

What's the Message - Lesson 33

Today's lesson is entitled . . . You Shall Be Holy . . . and covers the final chapters of the Book of Leviticus.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. We pray that the Lord will lead you through this study, to gain a richer understanding of what He means when He says that we should be holy . . . like Him. Amen.

In our last lesson we explored the doctrine of atonement, and what that meant to the Israelite thousands of years ago . . . and still means to us today. Today we will explore chapters 18 through 27 of Leviticus. In these chapters we see the repetition of a theme, a theme that is established in the opening verses of chapter 18:

We read: *The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them, I am the Lord your God. You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the Lord your God. Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the Lord."*

We see another element added to this is chapter 19: *"Say to the people of Israel, You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy. Then we see that this is to apply to our vertical relationship with God under the words: Do not turn to idols or make gods of cast metal for yourselves. I am the Lord your God. Then we see that this also applies to the horizontal relationships with our family and neighbors as these words are added: you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.*

At the end of chapter 20, we have this verse: *You are to be holy to me because I the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.*

This theme reaches its pinnacle, and comes to its conclusion in chapter 26, where we have selected from verses 3, 9, and 12: *“If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field its fruit . . . I will look upon you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you . . . I will walk among you, and be your God, and you will be my people.*

Then we see the corollary verses of the consequences of disobedience: *“But if you will not listen to me, and carry out all these commands, and if you reject my decrees abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, then I will do this to you:*

I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your enemies . . . if after all of this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over . . . I will scatter you among the nations, and I will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will be in ruins.”

And so, Teacher, we have a brief summary of the highlights of this theme as presented in the final chapters of Leviticus. Seems like an impossibly high standard to achieve, but that’s what it says. Now, what is the message in all of this for us?

Yes, God’s standards are very high, and impossible for any of us to achieve on our own. That’s why He gave the Israelites the gift of atonement, the forgiveness of sins.

If we relied on the law for our reconciliation with God, the Israelites, and we, all fall short. But God is holy, meaning here that God is perfect in all He does, and He expects no less of us. It is just as He said to Abraham back in our lesson eight, when we first looked at God’s covenant with Abraham. God requires obedience from us. Unconditional, full, and complete obedience.

And the consequences for failure are very serious and painful. Thank God that He has given us the gospel of forgiveness.

But the word “holy” has a second meaning. It also means “set apart” . . . set apart for God’s purposes. And God’s purpose for His chosen people was that they were to be a blessing to others. But this could not be accomplished if they were corrupted by the sinful ways of the people around them.

So they were to follow a strict practice of separation, and obedience to God’s commands, to show the world that there is a better way to live. To live as one of God’s chosen people. It is a theme we shall see often throughout the entire Bible. We see it in the New Testament in 1 Peter 2: 9-10: *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

And Leviticus, chapter 26, verse 12 says it this way: *I will walk among you, and be your God, and you will be my people.*

Next time we shall begin our study of Numbers and Deuteronomy, with Part One of “Lessons in the Desert.”

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