that lined the temples of Egypt's so-called gods.

After God finishes giving Moses all the instructions, the Bible says that

⁷ There on the mountain, God meets with Moses, and He renews His covenant with Moses and the people (*Exodus 19:3-8*).⁷ And the next few chapters is just a breathtaking scene. First, God points to the group of sinners at the bottom of the mountain and says, "...you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people..." (*19:5*). Then, after Moses goes back down the mountain and warns the people to get ready, the Lord made His presence known to the entire congregation, and the Bible says that "they trembled" (*20:18*). "Now Mountain Sinai was completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and become louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice (*19:18-19*).

It's at this point that God gives His people His laws – which are designed to help God's people have a life-giving relationship with Him and a life-giving relationship with each other. The most well-known of these laws are the ten commandments which we read about in *chapter 20*.

Sometimes, people think of laws as just a bunch of restrictions. I remember when I was a teenager, I hated people telling me what to do. But as I got older (and matured) I began to realize that good laws exist to make people as happy as possible. They don't restrict your freedom; they create freedom.

- I am free to go this way down the highway when I'm in my lane because nobody is allowed to go that way down the highway in my lane. Road laws are meant to keep me safe – to set me up for success on the road.

It's the same thing with all of God's laws.

- Thou shall not steal. *What? That's not fair!*
- Thou shall not murder. *Agh, you're taking away all my freedom.*

No! All of God's laws are meant to make us the happiest people on earth. Because...

- Life is better when you don't worry about people committing adultery with your spouse.
- Life is better when you don't have to worry about people stealing your property.
- Life is better when you don't have neighbors lying about your character.
- Life is better when you are happy with what God has given you instead of wishing you had that donkey being advertised on TV (*20:17*).

⁸ The idea of idols might seem like an odd command to us, but it was very relevant to the people standing there at the foot of the mountain. They had just been freed from a nation that was full of idols. Many of them had probably been involved in building shrines and temples to these idols as part of their slave labor. Idols were a normal part of the culture in Egypt, and God is telling them not to bring this Egyptian idolatry into their worship of the one true God.

Why? First, God is a jealous God (*20:5*). He wants the hearts of His people to worship Him alone – just like a husband wants the affections of his wife to be for him alone. Second, there is no other true God but Him, and so every other god and every other idol is only going to lead to disappoint. "Indeed they are all worthless; their works are nothing; their molded images are wind and confusion (*Isaiah 41:29*).



...he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people.
And they said, "All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient."

~ Exodus 24:7

Moses is like, "Great! Let's do this thing." So, he goes back up the mountain, and God gives him even more specific instructions for how this group of sinners would live and thrive with the Presence of a holy God dwelling in their midst.⁹

But...(meanwhile, back at camp...) while God is giving Moses these worship instructions, the Israelites get tired of waiting for Moses to come back down the mountain (after 400 years in slavery, they can't wait 40 days for God to give His instructions to Moses), and so they ask Aaron to make them a god that can lead them on to the promised land (32:1). And Aaron (the man who was ordained to be the worship leader of God's people) agrees! So everybody brings him the gold that they brought from Egypt,

And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool,
and made a molded calf.

Then they said,

"This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!"

~ Exodus 32:4

Think about how utterly preposterous this scene is:

- God shows His unrivaled power over every Egyptian god in the plagues that He rained down.
- He tells His people not to make any idols
- They whole-heartedly agree to obey everything that the Lord has said.
- From their camp they can literally see the glory of the Lord on the top of the mountain¹⁰
- And in less than 40 days, they convince their appointed High Priest to break the very first commandment by making a gold calf and then proclaiming that this idol is the god who brought them out of Egypt.

While the glory of the Lord is like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain, they are down below...worshipping a cow.

Q. What's the lesson here?

A. The lesson is that...

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;

Who can know it?

~ Jeremiah 17:9

⁹ The Tabernacle & the furniture that was to go inside the Tabernacle (25–26); the Altar and the area around the Tabernacle (27, 30); the garments that the priests would wear (28); instructions for consecrating Aaron and his sons for the priesthood (29); daily offerings (29); incense & oils (30), the artisans who would be making everything (30).

¹⁰ Exodus 24:17.

So the lesson is that **God doesn't choose people because they are good**. Jesus made that very clear when he said, **"There is no such thing as good people!"**

**...No one is good by One, that is, God.
~ Mark 10:18**

Maybe you came here this morning (*or you are watching online*) and you are thinking to yourself:

- God could never **love** me. God would never **want** me. God could never **use** me.
- After everything I've done in my life, God would never **choose** me to be part of His family.

Friend, if that's what you are thinking, then you don't know this God.

- This God loves the unlovable.
- This God chooses the most unlikely.
- This God rescues those who are totally lost.
- This God crushes empires and moves waters and performs miracles to save the lowest of the low.

"Yeah, but Pastor Jeremiah, you don't know how deep my sin goes."

- No, I don't.
- But God does.¹¹

Think about this for moment: while the children of Israel were making their golden calf, God was teaching Moses about how to offer daily sacrifice for sin (**29:1-43**).

**And you shall offer a bull every day as a sin offering for atonement...
~ Exodus 29:36**¹²

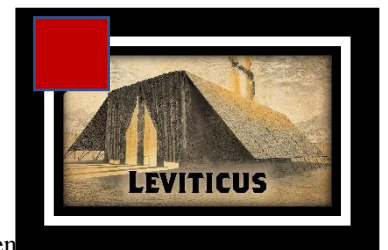
**Now this is what you shall offer on the altar...day by day continually.
One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other you shall offer at twilight.
~ Exodus 29:38-39**

God knew that His people were going to be sinning every single day, and He chose them anyway!

- Just like Jesus knew that you and I were going to be wretched sinners, and He died for us anyway.

**But God demonstrates His own love toward us,
In that while we were still sinners,
Christ died for us.
~ Romans 5:8**

God makes a way for sinners to have a relationship with Him.



¹¹ He knew how sinful His people would be before Adam & Eve ever rebelled in the Garden of Eden. In the eternal mind of God, Jesus was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (*Revelation 13:8*). See also: *1 Peter 1:20*.

¹² C.f., Leviticus 17:11.

- That's the good news of the cross.
- AND **that's the point of the book of Leviticus.** →

Even though we haven't spent any time in Leviticus this morning, you now know what the book is about.

It's called "Leviticus" because it pertains to the worship leaders in Israel who were from the family of Levi (and therefore known as the Levites). And this whole book is about **God making a way through sacrifices and purification and laws for His holy Presence to dwell with His people** – sinners though they be – so that all the world might know that they are His precious and treasured possession.

I will set My tabernacle among you,
and My soul shall not abhor you.
I will walk among you and be your God,
and you shall be My people.
I am the Lord your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt...
~ Leviticus 26:11-13

God made a way for this in the wilderness through daily sacrifices, purification laws, and a building called the Tabernacle – that's the message of Leviticus. But (if you read this book slowly, thoughtfully, and prayerfully) you will see that **every chapter is pointing forward to the day when Jesus will do all of this perfectly.**

- He will be the perfect sacrifice that you read about in Leviticus 1.
- He will purify His people once and for all with His own blood.
- And He Himself will be the dwelling place of God's people.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt (tabernacled) among us,
And we beheld His glory,
The glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.
~ John 1:14

Conclusion:

If you are a Christian, you are God's treasured possession, and it has always been His desire for the entire world to know it. He wants the world to know that You are set apart for Him alone. In the OT God sent plagues on Egypt in order to make a clear distinction between His people and the world around them; in the NT God sent His Holy Spirit to make this distinction.

If you are a believer, the story of Exodus & Leviticus leaves us with one major question:

1. Does the world know that your heart belongs to God alone?

If you aren't a Christian yet, here's your question from Exodus & Leviticus:

1. What is keeping you from giving your heart to this God? Just as He loved His people in the OT enough to sacrifice thousands and thousands of animals in order to dwell in their midst, He has loved you so much that He sacrificed His only Son on the altar of

the cross so that your sin could be cleansed for good and so that He might dwell in your heart.

PRAY