



# Jesus in the Book of Leviticus

*The Gospel in Symbols*

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A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY GUIDE

Exploring the Christological Fulfillment  
of Every Shadow in the Third Book of Moses



*“These are a shadow of things to come,  
but the substance is of Christ.”*

— COL. 2:17

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Course Handbook



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# Chapter 1

## The Revelation of Christ in Leviticus

*“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.”*

— JOHN 5:39

LET ME BEGIN with what may seem a startling claim: the Bible has only one central character. Oh, I know it seems to contain a cast of thousands—patriarchs and prophets, kings and beggars, heroes and villains. But strip away the costumes and scenery, and you’ll find that every line, every scene, every act points toward one magnificent Person. From the first page of Genesis to the last page of Revelation, the whole immense drama moves toward Him and finds its meaning in Him. His name, of course, is Christ.

*“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.”*

— JOHN 5:39–40

You see, when our Lord rose from the dead on that first Easter morning, He didn’t merely show His disciples the nail-prints in His hands. He did something far more astonishing. Walking alongside two bewildered travelers on the Emmaus road, He gave them a theology lesson that must have been absolutely breathtaking:

*“Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”*

— LUKE 24:27

Think of that! Starting with Moses—with Genesis, Exodus, and yes, even Leviticus—Jesus traced His own story through every page of what we call the Old Testament. Can you imagine what it would have been like to sit in on that conversation? To hear Him explain how the smoke rising from those ancient altars was telling His story all along?

The tragedy is that many people read these Scriptures and see nothing at all. When ancient Israel read the Law, Paul tells us, a veil lay over their hearts. They saw the words, certainly, but not the Word Himself. They observed the form but missed the Face entirely. They were like someone studying a photograph of the sun and thinking they had seen the sun itself.

But—and here is the glorious turning point—when the heart turns to Christ, the veil is taken away. Everything changes. Suddenly the Law becomes life. The shadow reveals its substance. The ritual unveils the Redeemer. Those same dusty pages that once seemed to conceal Him now blaze with the glory of Christ, the true and living Reality.



Consider the structure of the Old Testament itself. The Jews divided their Scriptures into three great sections: the Law (Torah), the Prophets (Nevi'im), and the Writings, which they often called simply “the Psalms.” These weren’t arbitrary categories. They were, if you like, three great galleries in the same exhibition, each displaying a different aspect of the same magnificent Subject.

And what did Jesus Himself say about these three sections?

*“All things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning Me.”*

— LUKE 24:44

About *Me*. Not about various religious ideas. Not about general moral principles. About a Person. Every bit of it.

Now, the Law might seem an unlikely place to look for the gospel. It’s so full of prohibitions and regulations, animal sacrifices and ceremonial washings. But that’s precisely the point. The Law revealed God’s absolute holiness and demanded perfect righteousness. And what did Christ do? He fulfilled it—every jot and tittle, as He said—by perfect obedience and by offering Himself as the true sacrifice.

Think of it this way: The Law demanded; Christ delivered. The Law revealed sin; Christ removed it. The Law showed us the way to God; Christ said, “I am the Way.” He didn’t abolish the Law—He became its living fulfillment.

*“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.”*

— MATT. 5:17–18

Look at just the first five books, the Pentateuch. In Genesis, Christ appears as the Seed of the woman, promised in the very hour of mankind’s fall. In Exodus, He is the Passover Lamb, whose blood shelters God’s people from judgment. In our book, Leviticus, He is both the High Priest and the Sacrifice—the One who makes the offering and *is* the offering. In Numbers, He is the bronze serpent lifted up in the wilderness (“And as Moses lifted up the serpent,” Jesus said, “so must the Son of Man be lifted up”). In Deuteronomy, He is the Prophet like Moses whom God promised to raise up from among His people.

Five books. Five portraits. One Face.



## 1.1 Four Keys to Unlock the Treasury

Now, if we’re going to read Leviticus properly—and by that I mean read it as a book about Jesus—we need what I’ll call four interpretive keys. Without these keys, we’ll find ourselves standing outside a locked treasury, knowing it contains riches but unable to get at them.

### 1.1.1 First Key: Shadow and Substance

The writer to the Hebrews tells us plainly that the Law possessed “a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things.” A shadow, you understand, is not nothing. If you see a man’s shadow on the ground, you know something real is casting it. But the shadow is not the man himself.

In Leviticus, every sacrifice, every priest, every ritual was a shadow cast backward in time by the reality of Christ. The shadow was real enough—those were real lambs, real blood, real altars. But they were not the Substance. Christ is the Substance—the true and living fulfillment of every type and symbol.

*“These are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”*

— COL. 2:17

Think about what makes a shadow a shadow. It’s an outline without detail. A copy, not the original. Temporary, not permanent. Earthly, not heavenly. Dependent on the reality that casts it, rather than self-existent. Apply each of these contrasts to the Levitical system and to Christ, and you’ll begin to see what Scripture means by calling it a shadow.

### 1.1.2 Second Key: The Reality of Duality

Here’s something that may surprise you: in God’s economy, there are always two dimensions of reality running side by side—the visible and the invisible, the earthly and the heavenly. When God instructed Moses to build the tabernacle, He told him explicitly to make it according to the pattern shown on the mountain. The earthly tabernacle, in other words, was a copy of the heavenly.

This isn’t allegory or fancy interpretation. The writer to the Hebrews states it as plain fact: the Levitical priests served in “the copy and shadow of the heavenly things.” Both realities existed. Both were real. But the visible illustrated the invisible, the earthly pointed to the heavenly, the temporary prefigured the eternal.

### 1.1.3 Third Key: Divine Separation

From the very beginning, God has been in the business of dividing—and this is not arbitrary pickiness but the very principle of holiness. In creation, He divided light from darkness, land from sea. In redemption, He divided Israel from the nations, the tribe of Levi from the other tribes, the high priest from the ordinary priests.

This is what holiness *means*: separation. Not separation for its own sake, but separation unto God. And there’s a divine order to it, a kind of ascending scale. Everything begins as common—ordinary, everyday, unremarkable. From the common, God distinguishes what is clean from what is unclean. From the clean, He chooses what is to be holy, set apart for His exclusive use. And the holy leads us, finally, into God’s very presence.

The progression runs like this: Common leads to Clean, Clean leads to Holy, and Holy leads to the presence of God Himself.

### 1.1.4 Fourth Key: Fourfold Meaning

The ancient rabbis understood something profound about Scripture: it has layers, like the layers of meaning in a great poem or symphony. They called this *PaRDeS*, an acronym from

the Hebrew words for the four levels.

First, there's *P'shat*, the plain or literal sense—what the words actually say on the surface. If we read that a lamb was offered at the tabernacle, then yes, a real lamb was really offered. This is the historical reality, and we mustn't spiritualize it away.

Second, *Remez*, the hint or prophetic pointer—what the words point toward. That lamb offered in the tabernacle hints at another Lamb who would one day be offered for the sins of the world.

Third, *Drash*, the moral lesson or practical application—what the words teach us. The requirement for an unblemished sacrifice teaches us that God demands perfection, that half-measures won't do.

Fourth, *Sod*, the hidden mystery or spiritual depth—what the words ultimately reveal about God's eternal purposes. That sacrificial system reveals the great mystery of substitutionary atonement, of the Just dying for the unjust.

All four levels are true simultaneously. We needn't choose between them. The literal doesn't cancel out the spiritual, nor does the spiritual negate the historical. Like looking at a diamond from different angles, each view reveals another facet of the same precious truth.



## 1.2 Opening the Book of Leviticus

So we come at last to Leviticus itself. I confess that if you opened your Bible and started reading through it cover to cover, Leviticus might well be the place where you gave up. After the drama of Genesis and the high adventure of Exodus, Leviticus seems to drag us into a morass of regulations about offerings and skin diseases and moldy houses. What on earth does any of it have to do with us?

Everything, as it turns out. Absolutely everything.

The English name "Leviticus" means "pertaining to the Levites," the priestly tribe. But the Hebrew title is far more interesting: וַיִּקְרָא (*Vayikra*), which simply means "And He called." It's taken from the book's opening words: "And the Lord called to Moses." That's significant. This isn't a book about what we do to reach God. It's about God calling out to us, inviting us to come near, showing us the way into His presence.

The setting is Mount Sinai, about a year after the Exodus. The tabernacle—that magnificent portable sanctuary—has just been completed. God's glory has filled it. And now, from within that dwelling place, God speaks. The journey from Egypt to Sinai was about redemption, about being set free. The message of Leviticus is about relationship, about staying free and walking with God.

Here's a helpful contrast: Exodus offers pardon; Leviticus offers purity. In Exodus, God approaches us; in Leviticus, we approach God. In Exodus, Christ appears as Savior; in Leviticus, as Sanctifier. Exodus deals with our guilt; Leviticus with our defilement. Exodus leaves us hearing God speak from the mountain, distant and terrifying; Leviticus brings us to hear Him speaking from the tabernacle, still holy but somehow accessible. In Exodus, we stand at a distance in fear; in Leviticus, we're shown the way into fellowship and access.

The book unfolds in seven movements, like a great symphony. Chapters 1 through 7 show us the offerings—how to approach God. Christ appears here as our Sacrifice, the Lamb slain for our sins. Chapters 8 through 10 reveal the priesthood—who may approach God. Here Christ is our High Priest, the Mediator between God and man. Chapters 11 through 15 lay out the laws of cleanness—what defiles and what purifies. Christ appears as our Cleanser, making us



fit for God's presence. Chapter 16 stands alone as the mountain peak of the book: the Day of Atonement, showing us the way of access. Here Christ is our Atonement itself, the fulfillment of everything the sacrifices symbolized.

Chapters 17 through 22 shift to practical holiness—our walk and service before God. Christ is our Sanctifier, making us not just clean but holy. Chapters 23 through 25 unveil God's sacred calendar of feasts and sabbaths. Christ is the Fulfillment of each appointed time, the reality behind every festival. And finally, chapters 26 and 27 conclude with covenant promises and voluntary vows—the outcome of a life lived in holiness. Christ appears as both our Lord and our Reward.

The book's theme can be stated in one sentence, drawn from a verse that appears three times like a refrain:

*“Be ye holy, for I am holy.”*

— LEV. 11:44; 19:2; 20:7

Or to put it another way: Holiness through Atonement. First the blood that cleanses, then the life that follows.



### 1.3 The Twin Pillars of Justice

Underlying all of Leviticus—indeed, underlying all of God's dealings with fallen humanity—stand two great unchanging realities, like twin pillars holding up a temple. We might call them the Pillar of Law and the Pillar of Sacrifice. Remove either one, and the whole structure collapses.

The Law speaks God's holy demand:

*“The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”*

— EZEK. 18:4

The Law is unbending, inflexible, absolute. It doesn't grade on a curve or make exceptions for good intentions. It exposes sin but cannot cleanse it. It judges but cannot justify. It shows us God's perfect standard and our utter inability to meet it. Like a mirror, it reveals the dirt on our faces but cannot wash us clean. Like a physician's diagnosis, it tells us we're sick unto death but offers no cure.

The Sacrifice speaks God's merciful provision:

*“Without shedding of blood there is no remission.”*

— HEB. 9:22

Where the Law condemns, the Sacrifice intercedes. Where the Law shows us God's justice, the Sacrifice reveals His mercy. The altar becomes the meeting place where these two attributes embrace. And nowhere is this more perfectly fulfilled than in Christ.

Think of it this way. God's justice requires that the sinner die—and at the cross, the sinner *did* die, in the person of Christ our substitute. God's holiness demands perfect obedience—and Christ rendered it, becoming “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” God's mercy seeks a way to pardon—and God Himself provided it: “The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” God's love longs to welcome us home—and in Christ, the Father's arms are opened wide: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.”

At the cross, law and sacrifice met. Justice and mercy kissed. The holy demand was satisfied, and the merciful provision was secured.



## 1.4 One Long Story

Before we close this opening chapter, I want you to see that the sacrifice of Christ wasn't some afterthought, some emergency measure God hastily improvised when His first plan went awry. From Eden onward, one crimson thread runs through the entire story of redemption.

In the Garden, when Adam and Eve sinned, they tried to cover themselves with fig leaves—their own inadequate attempt at righteousness. But God clothed them with garments of skin. Where did those skins come from? An innocent animal died so that guilty humanity might be covered. The principle of substitution appears on the very first page of human sin.

Abel brought a lamb and found acceptance with God. Why a lamb rather than fruit like his brother Cain? Because Abel understood what Cain refused to see: that we approach God not on the basis of our own efforts but through a substitute.

Noah, stepping out of the ark into a washed and renewed world, immediately built an altar and made a sacrifice. Abraham, commanded to offer his beloved son Isaac, received a ram caught in the thicket—God's provision of a substitute at the last possible moment. “In the mount of the Lord,” Abraham named that place, “it shall be provided.” And so it was, centuries later, on another mount just outside Jerusalem.

At the first Passover in Egypt, Israel was redeemed by the blood of a lamb applied to the doorposts. At Sinai, blood sealed the covenant between God and His people. Again and again, the same pattern: innocent life given for guilty life, blood shed for atonement, a substitute bearing the judgment we deserve.

All of these anticipated what John the Baptist would one day proclaim when Jesus appeared: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” They were shadows cast backward through time by the one great Reality: Christ crucified, “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”

In Leviticus, that shadowy outline becomes clearer, more detailed, more specific. The picture comes into sharper focus. And if we read with eyes opened by the Spirit, we'll see not ancient rituals but the living Christ—our Sacrifice, our Priest, our Atonement, our All.

## Chapter 2

# The Offerings

*“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”*

— JOHN 1:29

WHEN WE COME to study the five offerings of Leviticus, we face an immediate difficulty, though it’s a glorious sort of difficulty. The problem is simply this: Christ Himself is infinite, and no single description can contain Him. His Person cannot be measured, cannot be mapped, cannot be mastered.

Paul, trying to communicate just *one* aspect of Christ’s glory—His love—had to resort to four dimensions: breadth and length and depth and height. And even then, he admitted that this love “surpasses knowledge.” How then shall we capture the whole of Him in our little nets of words and concepts?

The answer, of course, is that we cannot. But God, knowing our limitations, has given us in Leviticus not one portrait of Christ but five. The five offerings aren’t five different Christs, nor are they five separate doctrines that happen to be true about Christ. No, they’re five windows looking into the same glorious Person, each revealing a different facet of His inexhaustible beauty.

*“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”*

— JOHN 1:29

Think of it like this: If you wanted to show someone a magnificent diamond, you wouldn’t just hold it still under one light and call that a complete presentation. You’d turn it slowly, letting the light catch each facet in turn, watching the fire flash from a dozen different angles. That’s what the five offerings do. They turn the diamond of Christ’s finished work so we can see its manifold glory.



### 2.1 Two Different Starting Points

Here’s something fascinating: the order in which the offerings appear isn’t random. In fact, there are really two different orders at work, and understanding this will unlock much of the book’s meaning.

To God, everything begins with His Son. Before God ever sees our sin, He beholds the perfect obedience of Christ, the Finished Work offered up to Him as a sweet aroma. Therefore, in God’s order—which is the order Leviticus follows in chapters 1 through 7—we start with

perfection and move toward fellowship. The first offering is the Burnt Offering, which speaks of Christ's complete devotion to the Father. We end with the Peace Offering, which speaks of fellowship restored.

But to us poor sinners, the journey begins quite differently. We don't start by contemplating Christ's perfection. We start with a gnawing awareness of our sin, our guilt, our distance from God. Only then do we move toward the altar, toward cleansing, toward acceptance. So when the offerings are actually *applied* in Leviticus (in chapters 8 and 9, for instance), they follow man's order: Sin Offering first, Burnt Offering last.

God begins where He always begins—with Christ. We begin where we must begin—with our need. Both orders are true. Both are necessary. And both meet at the cross.



## 2.2 The Five Windows

Let me introduce you to each of the five offerings, and as I do, watch for Christ appearing in each one.

First, the Burnt Offering, called in Hebrew עֹלָה (*'olah*), which means “that which ascends.” The whole animal was consumed on the altar, ascending as smoke to God. Nothing was held back. This offering speaks of Christ's total consecration, His complete devotion to the Father's will. “I delight to do Your will, O my God,” He said. Every moment of His life, every thought, every action—all of it rose to God as a sweet fragrance. The Burnt Offering is Christ seen from the Father's perspective: the beloved Son in whom He is well pleased.

Second, the Grain Offering, or מִנְחָה (*minhah*) in Hebrew. Alone among the offerings, this one involved no blood, for it speaks not of Christ's death but of His life. It was made of fine flour—uniform, with no coarse lumps or impurities. It was mingled with oil and frankincense. Here we see Christ's perfect humanity: the evenness of His character, the fragrance of His presence, the oil of the Spirit without measure upon Him. This is the offering of thanksgiving, presenting to God a life that was everything human life ought to be.

Third, the Peace Offering, or שְׁלָמִים (*shelamim*)—literally, “the offerings of peace.” Part of this sacrifice was burned on the altar for God, part was given to the priests, and part was eaten by the worshiper himself. It was a fellowship meal, a shared banquet. Here's Christ as our Peace, the One who has made peace between us and God through His blood, and who now invites us to feast in the Father's presence. “He brought me to the banqueting house,” says the Song of Songs, “and his banner over me was love.”

Fourth, the Sin Offering, or חַטָּאת (*hattat*). Now we've moved to man's starting point, to the offerings that deal with our guilt. The Sin Offering addressed our sinful nature, our condition as sinners. Here Christ appears as the Bearer of our sin, the One who “knew no sin” but was “made sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Fifth, the Trespass or Guilt Offering, אֲשָׁם (*'asham*). While the Sin Offering dealt with our state, the Trespass Offering dealt with our acts—specific sins, particular offenses. And it always involved restitution, making right what had been made wrong. Here's Christ as the Restorer of all things, paying back what He never stole, repairing what He never broke, settling debts He never incurred.

Five offerings. Five views of the cross. Five revelations of the One who is all in all.



## 2.3 Deeper Truths Woven Through

As you read through the intricate regulations surrounding these offerings, certain themes appear again and again like threads of gold running through a tapestry. Let me point out a few of them, for each reveals something precious about Christ.

First, notice this: God always provides the sacrifice. The worshiper didn't invent the system or decide what would be acceptable. God chose the offerings. This points us straight to Calvary, where God provided His own Lamb. "God so loved the world that He *gave* His only begotten Son." Salvation originates in God's heart, not ours.

Second, see how fire appears everywhere. The fire on the altar was never to go out, burning continually day and night. Fire in Scripture speaks of judgment, of testing, of God's holiness consuming all that is unholy. Christ bore the full fire of God's judgment against sin. The flames never went out; the judgment was complete.

Third, observe that the fat—the richest, choicest part of the animal—belonged exclusively to God. It could never be eaten by man, only burned on the altar. What does this mean? That the best of Christ, the inmost devotion of His heart, was reserved for the Father alone. We receive immeasurable blessings from Christ's death, but the deepest satisfaction, the truest delight, belongs to God. The cross satisfied the Father's heart first.

Fourth, the blood had to meet God before it could benefit man. The blood was applied first to the altar, sprinkled before the Lord, brought into the holy place. Only then could it cleanse the worshiper. This is crucial: Christ's death satisfied God's justice *before* it secured our pardon. The cross is first Godward, then manward.

Fifth, no leaven could be included in any offering (except one type of Peace Offering, and then it had special significance). Leaven in Scripture represents corruption, sin, that which spreads and puffs up. Christ, our true Offering, had no corruption whatsoever. He was, as Peter says, "a lamb without blemish and without spot."

Sixth, every offering had to include salt, which speaks of the covenant—of preservation, permanence, purity. "Have salt in yourselves," Jesus told His disciples, "and have peace with one another." The covenant made in Christ's blood is salted, preserved, eternal.

Seventh, when the sacrifice was complete, only ashes remained. Nothing left to burn. "It is finished," Jesus cried from the cross. The work of redemption was complete, consumed, done. The ashes testify to the finished work.



## 2.4 The Two Burnings

Here's a detail that's easy to miss but absolutely vital. Leviticus uses two different Hebrew verbs for "burn," and they mean entirely different things.

The first verb is קָטַר (*qatar*), which means to burn as incense, to make smoke rise as a sweet aroma. This burning happened on the altar in the tabernacle courtyard, right at the center of Israel's camp. It speaks of acceptance, of an offering received with pleasure. When the fat and the flesh were burned with this verb, they rose to God as a "sweet savor," a pleasing fragrance.

But there was another burning. Certain parts of certain offerings—particularly the Sin Offering—had to be taken outside the camp and burned there with a different fire. This burning used the verb שָׂרַף (*saraph*), which means to burn in judgment, to consume as something accursed.

Outside the camp. Do you see the significance? The writer to the Hebrews saw it:

“Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered outside the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him outside the camp, bearing his reproach.”

At Calvary, both burnings met in one place. The fragrance of His obedience rose to God as a sweet-smelling savor—“Christ has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma,” as Paul puts it. Yet at the same time, He bore the fire of judgment outside the camp, treated as an outcast, made a curse for us.

Acceptance and rejection. Pleasure and wrath. The sweet savor and the bitter cup. All converging at the cross.



## 2.5 What Then Shall We Say?

When we stand back and look at these five offerings together—these five facets of the one diamond—what emerges is a portrait of Christ so complete, so beautiful, so inexhaustible that we can only bow in wonder.

We see His perfection: the Burnt Offering’s complete consecration, the Grain Offering’s unblemished humanity. We see His provision: the Peace Offering’s fellowship, the feast spread in God’s presence. We see His substitution: the Sin Offering bearing our nature, the Trespass Offering paying our debts.

And we see that every aspect of our need met every aspect of God’s requirement in the Person of Jesus Christ. He is simultaneously the Offerer and the Offering, the Priest and the Victim, the Gift and the Giver.

The next time someone tells you that Leviticus is dry and irrelevant, that it’s nothing but ancient rituals with no meaning for us today, you might gently suggest they look again. For in these offerings, presented in minute and careful detail, God has painted for us a portrait of His Son in five dimensions.

Each offering is a word in God’s vocabulary. Put them together, and they speak one Name: Jesus.

## Chapter 3

# The Priesthood

*“We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.”*

— HEB. 8:1

THERE IS SOMETHING rather curious about the priesthood. We moderns, I think, have rather lost the feel of it. We understand judges and lawyers well enough—they enforce rules we’ve broken. We understand teachers—they explain things we don’t know. But a priest? A man who stands between us and God, who approaches the Unapproachable on our behalf? This strikes us as either unnecessary or presumptuous, depending on our temperament.

Yet this is precisely what makes the priesthood so vital. For what do you do when the problem isn’t merely that you’ve broken a rule (that’s for judges) or that you don’t understand something (that’s for teachers), but that you yourself have become unfit for the very presence you most need? You can’t fix yourself any more than a drowning man can pull himself up by his own hair. You need someone who can stand where you cannot, who can go where you dare not, who can speak when you have no words.

This was Aaron’s office. And this, infinitely more, is Christ’s.



The writer to the Hebrews tells us plainly: “We have such a High Priest.” Not “we had” or “we hope for,” but “we have.” Present tense. Active ministry. Right now, at this very moment, Christ stands in the presence of God on your behalf. If you are in Him, you are never alone before the Father. Never.

But before we can grasp the magnitude of Christ’s priesthood, we must first understand what Aaron’s priesthood was meant to show us. The Old Testament priests were not the reality—they were the shadow, the preview, the rough sketch before the masterpiece. Yet even shadows can teach us, if we know what to look for.



Consider how a man became a priest in Israel. It was not a career one chose, like becoming a carpenter or a merchant. You couldn’t apply for the position or work your way up through diligent service. No, the priesthood came by birth—or rather, by God’s choice of your birth. Only descendants of Aaron could serve. This already tells us something crucial: priesthood is not about human achievement but divine appointment.

But even being born in the right family wasn’t enough. Aaron himself, the first high priest, had to undergo an extraordinary consecration ceremony. Leviticus 8 describes it in meticulous detail, and if you read it carefully, you’ll notice that it had ten distinct steps. Ten movements,

each one necessary, each one meaningful. Let me walk you through them, for in each step we shall see a glimpse of Christ.



First came *selection*. God called Aaron by name. Not because Aaron was particularly righteous—we know he made the golden calf, after all—but because God had chosen him. The priesthood began with God’s sovereign call, not man’s worthiness. And here we see our first parallel: Christ did not seize the office of High Priest. The Father declared it: “You are My Son... You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” Divine appointment precedes human service.

Second, Aaron had to be *brought near*. Moses, acting on God’s command, brought Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tabernacle. They could not come on their own initiative. They had to be summoned and led. So too, Christ came to the Father not by presumption but by the Father’s own drawing. The Son does nothing of Himself, but only what He sees the Father doing.

Third came *washing*. Aaron was washed with water from head to foot. Now this is interesting. The washing wasn’t because Aaron had been working in the fields and needed a bath. It was ceremonial—a visible sign of the purity required to stand before God. Christ, of course, needed no such cleansing. He was already pure. Yet even He submitted to John’s baptism, not to be made righteous, but to “fulfill all righteousness.” He identified completely with those He came to save.

Fourth, he was *clothed*. Ah, the garments! The priest’s robes were no ordinary clothes. They were “garments for glory and for beauty,” woven with gold, blue, purple, and scarlet. The high priest wore a breastplate bearing the names of the twelve tribes, a turban with a golden plate inscribed “Holiness to the Lord.” He was clothed in symbolism from head to foot. Every thread spoke of mediation, of bearing the people before God and bearing God’s holiness before the people. And Christ? He too was clothed—first in our humanity, that He might represent us; and now in resurrection glory, that we might see in Him what we shall become.



Fifth came *anointing*. Oil was poured upon Aaron’s head until it ran down his beard, down to the very hem of his garments. Oil in Scripture always speaks of the Holy Spirit. Aaron was anointed for service; Christ was anointed without measure. When Jesus stood in the synagogue at Nazareth and read from Isaiah—“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me”—He was declaring that all the oil poured on all the priests of Israel had been but a shadow of the Spirit’s fullness resting upon Him.

Sixth, there was *substitution*. A bull was brought as a sin offering. Aaron laid his hands upon its head, transferring his guilt to the innocent animal. Think of this: even the high priest needed atonement. Even the mediator needed a mediator. But here the picture shifts when we come to Christ. He needed no sin offering for Himself. Instead, He *became* the sin offering. He is both priest and sacrifice, both the one who offers and the one who is offered. The shadow splits into two roles; the reality unites them in one Person.



Seventh came *consecration*. Blood from the ram of consecration was applied to Aaron’s right ear, right thumb, and right big toe. What does this mean? The ear—that he might hear God’s word. The thumb—that his actions might serve God’s will. The toe—that his walk might



follow God's path. Everything about the priest was to be marked by blood, set apart for God's exclusive use. And Christ? His entire life was one seamless act of consecration. "For their sakes I sanctify Myself," He said. He set Himself apart that we might be set apart in Him.

Eighth, there was the initiation into *service*. Parts of the offerings were placed into Aaron's hands, and he waved them before the Lord. This was the moment when Aaron's priesthood became active, when theory became practice. So too, Christ's high-priestly work began in earnest when He "by His own blood entered the Most Holy Place." The ceremony became ministry; the shadow became substance.

Ninth came *separation*. Aaron and his sons remained at the entrance of the tabernacle for seven days, not leaving, not engaging in ordinary life, but dwelling in the presence of God. Separation is always the cost of consecration. You cannot be set apart for God and still belong fully to the world. Christ knew this separation in its deepest form—separated from sinners, separate from us in His holiness, yet separate *for* us in His ministry.

Tenth and finally, there was *participation*. After the consecration, Aaron and his sons ate the consecrated meat. The sacrifice that had been offered to God was now shared with those who had offered it. It became their food, their sustenance, their joy. This is communion—the priest feeding on the very thing he had given to God. And here we touch one of the deepest mysteries of faith: we feed on Christ. "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him." The sacrifice becomes the meal; the offering becomes our life.



Now, if you put all these steps together, you begin to see the magnificent portrait they paint. The priesthood was never meant to be merely functional—a job to be done. It was relational, covenantal, intimate. The priest stood between a holy God and a sinful people, bearing the weight of both, representing each to the other.

But here is where Aaron's priesthood shows its fatal flaw. It could not last. Aaron died. His sons died. Every high priest who ever wore those golden garments eventually laid them down in death and passed them to another. The priesthood was a revolving door of mortal men, each one performing the same rituals his predecessor had performed, each one knowing that his own death would require yet another replacement.

This is where Christ's priesthood becomes unutterably glorious. He holds His priesthood permanently, because He continues forever. He has no successor because He needs none. The priesthood that was always passing from dying hands to dying hands has finally come to rest in hands that bear the marks of death but can never die again.



The writer to the Hebrews labors this point with an almost passionate intensity. Christ's priesthood is superior, he says—and then he tells us why. Let me give you the heart of his argument.

First, it is superior in *Person*. The Levitical priests were sinful men. They had to offer sacrifices for their own sins before they could offer for the people's. But Christ is "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." He is not merely a better priest; He is a different kind of priest altogether—one who never needs cleansing, never needs correction, never casts a shadow because He Himself is the Light.

Second, it is superior in *order*. Aaron's priesthood was "according to the order of Aaron." But Christ's priesthood is "according to the order of Melchizedek." Now this requires a bit of unpacking. Melchizedek appears suddenly in Genesis 14—a king-priest to whom even Abraham paid tithes. He had no genealogy recorded, no beginning of days or end of life in Scripture's

account. He simply appears, blesses Abraham, and disappears. The Bible uses this silence to make a point: Melchizedek's priesthood was not based on lineage but on an indestructible life. And Christ's priesthood is the same. It doesn't depend on ancestry or ceremony or succession. It rests on who He is—the eternal Son of God.

Third, it is superior in *appointment*. The Levitical priests were appointed by the Law of Moses—a system of regulations and requirements. But Christ was appointed by divine oath. God swore: “The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind: ‘You are a priest forever.’” When God swears an oath, He is binding Himself, guaranteeing the thing by His own unchangeable nature. Christ's priesthood doesn't depend on our obedience to law; it depends on God's unchangeable promise.

Fourth—and this may be the most tender point of all—it is superior in *sympathy*. The Levitical priests knew human weakness in theory. Christ knows it in experience. He “has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet without sin.” He is not a distant high priest, untouched by our struggles, unmoved by our failures. He is the High Priest who wept, who prayed with loud cries and tears, who learned obedience through what He suffered. He knows. Oh, how He knows.



Now let me show you something wonderful that happens in Leviticus 9. After all the consecration ceremonies were complete, Aaron performed his first official priestly acts. The chapter describes three distinct appearances, and they form a perfect picture of Christ's threefold ministry.

First, Aaron appeared at the altar. He offered the sacrifices for sin and consecration. This corresponds to Christ's first appearance—when “He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” That was Calvary. The altar. The cross. The once-for-all offering that needs no repetition.

Second, Aaron went into the tabernacle. He disappeared from the people's view and entered God's presence on their behalf. This is Christ's present ministry. Right now, at this moment, “He appears in the presence of God for us.” We cannot see Him, but He is there—interceding, representing, pleading our cause before the Father.

Third, Aaron came out again and blessed the people. The glory of the Lord appeared, and the people shouted and fell on their faces. This is Christ's future appearance. “He will appear a second time, apart from sin, to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him.” When He comes again, it will not be to deal with sin—that work is finished. It will be to consummate our redemption, to bring us fully into the glory He has prepared.



Do you see the beauty of it? Past, present, future. Christ appeared. Christ appears. Christ will appear. The whole of salvation history, the entire arc of redemption, is bound up in these three movements of our great High Priest.

And mark this: each appearance is connected to one of the three great eternals that Hebrews mentions. Christ offered Himself through the *eternal Spirit*—that was the power behind His sacrifice. He obtained *eternal redemption*—that was the result of His heavenly ministry. And He will return to give us our *eternal inheritance*—that will be the outcome of His appearing.

The eternal Spirit. Eternal redemption. Eternal inheritance. Everything about Christ's priesthood is stamped with eternity. There is nothing temporary, nothing provisional, nothing that will one day need to be replaced or improved. It is final because it is perfect. It is permanent because it is complete.



Now, you may ask, what practical difference does all this make? Why does it matter that we have a High Priest when we're here and He's there?

Let me put it this way. Suppose you had a legal case pending before the highest court in the land, and everything you valued hung in the balance. Wouldn't it matter enormously whether you had an advocate? Wouldn't you want to know that someone competent, someone trustworthy, someone who understood both the law and your situation was standing before the judge on your behalf?

That's what we have in Christ—only infinitely better. He is not merely competent; He is perfect. He is not merely trustworthy; He cannot lie or fail. He doesn't just understand our situation; He lived it. He entered into our humanity so completely that there is no temptation we face, no weakness we feel, no sorrow we bear that He has not already experienced and overcome.

And more than that—He is not pleading our case before an impartial judge. He is pleading before His own Father, with whom He shares a perfect unity of will and love. The Judge and the Advocate are one in purpose. The entire divine nature is committed to your redemption.

This is why the Bible invites us to “come boldly to the throne of grace.” Not arrogantly, not presumptuously, but *boldly*—with confidence. Why? Because we have a High Priest. Because the way is open. Because the blood has been sprinkled and the veil has been torn and the throne of judgment has become the throne of grace.



Let me close this chapter with a comparison. I'll put it plainly, almost starkly, so you can see at a glance what has changed between the old priesthood and the new:

Aaron's priesthood was according to the order of Aaron—temporary and ceremonial. Christ's is according to the order of Melchizedek—eternal and real. The Levitical priests were appointed by the law of Moses, a system destined to fade. Christ was appointed by the oath of God, a word that cannot be broken. Those priests were sinful men who had to offer sacrifices for themselves before they could help anyone else. Christ is the sinless Son of God who needed no sacrifice for Himself but became the sacrifice for us all.

The old priests offered many sacrifices, again and again, year after year—the very repetition proving they could never truly finish the work. Christ offered one sacrifice, once for all, and sat down—the sitting proving the work is complete. The Levitical priests served in an earthly sanctuary, a copy and shadow of the true one. Christ serves in the heavenly sanctuary, the true tabernacle that the Lord pitched, not man.

Their priesthood was based on the Old Covenant, which was fading even as the ink dried. Christ's priesthood is based on the New Covenant, sealed in His blood and everlasting as God Himself. The old sacrifices could never perfect the worshiper's conscience—they dealt with external cleanness but left the heart untouched. Christ's sacrifice perfected forever those who are being sanctified. The Levitical priesthood ended with each priest's death, requiring an endless succession of replacements. Christ's priesthood continues forever because He lives forever.

The old system gave limited access—only the high priest, only once a year, only with blood and trepidation. Christ's priesthood has thrown the gates wide open to all believers, at all times, with full assurance. The old priesthood brought continual remembrance of sins through its very repetitions. Christ's priesthood has resulted in God remembering our sins no more.



“We have such a High Priest.”

Not a better version of the old model. Not an improved Aaron. Not a more efficient system of approaching God. We have something altogether different, altogether new, altogether final.

We have Christ. And having Him, we have everything.

## Chapter 4

# The Day of Atonement

*“By His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.”*

— HEB. 9:12

IF YOU WERE to read straight through the book of Leviticus—and I confess most people don’t—you would notice something strange happening in chapter 16. The tone shifts. The language becomes more solemn. The instructions grow more precise. You get the sense that everything up to this point has been preparation, and now we’ve arrived at the thing itself.

And we have. Chapter 16 describes Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, and it stands like a mountain peak in the landscape of Scripture. If Leviticus is a sanctuary, then chapter 16 is the Holy of Holies. If the book is a symphony, then this chapter is the movement where every instrument sounds and every theme converges.

This was the day when everything hung in the balance—when the high priest went behind the veil, into the very presence of God, to make atonement for the entire nation. It happened only once a year, and the whole nation held its breath. Would the priest emerge alive? Would the sacrifice be accepted? Would God dwell among them for another year, or would His glory depart?



The word itself is worth pondering. *Atonement*. In Hebrew, it’s *kaphar*, and it carries a rich cluster of meanings: to cover, to make reconciliation, to make satisfaction. Think of those three ideas braided together. Something that was exposed is covered. Someone who was estranged is reconciled. A debt that was owed is satisfied.

But here we must be careful. The atonement of the Old Covenant and the atonement of the New are not quite the same, though they bear the same name. The sacrifices of Leviticus covered sins—they pushed them forward, so to speak, until the day when they could be truly dealt with. It’s as if God, looking at the blood on the mercy seat, said, “I will accept this as a token, a promissory note. The real payment will come later.”

And it did. When Christ died, He didn’t merely cover sins—He took them away. John the Baptist saw this with prophetic clarity when he cried, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” Not covers. Not postpones. Takes away. Removes. Eradicates.

The old sacrifices were like a cloth thrown over a stain; Christ’s sacrifice is like the stain being washed out entirely. The old atonement said, “Not yet.” Christ’s atonement says, “It is finished.”



Now let me describe what actually happened on this extraordinary day, because every detail

is laden with meaning, and if we rush past them, we'll miss the beauty.

The day began with the high priest—usually clothed in magnificent robes of blue and purple and gold—stripping them all off. He washed himself entirely and put on plain white linen garments. No gold. No jewels. No splendor. Just white linen, the clothes of purity and humility.

Why? Because on this day, more than any other, the priest was representing not God's majesty but the people's need. He was going to deal with sin, and sin is no place for pride or display. The linen spoke of righteousness, yes, but also of simplicity. The high priest, for this one day, looked very much like any other priest—or indeed, like any other man. He stood in solidarity with those he represented.

Does this not remind you of Christ, who “made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant”? He who was rich became poor. He who was clothed in glory took on flesh. He set aside the robes of heaven to wear the garment of our humanity.



Next came the sacrifices. First, a bull for the high priest's own sins and the sins of his household. Think of this: before he could do anything for the people, he had to make atonement for himself. The mediator needed mediation. The priest needed a priest.

But when we come to Christ, this part of the picture dissolves. He had no sins of His own. He needed no purification. He didn't have to offer a sacrifice for Himself before He could offer one for us. He was both the priest who offered and the lamb who was slain—and being sinless, His offering for us was pure, untainted, infinitely effective.

Then came the two goats. Ah, now here is where the Day of Atonement reveals its deepest secret. Two goats were selected, and lots were cast over them. One lot fell to the Lord; the other to Azazel (the scapegoat). Same species. Same size. Same value. But two different destinies, two different roles—and yet together they formed one complete offering.



The first goat was slain. Its blood was taken by the high priest into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled on the mercy seat—that golden lid covering the Ark of the Covenant. Beneath that lid lay the tablets of the law, the unbroken standard of God's righteousness. The law demanded perfection. The law condemned the guilty. The law cried out for justice.

And above the mercy seat hovered the Shekinah glory, the visible presence of God Himself. Between the law below and the glory above, the blood was sprinkled seven times. Seven—the number of completeness. The blood speaking to both directions: satisfying the law's demands, appeasing the holiness of God.

This is what we call propitiation—the satisfaction of divine justice. God is not indifferent to sin. He is not lenient or soft or willing to shrug it off. His holiness must be honored; His law must be vindicated. And the blood on the mercy seat says, “Justice has been done. The law's requirement has been met. A life has been given in exchange for the lives that were forfeited.”

So the slain goat represents the Godward side of atonement. It shows us that God has been satisfied, that His wrath has been turned away, that the Judge is now the Justifier.



But what about the worshiper? What about the sinner standing outside the tabernacle, waiting, wondering? The blood has satisfied God, yes—but has the sin really gone? Can I be sure it's not still clinging to me, accusing me, condemning me?

That's where the second goat comes in. After the blood of the first goat had been sprinkled in the Most Holy Place, the high priest emerged and laid his hands on the head of the living goat. And as he did, he confessed—aloud, specifically—all the sins and transgressions of the people. Every lie. Every theft. Every act of idolatry. Every secret shame. All of it named, all of it transferred, all of it placed upon the goat.

And then the goat was led away into the wilderness. It was driven far from the camp, out into the uninhabited wasteland, until it was lost to sight. The people watched it go, bearing their sins into forgetfulness.

This is expiation—the removal of sin. Not just the penalty taken care of (that's propitiation), but the sin itself sent away, put out of reach, separated from the sinner as far as the east is from the west. The scapegoat shows us the manward side of atonement. It answers the question: Where has my sin gone? And the answer is: Away. Gone. Removed. Forgotten.



Now you see why it took two goats to make one complete sin offering. One goat couldn't show both realities. If only the first goat had been used, we would know that God's justice had been satisfied—but we might still wonder if our sins were truly gone. If only the scapegoat had been used, we might think our sins had simply been swept under the rug without justice being served.

But God, in His wisdom, gave us both pictures. The slain goat says, "My holiness has been honored." The living goat says, "Your sin has been removed." Together they proclaim the full gospel: God is just and the justifier of the one who believes in Jesus.

And both—both!—are fulfilled in Christ. He is the slain goat, offered on the altar of the cross, His blood speaking to the Father: "Justice is satisfied. The price is paid. The law is honored." And He is the scapegoat, bearing our sins away—not into a wilderness, but into death itself, into the grave, into the realm where they could never be retrieved.

*"As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."*

— Ps. 103:12



But there's more. After the goat had been sent away and the sacrifices completed, the carcasses of the bull and the goat were taken outside the camp and burned. Completely. Utterly. Nothing was to remain.

Now this is fascinating, because there were two different Hebrew words used for burning in Leviticus. One word, *qatar*, meant to burn something on the altar so that it ascended as a sweet aroma to God. The other word, *saraph*, meant to burn something in judgment, to consume it as an accursed thing.

The sacrifices on the altar were burned with *qatar*—they rose as incense, pleasing to God. But the remains taken outside the camp were burned with *saraph*—consumed under the fire of judgment.

Do you see what this means? The same sacrifice that was a sweet aroma to God was also bearing the curse. The same offering that delighted the Father was also enduring His wrath against sin. Two sides of one coin. Acceptance and rejection. Pleasure and judgment. All meeting in the same victim.

And this is exactly what happened at Calvary. The Father declared, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Yet the Son cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” He was simultaneously the fragrant offering and the cursed thing. He bore both the Father’s love and the Father’s wrath—love toward the Son who obeyed perfectly, wrath toward the sin He carried.

*“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us.”*

— GAL. 3:13



Now we come to the mercy seat itself. In Hebrew, *kapporet*. This was the golden lid that covered the Ark of the Covenant, and it is one of the most eloquent pieces of furniture in all of Scripture.

Picture it: Inside the ark were the tablets of the law—God’s righteous standard, which condemned everyone who fell short. Above the ark, between the cherubim, dwelt the glory of God—His holy presence, which no sinner could survive. And the mercy seat sat between them, bridging the gap.

Three hundred and sixty-four days a year, that mercy seat was empty, its gold glinting in the dim lamplight but offering no answer to the law’s accusation and the glory’s terror. But one day a year—this day, the Day of Atonement—blood was sprinkled upon it. And in that moment, law and glory were reconciled. Justice and mercy kissed each other.

*“Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.”*

— Ps. 85:10

The mercy seat became the meeting place. The place where God’s holiness and God’s love converged without contradiction. The place where He could be just and still justify the ungodly.

And what was the mercy seat but a shadow of the cross? At Calvary, the law’s demands were met—Christ fulfilled every jot and tittle. And at Calvary, the glory of God was revealed—the glory of His love, His grace, His determination to save at any cost. The throne of judgment became the throne of grace.



There is one final element we must not overlook. After all the sacrifices had been made, after the blood had been sprinkled and the scapegoat sent away and the remains burned outside the camp, the people were commanded to rest. Complete rest. They were to do no work at all. It was a Sabbath of solemn rest.

Why rest? Because the work was done. Not their work—they hadn’t done anything. The priest’s work. The offering’s work. God’s work of atonement.

And here we touch the very heart of the gospel. Atonement is not achieved by our striving, our efforts, our spiritual disciplines. It is received by faith. The Day of Atonement taught Israel to stop, to cease from labor, to trust that the blood had been accepted and the sin had been removed. Their part was to rest in God’s provision.

So it is with us. We do not make atonement. We do not contribute to it. We do not add to it or complete it or maintain it. Christ has done it all, and we rest in His finished work. “It



is finished,” He cried from the cross. And having finished it, He sat down at the right hand of God—the posture of completed work, of victory, of rest.

*“By one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.”*

— HEB. 10:14



Now let me draw all these threads together and show you the glory of what Christ has done. Because when you compare the Day of Atonement with Christ’s atonement, the differences are as striking as the similarities—and the differences are what make the gospel such staggeringly good news.

The Day of Atonement happened once a year, every year, without fail. The very fact that it had to be repeated showed that it never fully solved the problem. It was provisional, temporary, a holding action. But Christ’s atonement happened once for all. One sacrifice. One offering. Never to be repeated because it never needs to be repeated. It is final, complete, sufficient.

Many priests served under the Old Covenant, one dying and another taking his place. But we have one High Priest, eternal and unchanging. The Levitical priests offered the blood of bulls and goats—the blood of animals that could never truly take away human sin. Christ offered His own blood, infinitely valuable, infinitely effective. They served in an earthly sanctuary, a shadow of the true one. Christ serves in heaven itself, in the presence of God.

The old sacrifices resulted in temporary covering. Christ’s sacrifice resulted in eternal redemption. The old system allowed restricted access—one man, one day, one place, and even then only with trembling. Christ’s sacrifice has opened the way for all believers to enter boldly, anytime, anywhere, into the very presence of God.

And perhaps most wonderfully: the old sacrifices brought continual remembrance of sins. Every year the ritual reminded the people of their guilt, their failure, their need. But under the New Covenant, God says, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” Not covered. Not postponed. Forgotten. Erased. Gone.



Do you see the magnificence of it? Everything the Day of Atonement pointed toward, Christ fulfilled. Everything it promised, He delivered. Everything it showed in shadow, He accomplished in substance.

The high priest’s plain linen? Christ’s humility in taking on human flesh. The bull for the priest’s sins? Not needed—Christ had none. The slain goat’s blood? Christ’s blood, satisfying divine justice. The scapegoat bearing sins away? Christ carrying our sins into death. The burning outside the camp? Christ crucified outside Jerusalem’s walls, bearing the curse. The mercy seat sprinkled with blood? The cross where righteousness and peace embraced. The Sabbath rest? Our ceasing from works and resting in His finished work.

Every detail finds its fulfillment. Every symbol finds its substance. Every shadow finds its reality in Him.



And now—now!—because of what Christ has done, we are invited to enter. Not once a year. Not through a human mediator. Not with the blood of animals. But at any moment, through Christ, with full assurance.

*“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.”*

— HEB. 10:19–22

Draw near. Come boldly. Enter with confidence. Why? Because Christ has gone before you. Because His blood speaks better things than the blood of Abel. Because the veil has been torn from top to bottom, and the way into the Holy of Holies is open.

The Day of Atonement was the shadow. Christ is the substance. And having Christ, we have what no Israelite ever possessed: not just the hope of acceptance, but the certainty of it. Not just the covering of sin, but its complete removal. Not just access once a year, but fellowship every moment.

We have atonement—full, free, final, and forever. And all because of Him.

## Chapter 5

# Laws of Cleansing and Holiness

*“For I am the LORD your God: you shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy.”*

— LEV. 11:44

IF YOU’VE EVER tried to explain to a modern friend why ancient Israelites couldn’t eat pork or touch a dead mouse, you’ve likely encountered a very particular kind of blank stare. The sort of look that says, “Really? God cares about dietary restrictions?” And I confess, at first glance, Leviticus chapters 11 through 15 do seem like the most puzzling section of Scripture — a bewildering catalogue of clean and unclean animals, skin diseases, bodily discharges, and purification rituals. One is tempted to flip past these chapters with the same haste one uses to skip the “begats” in Chronicles.

But that would be rather like dismissing the alphabet because individual letters seem meaningless. We must learn to read what God has written.

*“For I am the LORD your God: you shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy.”*

— LEV. 11:44

You see, what we’re confronting here is not arbitrary divine fussiness but a profound spiritual education. God was teaching a nation — and through them, teaching us — what holiness actually means. And He chose to do it through the most everyday, unavoidable aspects of life: food, health, and physical existence. It’s rather brilliant when you think about it. He might have taught holiness through abstract philosophy, but instead He embedded the lesson in the very texture of daily experience.

The central revelation is this: atonement makes access to God possible, but holiness makes fellowship with God continual. It’s not enough to be forgiven; we must be transformed. The blood of the sacrifice opened the way; the laws of cleanness showed how to walk that way.



Let me introduce you to the vocabulary first. The Hebrews had several words that dance around this concept of holiness and purity. *Tahor* meant clean or pure — think of water so clear you can see straight through to the bottom. *Tame’* was its opposite: unclean, defiled, the muddied and murky. Then there was *qadash*, to sanctify or set apart — the word used when something ordinary became sacred, reserved for God alone. And *nazah*, to sprinkle, which brings to mind the deliberate application of blood or water in cleansing rites.

These weren’t mere dictionary definitions. They were categories that shaped how Israel thought about reality itself. The world, in their minds, was not divided into “things I like” and

“things I don’t like,” but into that which could approach God and that which couldn’t. That which brought life and fellowship, and that which brought death and separation.

Now, we come to the famous — or infamous — laws of clean and unclean animals in chapter 11. The Israelites were told they could eat land animals that both chewed the cud and had split hooves. Sea creatures were acceptable if they had both fins and scales. Birds of prey and scavengers were forbidden. Why these particular criteria?

Modern scholars have offered all sorts of explanations: hygiene, cultural distinctiveness, avoidance of pagan practices. And perhaps there’s truth in all of that. But I think the deeper pattern is symbolic. Consider the land animals. Chewing the cud suggests meditation, rumination, the slow digestion of what one takes in — rather like how we’re to meditate on God’s Word, aren’t we? The split hoof suggests a careful, discerning walk, a division between good and evil paths. The pig, for instance, has the split hoof but doesn’t chew the cud — it has the appearance of discernment without the inner life to match. The camel chews the cud but has no split hoof — all inner devotion, perhaps, but no careful walk to show for it.

You see the picture? God’s people were to be both thoughtful in what they consumed spiritually and careful in how they walked practically. They needed both inner devotion and outer obedience, both the meditation of the heart and the discipline of the feet. The dinner table became a daily lesson in spiritual discernment.

The sea creatures tell a similar story. Fins provide direction and movement; scales provide protection and separation from the surrounding water. God’s people must be able to move purposefully through the world (fins) while remaining distinct from it (scales). A creature that simply drifted with the current or absorbed everything around it wouldn’t do.

And the prohibition on birds of prey and scavengers? These were creatures that fed on death and corruption. God’s people were to reject spiritual scavenging — feeding on the already-dead, the rotten, the corrupt. We’re meant to draw our life from the Living God, not from the carrion of this dying world.



Of course, the most important thing about these food laws is what Jesus did with them. In Mark’s Gospel, we read that Jesus “declared all foods clean.” This wasn’t divine forgetfulness or a change of mind. It was fulfillment. The shadow had done its work; the substance had arrived. External regulations had taught the principle; now the Spirit would write it on hearts.

*“There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man.”*

— MARK 7:15

The ceremonial distinctions between clean and unclean animals served their purpose for a time. They were — if you’ll permit me the metaphor — like the training wheels on a child’s bicycle. Absolutely necessary at one stage, but meant to be removed when the child learned to balance. Israel needed these concrete, physical lessons to grasp the invisible reality of holiness. But when Christ came, the reality itself arrived. True cleanness, He taught, comes from a heart purified by faith.

Luke records in Acts that Peter needed a dramatic vision to grasp this — that sheet descending from heaven with all manner of creatures, and the voice saying, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” Poor Peter, still thinking in Old Covenant categories, had to be told three times. But the point was revolutionary: the wall of partition, maintained partly

through dietary laws, was coming down. The Spirit could make a Gentile's heart clean without making his diet kosher first.



Now we come to what is perhaps the most vivid picture of sin in all of Scripture: leprosy. Chapters 13 and 14 devote extraordinary attention to this disease — how to diagnose it, how to quarantine it, how to cleanse someone healed from it. And I must tell you, reading these chapters can feel rather like reading a medieval medical textbook. But stay with it, because leprosy is doing tremendous theological work.

Leprosy — whatever the precise medical condition referred to — had several characteristics that made it a perfect symbol of sin's operation in the soul. First, it often began unseen, beneath the surface, in ways the victim might not initially notice. Rather like sin, which we can harbor in our hearts long before it breaks out in action. Second, it spread silently, progressively, taking more and more territory if left unchecked. Again, just like sin. Third, it defiled completely — the leper was pronounced “unclean” and had to live “outside the camp,” separated from the community and from worship. Sin does precisely this: it separates us from fellowship with God and with His people.

But here's what's crucial: the priest didn't heal the leper. He could only diagnose the disease and, after God healed it, pronounce the person clean. The law could identify sin, but it couldn't cure it. It could say, “You are defiled,” but it couldn't say, “You are cleansed” — not with any lasting effect.

Enter Jesus. The Gospels record that He did something absolutely shocking: He touched lepers. In that culture, this was unthinkable. Contact with a leper meant becoming unclean oneself. But when Jesus touched the leper, something unprecedented happened — the uncleanness didn't flow from the leper to Christ. Instead, cleanness flowed from Christ to the leper.

*“Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed.”*

— MARK 1:41–42

Do you see the revolution here? Under the old system, holiness was something you could lose through contact with defilement. One touch of the unclean and you were contaminated. But in Christ, holiness becomes contagious. He doesn't catch our disease; we catch His health. He doesn't absorb our defilement; we absorb His purity. The flow has reversed.

This is why Christianity is not fundamentally about avoiding bad things but about clinging to the Good One. Holiness is not maintained by quarantine but by union with Christ. The Pharisees tried to stay clean by building walls around themselves. Jesus makes us clean by drawing us into Himself.



Chapter 17 brings us to what might be called the theological center of Leviticus — the sanctity of blood.

*“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.”*

— LEV. 17:11

Here is the heart of the matter. Blood represents life, and life belongs to God. Therefore blood — as the carrier and symbol of life — must be treated as sacred. The Israelites were absolutely forbidden to consume blood. Why? Not because blood is somehow magically powerful in itself, but because it was God’s appointed means of atonement. To treat it casually would be to treat atonement casually.

This makes the Christian’s position rather remarkable. We speak, don’t we, of drinking Christ’s blood — of course, spiritually, sacramentally, depending on your tradition. But the point is, we claim to take into ourselves the very life of the One who gave His blood for our atonement. The ancient prohibition on consuming blood highlights by contrast the staggering intimacy Christ offers: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.”

The blood that was forbidden under the Old Covenant becomes, in Christ, the means of our spiritual nourishment. The life that belonged exclusively to God is now shared with us through union with His Son. Again, what was shadow becomes substance; what pointed forward finds its fulfillment.



Chapters 18 through 20 shift from ceremonial purity to moral purity, from the ritual to the ethical. Here the laws address sexual morality, family relationships, social justice, and religious integrity. And the refrain that echoes through these chapters is unmistakable: “I am the LORD,” and “Be holy, for I am holy.”

*“You shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.”*

— LEV. 20:26

Notice what’s happening. God’s holiness is not an abstract attribute, floating disconnected from His people. Rather, His holiness is the pattern and the power for their holiness. He is holy, therefore they must be holy. He has separated them to Himself, therefore they must live as separated ones. The moral law flows from the character of God.

This is important because it answers a question you’ve probably encountered: “Why can’t I decide for myself what’s right and wrong?” Well, because you didn’t create yourself, and you don’t sustain yourself, and you’re not the ultimate reality to which all things must answer. God is. His character defines goodness, and His will defines our calling. We are not autonomous moral agents, inventing ethics from scratch. We are creatures made in the image of a holy God, called to reflect His character in our choices.

The laws in these chapters cover areas where modern people often claim moral autonomy: sexual expression, family structure, religious practice. But the biblical pattern is clear. These aren’t neutral zones where personal preference rules. These are sacred territories where God’s holiness must shape our behavior. Not because God is a cosmic killjoy, but because He knows what we’re for — and it’s not autonomy. It’s fellowship with Him. And sin — any sin — breaks that fellowship.



So what do we make of all this as Christians? We don’t keep kosher kitchens or quarantine people with skin diseases. Are these chapters merely historical curiosities?

Not at all. They teach us several vital truths. First, that holiness matters to God. Not just in our thoughts or our religious feelings, but in the whole fabric of life — what we eat, how we use our bodies, whom we associate with, how we treat one another. God is interested in the whole person, not just the “spiritual” parts.

Second, that defilement is real and serious. We moderns tend to think that nothing can really corrupt us — that we can engage with any content, any relationship, any practice, and remain essentially unchanged. The laws of cleanness say otherwise. What we expose ourselves to, what we participate in, what we allow into our lives — these things matter. They shape us. Some things defile.

Third, that we cannot cleanse ourselves. The elaborate rituals of Leviticus — the washings, the waiting periods, the offerings — all testify that defilement is not something we can simply decide to be rid of. We need an external cleanser. We need water and blood that come from beyond ourselves. We need, in short, a Savior.

And fourth, that in Christ, the deepest longing of Leviticus is fulfilled. The ritual washings pointed to a cleansing of the heart. The blood sacrifices pointed to a final, sufficient offering. The quarantine of lepers pointed to a healer who would not avoid the unclean but would transform them by His touch. All of it — every strange regulation, every puzzling prohibition — was preparing the way for the One who is Himself our holiness.

*“But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God — and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”*

— 1 COR. 1:30

Christ is our *tahor*, our cleanness. He is the *qadash*, the one set apart to God and the one who sets us apart. By His blood — the *dam* that makes atonement — we are sprinkled clean. The water of the Word washes us. The oil of the Spirit consecrates us. The fire of God’s presence purifies us.

The law said, “Be holy, for I am holy,” and left us helpless to comply. The Gospel says, “Be holy, for I am holy,” and then gives us the Holy One Himself to dwell within us, making us partakers of the divine nature. The standard hasn’t changed, but the provision has arrived.

So when you read these chapters about clean and unclean animals, about leprosy and discharges, about blood and sanctification, don’t dismiss them as primitive religious taboo. Read them as the shadow that proves the light is coming. Read them as the alphabet that spells out “Christ.” Read them as the ache that finds its answer in the Healer’s touch.

Every law that said “unclean” was preparing the world to hear Him say, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Every restriction that kept the defiled outside the camp was preparing us to marvel when He went outside the camp to bring us in. Every impossible standard of purity was preparing us to rest in the One who fulfilled it all and then credited His righteousness to our account.

The laws of cleansing taught us what we needed. Christ became what we needed. And that, after all, is the pattern running through all of Scripture.

## Chapter 6

# The Feasts of the Lord

*“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.”*

— GAL. 4:4

IMAGINE, IF YOU will, attending a dress rehearsal of a magnificent play. The actors move through their positions, the lights shift according to cue, the music swells at precisely the right moments. Everything is timed, choreographed, rehearsed. But it’s not the real performance yet. That comes later, when the curtain rises for opening night and the audience leans forward in the dark, watching the story unfold.

This is something like what we encounter in Leviticus 23. The feasts of Israel were God’s dress rehearsal for redemptive history. The dates were fixed, the actions prescribed, the meanings embedded in every detail. And all of it — every feast, every ritual, every appointed time — was pointing forward to the grand opening when God Himself would step onto the stage of human history.

*“These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, holy convocations, which you shall proclaim in their seasons.”*

— LEV. 23:4

Notice the text calls them “the appointed feasts of the LORD” — not Israel’s feasts, but Yahweh’s. The Hebrew word is *mo’adim*, which means appointed times or divine appointments. God had marked certain dates on the calendar before the events they commemorated had even occurred. Rather like a playwright who has written every act before the first performance. The script was ready; history would perform it.



Let me lay out the calendar for you. There were seven major feasts arranged in a beautiful pattern — four in the spring and three in the fall, with the long summer months between them. And here’s what’s extraordinary: the four spring feasts have already been fulfilled in Christ’s first coming with such precision that it takes your breath away. The three fall feasts point to His second coming and are still waiting for their fulfillment.

The spring feasts begin with Passover, celebrated on Nisan 14. This was followed immediately by the Feast of Unleavened Bread, running from Nisan 15 to 21. Then came Firstfruits, observed on Nisan 17, the day after the Sabbath during Unleavened Bread. Fifty days after Firstfruits — hence the name Pentecost, meaning “fiftieth” — came the Feast of Weeks, also called Pentecost, on Sivan 6.



The fall feasts began with the Feast of Trumpets on Tishri 1, followed by the Day of Atonement on Tishri 10, and culminating in the Feast of Tabernacles from Tishri 15 to 22.

Now, you might think I'm about to drown you in dates and details. But stay with me, because what's about to emerge is one of the most stunning confirmations that the God who inspired Scripture is the same God who orchestrates history.



Passover was the feast of redemption, commemorating Israel's deliverance from Egypt. On the fourteenth day of Nisan, every household was to take a lamb without blemish, inspect it for four days, and then sacrifice it at twilight. The blood was to be applied to the doorposts, and the lamb was to be roasted and eaten in haste, with bitter herbs and unleavened bread.

*"When I see the blood, I will pass over you."*

— EX. 12:13

Three crucial details defined the Passover lamb: it must be without blemish, its blood must be publicly displayed, and not a bone of it could be broken. Remember these.

Now, fast forward fourteen centuries. Jesus enters Jerusalem on the tenth of Nisan, the exact day when Passover lambs were selected and began to be inspected. For four days He teaches in the temple, challenged by Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians — every faction trying to find fault. They find none. He is, as Pilate will later declare, without blemish. "I find no fault in Him."

On the fourteenth of Nisan, at the very hour when Passover lambs are being slaughtered throughout Jerusalem, Jesus dies on the cross. His blood is publicly displayed, not on wooden doorposts but on a wooden cross. And John's Gospel makes a point of recording that when the soldiers came to break the legs of the crucified men to hasten death, they found Jesus already dead. So they didn't break His legs.

*"For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, 'Not one of His bones shall be broken.'"*

— JOHN 19:36

Do you see it? The feast that Israel had celebrated for fourteen hundred years, never quite understanding what it meant, suddenly came into focus. Every Passover lamb ever slain had been pointing to this moment. Every repetition of the ritual had been rehearsing this event. God had been saying, year after year, "One day there will be a Lamb — My Lamb — whose blood will purchase a greater exodus than you can imagine."

Paul puts it plainly: "Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."



Immediately following Passover came the Feast of Unleavened Bread, lasting seven days. Leaven — yeast — was forbidden during this period. Every trace of it had to be purged from the household. Why? Because leaven symbolized corruption, sin, the principle of decay. During Unleavened Bread, Israel ate bread that hadn't fermented, hadn't corrupted, hadn't decayed.

When Jesus died, His body was placed in a tomb just as the Feast of Unleavened Bread began. And what was true of His body literally was true of His person spiritually: no corruption touched Him. Peter, quoting the Psalms, declares that His flesh "did not see corruption."

*“You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”*

— ACTS 2:27

The feast proclaimed in symbol what the resurrection would confirm in fact: death could not corrupt Him. The grave could not hold Him. He was the Unleavened One, pure and incorruptible.



Then comes Firstfruits. On the day after the Sabbath during Unleavened Bread — which would be Nisan 17 — the priest would take a sheaf of the first grain harvested and wave it before the Lord. This was the guarantee of the full harvest to come. The firstfruits sanctified and represented the whole crop.

On Nisan 17, Jesus rose from the dead. The exact day. Not approximately, not symbolically, but on the precise calendar date when Israel was waving the firstfruits in the temple.

*“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”*

— 1 COR. 15:20

His resurrection is the guarantee of ours. He is the first sheaf of the great harvest of resurrection that will include all who belong to Him. Every year for fifteen centuries, Israel had performed this ritual on Nisan 17, declaring by their actions that the first of the harvest guarantees the rest. And then, on that very date, God raised Christ from the dead as the guarantee — the firstfruits — of the resurrection harvest to come.

You see, this is not coincidence. This is not clever interpretation imposed on the text after the fact. This is the God who numbers our days and marks His calendar announcing what He’s going to do before He does it. The feasts were prophecy in ritual form, calendar entries for events that would transpire centuries later.



Fifty days after Firstfruits came Pentecost, also called the Feast of Weeks. This feast had a unique feature: the offering included two loaves of bread baked with leaven. Every other offering forbade leaven, but not this one. Why? We’ll come back to that.

Pentecost commemorated the giving of the Law at Sinai, which occurred fifty days after the Exodus. But it also pointed forward. And exactly fifty days after Jesus rose from the dead, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on the gathered disciples in Jerusalem.

*“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind.”*

— ACTS 2:1–2

Three thousand people were converted and baptized that day. The Church was born. And here’s where those two leavened loaves make sense: they represented Jew and Gentile, both still containing corruption (leaven), but both offered to God, both united in one body. The Church

is not yet perfected — we still carry the leaven of sin — but we are accepted in the Beloved, offered to God as firstfruits of His new creation.

So there they are: the four spring feasts, all fulfilled to the day in Christ's first coming. Passover on the day of His death. Unleavened Bread during His burial. Firstfruits on the day of His resurrection. Pentecost on the day the Spirit came.

If you're a betting person, you might want to pay attention to the fall feasts. Because if God kept the first four appointments with such precision, there's every reason to believe He'll keep the last three.



The Feast of Trumpets, celebrated on Tishri 1, was marked by — you guessed it — the blowing of trumpets. A loud, sudden summons. A call to assembly. A wake-up alarm.

The biblical imagery of trumpets is rich. Trumpets announced God's presence at Sinai. Trumpets signaled the movement of the camp in the wilderness. Trumpets called the people to gather. And Paul tells us that the return of Christ will be heralded by a trumpet.

*“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.”*

— 1 THESS. 4:16

The Feast of Trumpets points to the sudden, unmistakable call when Christ returns for His Church. It speaks of awakening, assembling, being caught up to meet Him. It's the divine summons that will interrupt history as dramatically as a trumpet blast interrupts sleep.

Now, I won't pretend to know whether Christ will return on Tishri 1 of some future year. Date-setting has a poor track record and Scripture warns against it. But the themes of the feast — suddenness, summons, gathering — certainly align with what we're told about His return.



Ten days after Trumpets came the most solemn day of the year: Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. We've already explored this in depth in chapter 4, but its placement in the calendar of feasts is significant. After the trumpet sounds, after the gathering, comes the great day of reckoning when sins are dealt with finally and completely.

For Israel, this points to a future day when the nation will look on Him whom they pierced and mourn, when the veil will be lifted and they will recognize their Messiah.

*“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son.”*

— ZECH. 12:10

This hasn't happened yet. But Zechariah, Paul, and other prophets assure us it will. The fall feasts await their fulfillment.



Finally, there's the Feast of Tabernacles, also called Booths or Sukkot. For seven days, Israel lived in temporary shelters, commemorating their wilderness wanderings when they dwelt in tents and God dwelt among them in the tabernacle.

But Tabernacles always looked forward more than backward. It was the feast of the Kingdom, the celebration of harvest, the anticipation of God dwelling with His people permanently. The joy was almost reckless. The hospitality was extravagant. It was a glimpse of the world to come.

John tells us that the Word became flesh and “tabernacled” among us — the Greek verb echoes the feast. But the full reality hasn't arrived yet. We're still waiting for the final fulfillment.

*“And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.’”*

— REV. 21:3

That's the promise of Tabernacles: God dwelling with us fully, permanently, joyfully in the new creation. No more temporary shelters. No more pilgrimage. No more groaning for the redemption of our bodies. Just the King in His kingdom, the Bridegroom with His bride, the Father with His children, forever.



Step back for a moment and consider what we've seen. Seven feasts, arranged across the year, telling one story. The story begins with redemption (Passover), moves through sanctification (Unleavened Bread), celebrates resurrection and new life (Firstfruits), receives the Spirit (Pentecost), anticipates the return of Christ (Trumpets), looks for the reconciliation of Israel (Atonement), and culminates in the eternal dwelling of God with His people (Tabernacles).

The whole plan of redemption, laid out on a calendar, rehearsed every year, pointing forward to the fullness of time when God would send His Son. And the precision with which the first four were fulfilled should give us absolute confidence about the last three.

This is not the God of vague hopes and uncertain outcomes. This is the God who declares the end from the beginning, who marks dates before history arrives at them, who writes the script and then performs it flawlessly. When He says, “I am coming soon,” He means it. And when He says, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men,” we can count on it.



Now, you might ask, “What do these feasts mean for us as Christians? We don't keep the Old Covenant calendar.” And you'd be right. We don't observe Passover or Tabernacles in the ceremonial sense. But we do understand them.

The feasts teach us that God works on a schedule. History is not random. Redemption is not improvised. Before Abraham was, Christ was. Before Sinai received the Law, Calvary was planned. Before time began, the Lamb was slain in the heart of God.

The feasts teach us that symbols matter. God could have simply announced the Gospel in propositional statements. Instead, He embedded it in rituals, calendars, harvests, and holy days. He taught through shadow before revealing the substance. He condescended to our need for concrete, tangible, embodied truth.

The feasts teach us that Christ is the center of all Scripture. You can't understand Leviticus 23 without Him, and you can't understand Him fully without Leviticus 23. The Old Testament isn't an obsolete preface; it's the promise. The New Testament isn't a disconnected sequel; it's the fulfillment. Together they tell one story: Christ.

And the feasts teach us to watch. If God kept four appointments with meticulous precision, we'd be fools not to prepare for the next three. We don't know the day or the hour — Jesus Himself said so — but we know the character of the One who set the appointments. He is faithful. He will come. The trumpet will sound. The King will return. And we will dwell with Him forever.



So when you read Leviticus 23, don't see it as an archaic list of festivals that no longer apply. See it as God's date book, His calendar of redemption, His plan written before the foundation of the world and unfolding precisely on time.

Every Passover lamb that bled out in the temple courtyard was saying, "He's coming." Every sheaf waved on Firstfruits was saying, "He will rise." Every trumpet blast on Tishri 1 was saying, "He will return."

The feasts are God's way of saying, "I'm not making this up as I go along. I knew the end before I spoke the beginning. I appointed the times and the seasons. I marked the calendar. And every date I set, I will keep."

In Christ, the spring feasts have been fulfilled. We live between Pentecost and Trumpets, between the Spirit's coming and the Savior's return. We celebrate the first four with grateful hearts: He has died, He has risen, He has sent His Spirit. And we anticipate the last three with expectant hearts: He will return, He will reconcile, He will dwell with us forever.

The curtain rose once for the first act. The performance was flawless. Now we wait for the curtain to rise again for the final act. And we wait in confidence, because the Playwright always finishes what He begins, always keeps His appointments, always fulfills what He has promised.

*"He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"*

— REV. 22:20

Maranatha. The Lord is coming. The feasts have declared it. The calendar confirms it. The Spirit within us groans for it. And one day — perhaps on a Tishri 1, who knows? — the trumpet will sound, and we'll discover that every feast, every symbol, every appointed time was pointing to that moment when time itself gives way to eternity, and we see Him face to face.

Until then, we keep watch. We celebrate what has been fulfilled. We anticipate what is yet to come. And we live in the tension of the already and the not yet, between Pentecost and Trumpets, between the first coming and the second, in the age of the Spirit, awaiting the age of glory.

The feasts tell us we won't wait forever. God keeps His appointments.

## Chapter 7

# Sabbath and Jubilee

*“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”*

— MATT. 11:28



### 7.1 The Gift No One Wants

IF YOU WERE TO offer a modern man complete rest—not a vacation with its frantic rush to see everything, but real rest—he would likely refuse it. We are, most of us, terrified of stopping. We mistake busyness for importance, and exhaustion for faithfulness. Even our religion becomes another form of work, another item on the endless list of things we must accomplish to prove ourselves worthy.

Yet here stands Leviticus 25, holding out the most scandalous gift imaginable: Stop. Rest. Let the land lie fallow. Trust that God will provide. Every seventh year, cease your striving. And after seven such years—forty-nine years of this rhythm—comes the fiftieth year, the Jubilee, when something even more extraordinary happens: debts are cancelled, slaves go free, and land returns to its original owners. Everything, as it were, starts over.

*“The land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me.”*

— LEV. 25:23

You see what God is doing here? He is not merely regulating agriculture or establishing economic policy. He is teaching His people—and us—that we own nothing. We are renters, not proprietors. The land belongs to Him, and so do we. This is liberating, not oppressive, once we grasp it. For if the land is His, then its provision is His responsibility, not ours. We may work, yes, but our work does not sustain us. He does.



### 7.2 Rest as Rebellion Against Fear

The command to rest was, in its historical context, madness. Consider it practically. You are an Israelite farmer. The seventh year approaches. Your neighbors—pagan nations all around—

plant their fields, tend their crops, harvest their grain. But you? You let the land rest. You plant nothing. You trust that what grew in the sixth year will somehow be enough.

This is not merely difficult; it is terrifying. What if God doesn't provide? What if your children go hungry? What if the surrounding nations see your weakness and attack? The Sabbath year and the Jubilee were not tests of agricultural theory—they were tests of faith. Would Israel believe that God could be trusted with their survival?

Most of us fail this test daily. We hoard because we do not trust tomorrow's provision. We work ourselves into illness because we believe our security depends on our efforts. We cannot rest because rest feels like failure. And yet God says, in effect: "You will rest. And in resting, you will learn who I am."

*"You shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants."*

— LEV. 25:10

The Jubilee takes this further still. Not only must you rest, but you must release. Release debtors. Free slaves. Return property. Now we touch upon something even more difficult than trusting God with our survival: trusting Him with our sense of justice. For surely some of those debtors deserved their debts. Surely some of those slaves had earned their bondage through foolishness or vice. Why should they be released? Why should the consequences of their actions be erased?

Because that, my friend, is what God does for us.



### 7.3 The Kinsman-Redeemer

Embedded in these chapters is one of the most beautiful images in all Scripture: the kinsman-redeemer, the *go'el*. If your brother became poor and had to sell his land, a near relative could buy it back for him. If your brother sold himself into slavery, a kinsman could redeem him. The law is quite specific about the qualifications: the redeemer must be a close relative, he must be willing, and he must be able to pay the price.

*"I know that my Redeemer lives."*

— JOB 19:25

Do you see where this is going? We are the ones who have lost our inheritance. We are the ones who have sold ourselves—not to another man, but to sin itself. We need a kinsman-redeemer. And Christ is precisely that. He became our kinsman by taking on flesh. He was willing—"Behold, I come to do Your will, O God." And He was able—the price was His own blood, and He paid it in full.

There is a stunning moment in the Jubilee instructions where we are told that the trumpet signaling freedom was blown on the Day of Atonement. Freedom and atonement were inseparable. You cannot have liberty without sacrifice. The slave goes free because blood has been shed. The debt is cancelled because someone has paid. This is not sentiment; it is the iron logic of God's justice meeting His mercy.

When Christ stood in the synagogue at Nazareth and read from Isaiah—“to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord”—He was announcing Jubilee. Not a year on the calendar, but an eternal Jubilee. The ultimate release. The final restoration. And when He sat down and said, “This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your hearing,” He was saying: I am your Jubilee. In Me, the slaves go free. In Me, the debts are cancelled. In Me, the inheritance is restored.



## 7.4 What Rest Really Means

We must be careful here. The rest that Christ offers is not inactivity. He does not call us to laziness or passivity. The rest He offers is rest from the burden of self-justification, from the crushing weight of trying to earn our standing before God. It is rest from fear—fear that we are not enough, that we have not done enough, that we never will be enough.

Think of it this way: A child does not earn his place at his father’s table. He belongs there by birth. The father delights in him, not because of his accomplishments, but because he is his son. The child may work—may help in the fields or the workshop—but his work is the overflow of security, not the source of it. He rests in his father’s love, and from that rest, grateful service springs.

This is what the Sabbath was always meant to teach: You belong to God. Your standing is secure. Now rest, and from that rest, live.

The tragedy is that Israel could not do it. They could not rest because they did not trust. And so they worked and worried, hoarded and feared, and eventually lost everything the Sabbath was meant to preserve. The land vomited them out, and they went into exile. And there, in Babylon, the land finally got its Sabbaths—seventy years of desolation for seventy Sabbaths ignored.



## 7.5 Christ Our Rest

*“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”*

— MATT. 11:28

When Jesus speaks these words, He is not offering a new idea. He is offering Himself as the fulfillment of what the Sabbath always pointed toward. Weary souls, burdened by the weight of religious performance, striving to be good enough, clean enough, holy enough—He says: Stop. I am your rest. The work is finished. The debt is paid. You are free.

And this freedom, this rest, changes everything. It does not make us idle; it makes us grateful. It does not lead to carelessness; it leads to worship. The one who knows he is forgiven much, loves much. The one who has been released from an impossible debt becomes generous. The one who has received rest becomes, paradoxically, more diligent—not to earn what he already has, but to give from the overflow of what he has received.

The Jubilee, you see, was never just about economics. It was about the kind of people God wanted to form. A people who knew they were loved before they worked. A people who forgave



because they had been forgiven. A people who released others from debt because their own debt had been released. A people who rested not in their own strength, but in His.

And when Christ comes again—when the trumpet sounds, not once in fifty years, but once for all eternity—the ultimate Jubilee will dawn. Every loss will be restored. Every tear will be wiped away. Every slave to sin, sickness, and death will be set free. The inheritance that Adam lost in Eden will be fully restored, and we will rest—not for a day, or a year, but forever—in the presence of the One who is Himself our Sabbath and our Jubilee.

Until then, we live in the tension. We taste the rest but do not yet possess it fully. We experience the freedom but still feel the chains. And so we wait, and we remember, and we rest as we are able in the finished work of Christ, knowing that what the Sabbath year and Jubilee pictured in shadows, He is bringing to fullness in glory.

The question is: Will we rest? Will we trust Him enough to stop striving, stop earning, stop fearing? Will we live as people who belong to Him, not by our work, but by His grace?

That is the challenge of Leviticus 25. That is the gift of Jubilee. That is the rest Christ offers still.

## Chapter 8

# Dedication and Vows

*“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”*

— ROM. 12:1



### 8.1 After the Rescue

SUPPOSE YOU HAVE been drowning. You have gone under twice, perhaps three times. Your lungs burn, your limbs are leaden, and the surface seems impossibly far away. Then, just as darkness closes in, a hand grasps yours and pulls you up, up into air and light and life. You gasp, you weep, you live.

What do you do next?

Some might simply walk away, relieved to have escaped. But if you have any gratitude in you at all, you will want to do something for your rescuer. You will want to give something back. Not because you must—the rescue is already complete, and nothing you can do will make it more complete—but because love demands expression. Gratitude, if it is real, cannot remain silent.

This is where Leviticus 27 comes in. It is the final chapter of the book, and it deals with vows and dedications. Not the mandatory sacrifices we saw at the beginning—those dealt with sin and guilt. These are voluntary offerings, made not out of obligation but out of love. Having been rescued by blood, having been cleansed and forgiven and restored, the Israelite now asks: What can I give back?

*“Behold, I come to do Your will, O God.”*

— HEB. 10:7

And the answer is: You can dedicate yourself. Your time. Your possessions. Even your very life. Not to earn God’s favor—that battle is already won—but to express your devotion. This is the difference between slavery and sonship. The slave works because he must; the son works because he loves.



## 8.2 The Nature of a Vow

Now, vows are tricky things. In our age, we are suspicious of them, and rightly so. We have seen too many promises broken, too many commitments abandoned when they became inconvenient. “I will love you forever” becomes “I will love you until I don’t.” And so we are cynical about vows, even the ones we make to God.

But Leviticus treats vows with great seriousness. A vow, once made, was binding. You could dedicate a person to the Lord’s service—yourself, a child, a servant. You could dedicate an animal, a house, a field. And once dedicated, it was holy. Set apart. It belonged to God, not to you, even if it remained in your possession. You could redeem it by paying its value plus a fifth, but you could not simply take it back. The vow was sacred.

*“When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed.”*

— ECCL. 5:4

Why such strictness? Because a vow is an act of worship. It is a way of saying: You, O God, are worth more to me than this thing I am giving. You are worth more than my comfort, my security, my possessions, even my life. And God takes us at our word. If we say something is His, He will hold us to it.

But here is the paradox: the vow was voluntary. No one had to make one. You could live your entire life as a faithful Israelite, offering all the required sacrifices, keeping all the laws, and never make a single vow. The vow was for those whose hearts were so full of gratitude, so overwhelmed by what God had done, that mandatory obedience was not enough. They wanted to give more.

This, I think, is the mark of genuine conversion. The new believer obeys because he must; the mature believer obeys because he wants to. The legalist keeps the rules to avoid punishment; the lover keeps the rules because they express what he already desires. And then, beyond the rules, he looks for ways to give even more.



## 8.3 The Devoted Thing

There is a category in Leviticus 27 even more solemn than a vow: the *herem*, the devoted thing. If something was devoted to the Lord, it could not be redeemed. It was irrevocably His. This was the language used of things placed under a ban—cities devoted to destruction, like Jericho. But it was also used of things wholly given to God, never to be taken back.

*“Nothing that a man devotes to the LORD, whether man or beast or field, shall be sold or redeemed; every devoted thing is most holy to the LORD.”*

— LEV. 27:28

Do you see what this means? There is a level of consecration beyond even a vow. It is the total, final, irrevocable giving of something to God. No going back. No second thoughts. No

redemption. It is burned, as it were, not in the fire of judgment, but in the fire of absolute devotion.

And this, I believe, is what Christ did. He did not merely make a vow to obey the Father; He devoted Himself. “For their sakes I sanctify Myself,” He said. He set Himself apart, wholly and completely, to accomplish our redemption. And having done so, there was no turning back. The cup could not pass from Him. The will of the Father was now His own will, fused together in perfect unity. He was the ultimate *herem*, the ultimate devoted thing, given wholly and irrevocably to the work of our salvation.



## 8.4 What Can We Give?

So what does this mean for us? We who have been rescued, redeemed, restored—what can we possibly give back to the One who has given everything?

The answer is both simple and terrifying: ourselves.

*“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”*

— ROM. 12:1

Notice the phrase: “by the mercies of God.” Paul does not say, “You must sacrifice yourselves to earn God’s favor.” He says, “Because of what God has already done, offer yourselves.” The motivation is mercy received, not merit sought. We give because we have been given to. We love because we have been loved first.

And notice what we are to present: our bodies. Not an animal. Not money. Not some abstract spiritual commitment that costs us nothing. Our actual, physical, daily lives. Our time when we would rather sleep. Our money when we would rather spend. Our patience when we would rather rage. Our forgiveness when we would rather nurse the grudge. This is the living sacrifice—not dead on an altar, but alive and daily dying to self.

It is, Paul says, our “reasonable service.” Given what Christ has done, what else could we possibly do? To hold back, to give God the leftovers of our time and energy and resources while pouring our best into ourselves—it is not merely ungrateful. It is unreasonable. It makes no sense in light of Calvary.



## 8.5 The Tithe and the Firstfruits

Leviticus 27 ends with the law of the tithe. A tenth of everything—grain, fruit, livestock—belonged to the Lord. It was holy, set apart. The Israelite could redeem it if he wished, but he had to add a fifth to its value. And the firstborn of the animals could not be dedicated as a vow, because it already belonged to God.

*“All the tithe of the land, whether seed of the land or fruit of the tree, is the LORD’s; it is holy to the LORD.”*

— LEV. 27:30

The tithe was a recognition that everything came from God. You did not give God a tenth; you gave back to God a tenth of what was already His. It was a tangible way of saying: I am not the source. I am not the provider. I am the steward, and You are the owner.

And the firstfruits principle went even deeper: the first and best belonged to God. Not the leftovers. Not what you could spare. Not the bruised fruit or the runt of the litter. The first and the best. Because what you give first reveals what you love most.

We modern people find this difficult. We want to see how the month goes, how the budget looks, what is left over after we have taken care of ourselves. Then, perhaps, we will give to God. But that is backwards. That makes God the residual beneficiary of our lives, not the central treasure. And our checkbooks, like our calendars, reveal what we truly worship.



## 8.6 The Peril and the Glory

There is a danger in all this talk of dedication and vows, and I must name it plainly: the danger of thinking we can contribute to our salvation. We cannot. Not by vows, not by tithes, not by any offering we could make. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Our best efforts are filthy rags. Our noblest vows are tainted with pride. If we think we are earning anything, we have understood nothing.

But—and this is crucial—there is a difference between earning our salvation and expressing our gratitude for it. A son does not earn his place in the family by working in the family business. But having a place in the family, he gladly works. He wants to. The work is not the price of sonship; it is the privilege of it.

So too with dedication and vows. They do not make us God’s children. Christ’s blood does that. But being His children, redeemed and forgiven and loved beyond measure, we want to give back. We want our lives to say, “Thank You. All I have is Yours. All I am is Yours. Take it. Use it. I hold nothing back.”

And when we live this way—not perfectly, for we are still sinners, but sincerely—something extraordinary happens. We discover that the life of total consecration is not a burden but a joy. The yoke is easy and the burden is light, because we are finally doing what we were made for. We are finally aligning our will with His. And in that alignment, we find not slavery but freedom. Not loss but fullness. Not death but life, abundant and eternal.



## 8.7 The Call

Leviticus ends, fittingly, with the word “holy.” Holy to the Lord. And that is what we are called to be. Not by our striving, but by His grace. Not by our vows, but by His faithfulness. And yet our vows matter, not because they save us, but because they shape us. They train our hearts

in the direction they should go. They teach us to hold loosely what the world clutches tightly. They remind us, again and again, that we are not our own. We have been bought with a price.

So what will you dedicate? What will you give? Not to earn His favor—that is already yours in Christ—but to express your love? Your time? Your resources? Your very self?

The altar stands ready. The High Priest intercedes. And the God who gave everything for you waits to receive whatever you will offer in return. Not because He needs it—He owns the cattle on a thousand hills—but because you need to give it. You need to live as one who has been rescued. You need to pour out your gratitude in tangible, costly, daily acts of devotion.

This is the reasonable service. This is the living sacrifice. This is what it means to be holy to the Lord.

# Conclusion: Seeing Christ Everywhere

When I first began to study Leviticus—truly study it, not merely skim it or endure it out of a sense of duty—I confess I did not expect to find Christ there. Oh, I knew the theology. I knew that all Scripture points to Him. But Leviticus seemed so forbidding, so ancient, so bound up in rituals I could never perform and laws I could never keep. What possible relevance could it have for a twenty-first-century Christian?

Everything, it turns out. Absolute everything.

You see, the problem was not with Leviticus. The problem was with my eyes. I was reading it as law, when I should have been reading it as love letter. I was seeing commands, when I should have been seeing Christ. And once I began to see Him—once the veil was lifted, as Paul says, and the glory revealed—I could not stop seeing Him. He was everywhere. On every page. In every sacrifice, every priest, every ceremony, every feast.

The burnt offering? Christ's total devotion to the Father, His life ascending like incense, a fragrant aroma of perfect obedience. The grain offering? His sinless humanity, crushed like grain, broken like bread, poured out for us. The peace offering? Our reconciliation, the fellowship restored, the wall of hostility torn down. The sin offering? Him becoming sin for us, bearing the weight of our guilt. The trespass offering? The restoration of what sin had stolen, the payment of what we could never repay.

And the priests—those flawed, mortal men who stumbled through their duties, offering sacrifice after sacrifice that could never truly cleanse—they were all pointing to Him. The one High Priest who is sinless, eternal, perfect. Who offered one sacrifice, once for all, and sat down because the work was finished.

The Day of Atonement? That solemn, terrifying, glorious day when the high priest entered the Holy of Holies with blood, while the people waited outside, hardly daring to breathe? That was Calvary. That was Christ entering the true Most Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and bulls, but with His own blood, obtaining eternal redemption.

Even the laws that seem strangest to us—the clean and unclean animals, the skin diseases, the emissions and discharges—all of it was teaching the same truth: sin defiles. It separates. It makes us unfit for God's presence. And we cannot cleanse ourselves. We need blood. We need a sacrifice. We need a Savior.

And the feasts! Oh, the feasts. Passover pointing to His death, the Lamb slain at the exact hour He hung on the cross. Unleavened Bread showing His sinless body in the grave. Firstfruits celebrating His resurrection on the very day it occurred. Pentecost marking the Spirit's arrival fifty days later. And the fall feasts, still awaiting their fulfillment when He returns—the trumpet blast, the final atonement, the eternal tabernacle of God with men.

Even Sabbath and Jubilee—those strange, impractical commands to rest and release—were pointing to Him. To the rest He offers weary souls. To the freedom He proclaims to captives. To the restoration of all that Adam lost and more besides.

And finally, the vows and dedications, the tithes and devoted things. All of them echoing His words: “Behold, I come to do Your will, O God.” All of them calling us to respond to grace with gratitude, to salvation with service, to mercy with devotion.

Do you see it? Do you see Him? He is not merely hidden in Leviticus like a puzzle to be solved. He is the whole point. He is the meaning behind the shadows, the substance the rituals were always meant to reveal. Leviticus is not primarily about what we must do to reach God.

It is about what God has done to reach us.

And if that is true of Leviticus—this book we find so difficult, so obscure—then what might we find if we looked for Him everywhere? In the Psalms, yes, we expect to find Him there. In the Prophets, certainly. But what about Chronicles with its endless genealogies? What about the conquest narratives in Joshua, or the legal codes in Deuteronomy, or even the Song of Solomon with its unabashed eroticism?

He is there. All of it, every word, every story, every law and poem and prophecy, is about Him. The Bible is not a miscellaneous collection of religious writings. It is one story, told in a thousand different ways, and the story is always the same: God pursuing rebels. Holiness stooping to save sinners. The Creator entering creation to redeem it. Love incarnate, bleeding on a cross, rising from a tomb, ascending to a throne, and promising to return.

This is what Leviticus has taught me. Not just theology—though the theology is glorious. Not just how to understand Old Testament law—though that understanding is invaluable. But something deeper, more transformative. It has taught me to see Christ everywhere. To read the Scriptures not as a law book or a history book or even a theology book, but as a revelation of a Person. The Person. The only One who matters, the only One who saves, the only One worthy of all praise and honor and glory and power forever and ever.

So I urge you: do not read Leviticus and stop at the shadows. Press through to the substance. Do not see only blood and fire and ritual. See the Love that provided the sacrifice. See the Mercy that accepted the offering. See the Grace that opened the way into the Holy of Holies, and see the Glory that now dwells, not in a tent in the wilderness, but in you, if you are in Christ.

And having seen Him here, in this strange and wonderful book, go and see Him everywhere else. In every book of the Bible, yes. But also in every sunset, every act of kindness, every pang of conscience, every moment of beauty that makes you catch your breath. He is there. He is always there. For in Him all things consist, and all things are moving toward the day when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

That is the revelation of Leviticus. That is the substance of the shadows. That is the glory behind the veil.

And it changes everything.

*“These are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”*

— COL. 2:17

*Soli Deo Gloria*