

The Book of Leviticus

Lesson 13: Rules for Priests and Acceptable Offerings -- Leviticus 21:1–22:33

Imagine you have been invited to serve at the table of a king. Not just to attend the banquet, but to carry the dishes, to stand at his right hand, to represent him before the guests. You would think carefully about how you looked, how you spoke, how you carried yourself. There is a holiness that fits the presence of greatness. In Leviticus 21 and 22, God is not fussing over trivial details. He is teaching Israel that those who draw near to Him, and the gifts they bring, must match the weight of His holiness.

These two chapters fall into two halves that mirror each other. First, the priests themselves must be holy: they must not defile themselves carelessly with the dead, they must marry in a way that honors their calling, and the man who serves at the altar must be without physical blemish. Then the offerings must be holy too: they must be eaten in purity, and the animal brought to the altar must be without defect, for a blemished gift is no honor at all. The servant and the sacrifice, both must be fitting for God.

We need to hear this carefully, because we live on the far side of the cross. We are not bound to the Aaronic priesthood. We do not bring bulls and goats to an altar. But the principle behind these laws did not pass away with the Old Law. The God who is holy still calls those who serve Him to a holy life, and He still asks for our best rather than our leftovers. The shadow has lifted, but the substance, the holiness of God, shines brighter than ever in Christ.

As you study, watch how every line points forward. The unblemished priest foreshadows a great High Priest who is holy, harmless, and undefiled. The spotless lamb foreshadows the Lamb without blemish whose blood is precious. And the call to bring God your best becomes a call to present your body a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable. This lesson is finally about wholehearted worship: giving God not what is convenient, but what costs us something, because of who He is.

Group Discussion: Where do God's people today tend to offer Him the 'blemished' or 'leftover' rather than the best, in worship, in giving, in service, and what would it look like for our congregation to offer God our best instead?

Personal Reflection: Think honestly about the past month. In what specific area have you been giving God your spare time, spare energy, or spare attention rather than your best? What is one change He may be asking you to make this week?

Read Leviticus 21:1–22:33

Study Questions

1. Why did God require the priests, and especially the high priest, to keep themselves from defilement and to be without physical blemish in order to serve at the altar? What does this teach about the holiness that fits those who draw near to God?
2. When you serve God (in worship, teaching, hospitality, or any ministry), do you prepare your heart, or do you come carelessly? What would taking your service to God more seriously look like for you?
3. Leviticus 22 insists that the offering brought to God be without blemish and 'accepted for you.' What does the demand for an unblemished, acceptable offering reveal about how God receives our worship and gifts?
4. Have you ever caught yourself giving God a 'blemished' gift, the cheap, the convenient, the easy? What did that reveal about how you were really viewing God at that moment?
5. How do these chapters present the priesthood and the sacrifice as a shadow of something greater? In what ways does the requirement of holiness and an unblemished offering point us forward?
6. Malachi rebuked Israel for bringing lame and sick animals to God's altar, saying, 'Offer it now unto thy governor.' Where might you be offering God something you would be embarrassed to offer a person you respect?

7. Why does it matter that those who handle holy things must themselves be holy? How does Leviticus connect the character of the servant to the integrity of the worship?
8. In what part of your life is there a gap between the holiness you profess on the Lord's Day and the way you actually live during the week? What is one step toward closing that gap?
9. How is Christ both the perfect High Priest (Hebrews 7:26–28) and the perfect, unblemished offering (1 Peter 1:18–19; Hebrews 9:14)? Why is it good news that the One who serves at the altar and the gift on the altar are both flawless, and how does that secure our access to God in a way the Aaronic system never could?
10. Looking across these two chapters, and remembering that you are now part of a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:5,9), what is one specific way the Lord is using this passage to form you into someone who offers Him your best, as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 7:26–28, the great High Priest who is holy, harmless, undefiled and perfect forever; 1 Peter 1:18–19, redeemed by the precious blood of Christ as a lamb without blemish and without spot; Hebrews 9:14, Christ offered Himself without spot to God to purge our conscience; Malachi 1:6–14, God's rebuke of Israel for offering blemished sacrifices and despising His name; Romans 12:1, present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, your reasonable service

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