



# Dwelling with the Holy God

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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## Introduction:

I recently heard that at one time **Leviticus** was the first book the Jews taught their children. Does this shock you like it does me? Why would they start the kids off on the most boring book of the Bible? They could have started with the phenomenal stories of the world's beginning and the history of their nation. Or they could start with the fabulous explanations of conquest and victory for their people, mixed with intrigue, war, giants, battles. But, no, they started with **Leviticus**. They may have done this thinking that if they started with **Leviticus**, the kids would get the worst one first and then everything else would be a pleasant surprise. However, I doubt that was the reason. In fact, it seems much more likely that the reason they started with this is because no book in the Bible establishes the holiness of God like **Leviticus**. If they let their kids cut their spiritual teeth on the foundational characteristic of God's holiness everything else would fall into proper place. Secondly, there is the place **Leviticus** holds in the canon. It was not the first book in the Torah/Law, but notice its logical place. The last third of **Exodus** is about the sanctuary God asked Israel to build "that I may dwell in their midst" (**Exodus 25:8**, ESV). It ends with the completion of that sanctuary as God indwells it in the midst of the people. **Leviticus** is what it takes for the holy God to be able to dwell in the midst of an unclean people. The Jews kicked off their children's instruction with this book that explained, "Here's how to keep God dwelling in our midst. Don't forget it." Our whole theme this year from **Ephesians 3:14-19** is about dwelling with God or wanting God to dwell in us. It stands to reason that we can learn some things from **Leviticus**.

## Discussion:

- I. We must set God apart as holy.
  - A. In **Leviticus 10**, Nadab and Abihu were struck dead by the fire of God because they offered fire God had not authorized (**Leviticus 10:1-2**). When God explained why, it wasn't retribution for violating some arbitrary rule. He said, "Among those who are near me, I will be sanctified, and before all the people, I will be glorified" (ESV). God is supremely, superlatively holy. As such, we must sanctify Him. Of course, that doesn't mean we make Him holy. It means we recognize Him as holy, setting Him apart in our hearts and minds. Nadab and Abihu were struck because they detracted from the glory of God's holiness. Interestingly, Moses and Aaron were not permitted to enter the Promised Land for the same reason (**Numbers 20:12; 27:14**).
  - B. The story itself explains how we sanctify God as holy. We recognize His way is the holy way. We recognize His way is the right way. We bring glory to Him not by offering whatever sacrifice we want or by doing whatever we think is good. We set God apart as Holy, sanctifying Him, by doing His things His way. Consider what Jesus said in **John 7:18**. "The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood" (ESV). God is glorified or set apart as holy by us, when we only do what He has authorized. When we go off on our own authority, we are glorifying ourselves. We are setting ourselves up as gods as if we are the distinct and separate ones. We must not do this. We must glorify God by pursuing what He has authorized and nothing else.
  - C. Peter makes a great point in **I Peter 3:13-17**. Depending on your translation it says to either sanctify Christ as Lord or sanctify God as holy. The end result is the same. The way we sanctify God or set Him apart is by being ready to give a defense for the hope that is within us. While we usually make this about "personal evangelism," we should see this much more like what happened in **Daniel 3**. The three Hebrew boys Haniah, Meshael, and Azariah (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego) sanctified God in their hearts. That is, God was distinct and separate from all others. Nebuchadnezzar was not like God. Nebuchadnezzar's statue was not like God. And God was so holy in their hearts, they would rather die than besmirch God's glory. They knew God was able to deliver them from the fire. They knew God would deliver them from Nebuchadnezzar. They defended their hope. "We're going into the furnace, but so is God." Consequently, in this instance, God set the three Hebrews apart by saving them from the furnace that killed the soldiers who threw them in.
  - D. Let us sanctify God in our hearts that He may dwell with us.
- II. We must distinguish between the holy and the common.
  - A. In **Leviticus 10:10**, God told the priests, "You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean" (ESV). That was apparently at the heart of Nadab and Abihu's mistake. The next 13 chapters of Leviticus unpack this statement as we read what many call "The Holiness Code." God goes

into great detail describing the difference between what was clean and unclean to the Jews under their covenant. This matters to God.

- B. Under our covenant, these issues of holiness aren't so much about the foods we eat, the dishes we use, the people we are around. It is about how we conduct ourselves. We are supposed to be holy vessels (**II Timothy 2:20-21**). We are supposed to be honorable vessels, set apart as holy, useful to God for every good work. **II Timothy 3:16-17** explains we accomplish this by letting God's Word teach, reprove, correct, and train us.
- C. **I Thessalonians 4:1-8** demonstrates how we must make distinctions regarding holy and common. We are to be holy and treat each other as holy. We are to recognize God has saved us in order to sanctify us, setting us apart for His holy use, not so we can get in our enclaves and pursue immorality together. The world may pursue unholiness, but we are set apart for holy use. We must distinguish between holy and common. We must make a distinction between us and the world.

### III. We must be holy in our relationship with people as well as God.

- A. In **Leviticus 19:9-17**, we see God's holiness code wasn't just about our relationship with God. If we want to dwell with God, we must learn to dwell with one another properly. We cannot simply "go to church," get the worship pattern right, and then live however we may please with others. We must learn to love others.
- B. The two greatest commandments express this in **Matthew 22:36-40**. **I John 4:20-21** makes this imperative. We simply cannot claim to love God just because we "go to church" and check off some obediences if we have brothers and sisters we cannot stand. If we have brothers and sisters we hold at arm's length, even if it is because of their sins, we do not love God. How can we claim to love God if we don't love His people?
- C. Consider **Matthew 5:23-25**. Jesus' point is I cannot be reconciled in my relationship with God if I won't reconcile my relationships with God's children. This assembly isn't doing us any good if we are leaving wedges in our relationships. Dwelling with the holy God means learning to dwell with His people in holiness.

### IV. We must have a holy sacrifice.

- A. It is no chance that puts **Leviticus 1-7** immediately after **Exodus 40**. God enters the Tabernacle, dwells among this unclean people and the very next thing they read about is sacrifice. Not just a sacrifice, but all kinds of sacrifices. There were burnt offerings, sin offerings, grain offerings, peace offerings. Sacrifice on top of sacrifice. There were sacrifices for the nation, for the priests, for the leaders, for the common people. There were sacrifices for those healed of leprosy and sacrifices for those who had given birth. The Tabernacle, the dwelling place of God, flowed with the blood of sacrifices. It was a place of death.
- B. Then, smack in the middle of the book, we find the central event: the Day of Atonement (**Leviticus 16**). The annual day in which the High Priest could actually come into the very throne room of God and make atonement for the sins of the nation in God's presence. It was a day filled with sacrifice. Notice specifically **Leviticus 16:16**. The purpose of these sacrifices was so God could dwell in this Tent of Meeting in the midst of the people's uncleanness. All things being equal, God could not dwell in the midst of these people without destroying them. He should have destroyed them in the midst of Egypt, but He didn't. He delivered them. And He did not deliver them to simply destroy them for their ongoing sins. So, He developed a plan by which He could dwell with them, a plan to atone for their sins, remove their guilt, and make them holy.
- C. But there was a problem. The blood of bulls and goats could not really make atonement or bring forgiveness (cf. **Hebrews 10:1-4**). But they pointed to God's ultimate plan to make us holy. Thus, in **John 1:29**, after thousands of years of sacrificed bulls and goats, animals slaughtered in the place of people who deserved to die, John sees Jesus walking down the road and says to his disciples: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (ESV). Jesus Himself was the ultimate sacrifice, whose blood truly can cleanse us of our sins and make us holy, allowing us to dwell with the Holy God (cf. **Hebrews 9:11-14**).
- D. Do you long to be holy? Have you been trying? Have you failed? I know that you have. All have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (**Romans 3:23**). The difference between **Leviticus** and our covenant is we have a sacrifice that actually can make us holy so we really can dwell with God. Have you partaken in that sacrifice?

### Conclusion:

I trust that in this sermon and the last, we have recognized the sacrifice of Jesus is not intended to let us live in our unholiness. Rather, it is intended to empower us to live in God's holiness so God may dwell in the midst of us. Do you want to dwell with God? Pursue holiness, but know that you cannot have holiness apart from Jesus Christ. For us, holiness takes sacrifice, and it takes a greater sacrifice than we can offer. So God offered it for us. Let us pursue the Holy God by pursuing the holiness of God through Jesus Christ. Then He can and will dwell with us.