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“Leviticus Introduction”

Dr. Michael S. Heiser

With

**Residential Layman
Trey Stricklin**

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Introducing Leviticus

Leviticus is a fascinating but neglected book. In this episode Dr. Heiser introduces the flow of the book and important concepts that will reoccur throughout the book: sacred space, holiness, and ritual impurity vs. moral impurity.

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 63, introducing Leviticus. I'm your layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. How are you doing Mike?

MSH: Very good. Good to be back with you Trey.

TS: This is it, Leviticus.

MSH: Oh yeah, the moment everyone's been waiting for.

TS: Everybody's lining up, the third book of Moses. Let's do this.

MSH: Why wouldn't everybody be lining up for Leviticus? Well what I want to do today is sort of give people a basic introduction, so we're calling this introducing Leviticus. I want to hit two things that is the flow of the book, flow the contents and then some of the important concepts that we're going to run into with considerable recurrence. And I think even this will be interesting. I think there will be some surprising elements in here but I want to sort of prep people for what they're going to encounter in Leviticus because I can't really even assume people have read it, and if they have, maybe read through it at least once, there are some orienting concepts that are going to become really important, like I said, that will come up over and over and over again that might sound different than what you may have heard in church. Perish the thought that someone would actually have gone to a church service and heard a sermon on Leviticus.

I can't really assume that but if it's happened, chances are what was said is not really, pardon the pun, kosher with the way that an Israelite would have parsed the contents of Leviticus. So that, just like Naked Bible on the blog, that's our purpose here, what did this book mean in the context of the Ancient Near East, the context of the ancient world, the context that produced the thing, as opposed to how we read today because chances are if you've heard anything about Leviticus, you've heard something like, oh, it's all about Jesus or this is the book designed to direct us to Jesus. That's not the case. An Israelite reading through the book of Leviticus would not have been thinking Messiah every time they turned a page. They would of thought something about Messiah perhaps in places but by and large this is not what they're thinking.

So right away, we have a bit of a disconnect. Let's just jump in here with the flow of the contents, the first seven chapters. The book is only 27 chapters. The first seven chapters, Leviticus goes through the types of sacrifices. So in the first three chapters, we're going to hit the burnt offering, the grain offering, and the peace offering. Now the burnt offering and the grain offering are two types of sacrifices that are actually classified as most sacred. What that means is, you didn't do this and become more holy than if you did something else. That thinking really pertains to the fact that only priests could partake of the sacrifice and they were only performed in sacred areas of the sanctuary. So right away, here's a bit of a disconnect that the sacrifices need to be understood in light of who does them and where they're done. Those are two aspects that are often neglected. And also, we'll eventually see as we go through the book where the blood is applied and where it isn't applied, so all these sorts of things are going to be important for parsing why are they doing what they're doing and what are they thinking when they're doing it.

Now the third sacrifice in chapters 1 to 3 is the peace offering. The peace offering was essentially a sacred meal. There were certain parts of the sacrifice burned on the alter. Others were boiled in pots and then a portion among the priests and the donors. So the peace offering is “less” sacred because the common people, the people who were not priests, could partake of some of the sacrifice. So it is just part of the logic of the system. All these things we’ll hit as we go so if you’re out there listening, don’t feel like you got to take notes. This is never going to come up again. That isn’t the case. I just wanted to give you a bit of an overview. Now these three sacrifices, burnt, grain, and peace offering, were performed separately. You could just do one on its own or in combinations with various celebrations and occasions for worship, either publicly or privately.

So they're really about worship and the question is who's doing it, where are they doing it, who partakes of it, that sort of thing. The next two chapters here's where you get the sin offering and what we call the guilt offering. By the way, as we go through, I'm going to start using other terminology when we actually hit chapters for some of the sacrifices because terms like sin offering and guilt offering are kind of misleading. How can I say this? They sort of predispose us to think about the sacrifice in a way that an Israelite would not have thought about it. Let me just give you an example. Both the sin offering and the guilt offering were necessitated by unintentional offenses against God, committed by individuals or their families, by the community or its leaders, whatever, and they are not about sort of moral absolution. A lot of the big sins, at least anyway, that we think of, murder, adultery, whatnot, they could not be atoned for by any sacrifice.

The blood of no sacrifice in the Old Testament is ever applied to the sinner. And that's a conceptual disconnect that is often startling. When you hear that, you think, how can that be like of a symbol of what Jesus did because the blood of Jesus is applied to us and we're forgiven. Well, there are connections, don't get me wrong, but that is not one of them. You don't have blood applied to the one who brings the offering. On the rare occasion when blood is applied to a person, it's typically the priest and most often it's some part of the sanctuary because a lot of the sacrifices are really about purging the sanctuary or purging the holy place or purging the priest or whatever. So that there is no ritual pollution, not moral pollution, but ritual pollution brought into sacred space, the place where God's presence is. It really has nothing to do with sort of an offering for sin like we think of Jesus. This is a fundamental disconnect in something we're going to have to deal with on a case-by-case basis as we go through Leviticus. But they have their own logic.

The system has its own logic and I think terms like sin and guilt offering, if that's what we're going to call them, and I'm going to suggest the Hebrew terms actually mean something different but that's the way they get translated. If this is the way we think about them than we're never really going to get close to what the system actually did or what the system is actually thought to do. We're going to be parsing this material through the event on the cross or through something else in the New Testament. I'm not saying there aren't connection points. There are and we'll hit those. What I am saying is that the New Testament cannot be a filter for this just like it shouldn't be a filter for anything else in the Old Testament. We need to take it on its own terms if we're going to understand it. Now chapter 6 and 7 are regulations about the distribution of various sacrifices to priests and donors, so that that sort of builds of the first five chapters.

The first five chapters discuss these five kinds of sacrifices. And then in 6 and 7 you get more rules. You get a little bit of regulation about how the sacrifices support the priesthood in

terms of sort of a remuneration for their service and whatnot. Chapters 8 through 10 you have actually a ceremonial event described in those chapters. It's the ceremonial founding of the ritual system. So God tells Moses what to do and then sort of, okay, now we need to get it started. We need to kick-start the system and that's what happens in chapters 8 to 10. That's going to end with Nadab and Abihu, the way we Anglicized it, that incident where the sons of Aaron are killed because they offer strange fire.

But that's connected to sort of the ceremonial effort to get the system up and running, that sort of thing. Now the basic function of the priesthood we find out in the first 10 chapters is really to officiate over the system as it's outlined and also to sort of be on the alert with respect to the matter of purity. And we're going to talk about purity and impurity a little later on after we work through the outline. So we're up to chapter 10. Chapters 11 through 16, these are the chapters that people often think of when they think of Leviticus, clean versus unclean animals, difference types of human impurity, the day of atonement is chapter 16. So these chapters 11 through 16 really sort of overview purity rules, and, again, purity was something we're going to talk about in a moment, often does not have anything to do with sin. Sometimes it does but often what we're talking about is ritual purity, fitness to occupy sacred space as opposed to the commission of a certain sin and then what to do about it. Because oftentimes in the Old Testament law, the solution for what to do about a certain sin is the death penalty. You don't need a sacrifice.

We already know the penalty is for that. You get rid of the person. So there's just a fundamental disconnect with what we think of as solutions for sin and what you see in the book of Leviticus. Chapters 17 through 27 then, the rest of the book, these last 10 or 11 chapters here are what scholars call the Holiness Code. Now the Holiness Code really constitutes a statement, an amplification in some senses of the law. It is in effect the priestly articulation or sort of the, how can I say this, the priestly involvement, priestly pronouncement of God's will, defines with the God of Israel requires for the people of Israel, and how the priests are supposed to oversee that in terms of how God is to be worshiped. So chapter 17, you have a discussion on what proper worship is, where you're supposed to present your sacrifices, what's a legitimate sacrifice, that sort of thing, what to do with the blood, so it's a procedural kind of chapter. You get chapters 18 through 20, you get community laws which these are the chapters where there's a discussion of sexual prohibitions which are not, it's only one emphasis in these chapters. It's not the whole emphasis of the chapters.

But other laws that concern community behavior, religious and social behavior, I already mentioned the sexual behavior. These laws have to do with both the status of the person being able to occupy sacred space and in these chapters you also get into the issue of moral uncleanness, principles of morality. So principles of ritual fitness are distinct from principles of morality. We tend to link both of those things but Israelite law did not and the practice of Israelite law did not as well. And as we go through the book of Leviticus, we're going to be parsing a lot of this out. Chapters 21 to 22 concerns the sanctity the priesthood, what would disqualify a priest, what are the criteria for suitability to be a priest, that sort of thing. Chapter 23 is the sacred calendars. That's where we see spelled out what the religious calendar of Israel is, what you do at certain times, what the celebrations are, how they're to be conducted, those sorts of things. Chapter 24, you get more sanctuary procedure and you get comments about blasphemy.

It helps us understand the concept of blasphemy but specifically in this chapter, you get discussion of the eternal light and the bread that is to be displayed inside the sanctuary, and then we get an incident related where the sacred space was blasphemed and what the punishment was. So we're still dealing largely with procedures for taking care of the sanctuary, taking care of sacred space, and when sacred space is violated, what happens. That's chapter 24. Chapter 25 is sort of an economic chapter. It deals with how the nation should treat its members in terms of economic viability. There's a whole system in Leviticus set up so that widespread poverty should not be present in the land. This is something that the priests are supposed to oversee. You get a law of Jubilee in here, that sort of thing, laws about who owns the land, tenants, laws of slaves, that sort of thing.

So this is where you get sort of the socio-economic subsystem within what we would broadly call a Levitical system. So Leviticus spends a whole chapter on really the big conceptual ideas of who owns the land really, the fact that we're all stewards and tenants on the land. It's not just somebody with wealth who has servants or whatnot. Ultimately God is the owner of all the land. We have a responsibility to him. He tells us to free the slave and free the land at certain intervals. We have a collective responsibility for making sure that the land yields enough so that we don't have this never ending poverty situation for the poor, that sort of thing. And then finally your last two chapters, 26 and 27, really consist of blessings and cursings, and how the priesthood is supposed to administer all this. So it ends with, hey, if you follow all this, things are going to be great.

If you don't, things are going to be awful and the land is going to spit you out and you're going to go into exile and things are just going to be terrible. And we can look back and read that and know what happened with the exile and whatnot and so some of that is sort of spelled out, foretold, envisioned that kind of thing, in these two chapters. What we're going to see as we shift now into concepts, important concepts for Leviticus, is that certain violations of Levitical procedure and, even more so, specifically moral obligations, moral impurity, can actually pollute the entire community and pollute the entire land, and in some cases, there's actually no solution for it other than hit the reset button, which is apocalyptic, and it involves exile, again, some of these things we know that are going to happen from later in the Old Testament. But they're actually sort of brought up and introduced in this book. So by way of concepts, let's start with sacred space.

This is the idea that there is holy ground and there is unholy ground. And when I say unholy ground, I am referring to ground that is not set aside for the occupation of Yahweh's presence. It's mundane. It's profane in the sense that it's normal. Sacred space is special. It is designed and really has to be prepared, and once prepared, it is only for the presence of Yahweh and those who he permits to have or share that access. And even those people have to be ritually prepared to enter that space so there's a very clear concept in Leviticus of sacred space, holy versus unholy, holy versus profane or normal or mundane ground. Now I'm going to read you a fairly lengthy segment from a Jacob Milgram who's a Jewish scholar and scholar of Judaic studies and also Jewish ritual. I want to read you a lengthy portion of his commentary about Leviticus, and I'm going to disagree with it at a number of points, and I'll tell you where and why. But his description, I think, is really well put and applies very well to protecting holy ground from violations, again, just some of the logic to it. So here's Milgram from his continental commentary Leviticus. This is pages 8-9, or at least we'll cover pages 8-9. Now I'll break this up into a few segments, but quote from Milgram, 16:34

The basic premises of pagan religion are (1) that its deities are themselves dependent on and influenced by a metadivine realm, (2) that this realm spawns a multitude of malevolent and benevolent entities, and (3) that if humans can tap into this realm they can acquire the magical power to coerce the gods to do their will. The eminent Assyriologist W. G. Lambert has stated, "The impression is gained that everyday religion [in Mesopotamia] was dominated by fear of evil powers and black magic rather than a positive worship of the gods . . . the world was conceived to be full of evil demons who might cause trouble in any sphere of life. If they had attacked, the right ritual should effect the cure Humans, as well as devils, might work evil against a person by the black arts, and here too the appropriate ritual was required." The Priestly theology negates these premises. It posits the existence of one supreme God who contends neither with a higher realm nor with competing peers. **[MSH: Now I'm going to disagree with Milgram there in a moment.]** The world of demons is abolished; there is no struggle with autonomous foes, because there are none. With the demise of the demons, *only* one creature remains with "demonic" power—the human being. Endowed with free will, human power is greater than any attributed to humans by pagan society. Not only can one defy God but, in Priestly imagery, one can drive God out of his sanctuary. In this respect, humans have replaced demons.

MSH: Now I'm going to disagree with that because it's flawed reasoning. Milgram ignores the book of Deuteronomy. I can't put it any other way. Scholars who, of course, would have done a lot of work in Deuteronomy would look at the statement by Milgram and go well, that's crazy talk because of Deuteronomy 32 and lots of other stuff in Deuteronomy. Well, it's true that Levitical theology doesn't have people tapping into the divine realm by means of lesser divinities. In other words, you don't have humans use lesser divine beings to tap into this realm to create spells to go get somebody like a Mesopotamian would think. Well, that's true. Regardless, even though that's the case and we have to reject the idea that God can be coerced, they are not a statement.

These ideas do not overturn the notion about territory that is not Yahweh's allotment by his own decision. That's the Deuteronomy 32:8-9 worldview. In other words, Levitical theology concerns what is supposed to go on or not within Yahweh's domain. It doesn't have anything to say, and this is where I think Milgram misses the boat, it doesn't have anything to say on other domains, the other nations that are put under the authority of the sons of God. Leviticus has nothing to say about that. So Milgram is sort of myopic here. He's focused only on the Levitical ritual system as it pertains to Israel.

Well, yeah, in Israel, in Yahweh's sacred space, you don't have these intermediate demons and all this other stuff. That talk is reserved for the nations outside Israel and that's what Milgram is missing in those two paragraphs that I read. The rationale, which is quite oppositional to Mesopotamia thinking which is truly polytheistic, is still sort of telling. Israelite thinking about sacred space is not a mere adoption of somebody else's concept, rather Leviticus is concerned with what goes on here in Yahweh's territory, Yahweh's inheritance. We don't really care in Leviticus about what goes on elsewhere in the realm of other gods, the allotment of the

other gods. That alone is sort of a theological statement in of itself because Levitical thinking about sacred space doesn't imitate Mesopotamia. The priesthood doesn't relate to the God of Israel through intermediate demonic figures. They don't have to practice black magic and stuff like this.

They don't need to coerce lesser divine beings, these demonic figures to go get something done that the God of Israel won't do for them. You don't have this intermediate world inside Israel. So Milgram is correct in that sense but I think he's far too categorical in his language because that Israelite worldview certainly, because of the book of Deuteronomy, includes the notion that there are other divine powers outside Israel that offer some serious problems and can seriously violate Yahweh's own sacred space and that frankly are in opposition to him. Now I want to pickup with Milgram again, another excerpt from his commentary. Milgram writes,

The pagans secured the perpetual aid of a benevolent deity by building him/her a temple-residence in which the deity was housed, fed, and worshiped in exchange for protective care. Above all, the temple had to be inoculated by apotropaic rites, that is, utilizing magic drawn from the metadivine realm- against incursions by malevolent forces from the supernal and infernal worlds. The Priestly theologians **[MSH: in other words, the people who produce Leviticus in his view]** make use of the same imagery, except that the demons are replaced by humans. **[MSH: Again, I would say to Milgram, this is me breaking in here now. I would say to Milgram, that's because Leviticus is only concerned with what goes on in Yahweh's domain, not other domains.]** Humans can drive God out of the sanctuary by polluting it with their moral and ritual sins. All that the priests can do is periodically purge the sanctuary of its impurities and influence the people to atone for their wrongs. **[MSH: Or in the case of some Mosaic law, exert the death penalty.]**

MSH: So what the priesthood in Leviticus is really about, I think he says this well, is that once the sanctuary is polluted, once sacred space is polluted and it would be polluted by a violation of all sorts of things that are spelled out in Leviticus and in a few other places in the Torah. Once that happens, what do we do? So the emphasis in Leviticus and largely all the sacrifices, at least the ones that are "sin and guilt offerings", the emphasis of those sacrifices is not to apply the blood to the individual person who committed the wrong and extend forgiveness to them on some moral basis. The blood is never applied to them rather the blood is applied to the sanctuary to purge it of pollution. So the emphasis is not on the bringer of the offering. The emphasis is on the sacred space, purifying it, making it fit for Yahweh's presence again after it has been violated. It's just a fundamental idea that's going to come up again and again and again as we go to Leviticus that's the sound quite different to what you may have heard about with respect to sacrifices elsewhere. Back to Milgram, he says here,

This thoroughgoing evisceration of the demonic **[MSH: I would say, let me put it this way, a thoroughgoing neglect or apathy toward the demonic because we're talking about Yahweh's domain, not other domains. But back to Milgram.]** also transformed the concept of impurity. In Israel, impurity was harmless. It retained potency only with

regard to the sanctuary or the holy objects. Laypersons-but not priests-might contract impurity with impunity; they must not, however, delay their purificatory rites lest their impurity affect the sanctuary. [**MSH: That was the real concern, infecting holy ground, you're going to see is the fundamental concern with the system in Leviticus.**] The retention of impurity's dynamic (but not demonic) power in regard to sanctums served a theological function. The sanctuary symbolized the presence of God; impurity represented the wrongdoing of persons. If persons unremittingly polluted the sanctuary, they forced God out of his sanctuary and out of their lives.

MSH: Again, I like the way he puts certain things there. Its good data but it's flawed thinking when it comes the bigger picture. The Old Testament is quite clear that worship of other deities, idolatry, polluted the land and in so doing polluted Yahweh's territory. So for that to be valid, we have to acknowledge and recognize with books like Deuteronomy and lots of other places that there are other gods out there and they are hostile. They are in opposition to Yahweh and they must not be worshiped. If they are, by definition, this is both a moral and a potentially ritual violation of not only the sanctuary but the entire land. That's an important idea. In other words, Israelites wouldn't have concluded that there were such things as hostile gods and so those guys couldn't really profane anything because we have these other books. An Israelite would not be thinking that there aren't any other gods.

He would be thinking in this territory and Yahweh's domain we don't have this intermediate world. It's just Yahweh here. That I think is a better articulation incorporating books like Deuteronomy and other material alongside Leviticus than Milgram's doing. But I still like the way Milgram puts some things. Now one thing we need to say as well, just for emphasis here, these laws about sacred space inform us that violations of the sanctuary were mostly not thought of in terms of moral sins like committing an unvirtuous act. Now for sure, if you did certain sins it could lead to violation of sacred space but holiness laws generally are concerned with becoming infected literally and therefore putting the sanctuary in peril of being violated. We have to think in terms of the place and the space as opposed to the person. That will help us in Leviticus.

That's why a lot of these laws about purity are described in terms of contact with dead things, bodily functions, unclean animals, diseases. For some reason, and when we get to each of those, I'll discuss why, what the logic is behind these things, but when you were polluted yourself by these things the danger is great that you could drift into sacred space or touch an object meant for use on sacred space and therefore violate the whole system. So it was the otherness of God, the thing that defines sacred space, that was the concern again. Sacrifice was about correcting violations of sacred space, sacred territory. It wasn't so much to cover a moral flaw or a moral sin. It was about making people fit to occupy sacred space. And again, this is only for unintentional violations. These sacrifices are for unintentional sins as we'll see. When it came to intentional sins, it was a different matter there. You might be thinking, well, what about Leviticus 16?

Didn't that atone for everybody's sins, sort of all at the same time? There's actually quite a controversy over that. I'm actually of the opinion that Leviticus 16, the Day of Atonement, was not about atoning for individual moral failures, sins in that respect. But even that ritual was still

about cleansing the sanctuary because the only time that the blood is ever mentioned as being applied anywhere in Leviticus 16 is the sanctuary and the sacred objects. It's still not the people. But again when we get to Leviticus 16, I'll present you with both views and you can make up your own mind. But I just want to know that even Leviticus 16, which is supposed to be this catchall forgiveness passage for Old Testament people, that's not the only way you can look at that if you look through the whole chapter.

Again, that might be different than what you have heard. I hope you're already seeing that, boy, what was done at the cross is a whole lot better than this. And yeah, that's the whole point of the book of Hebrews. The blood of bulls and goats could not do certain things whereas the blood of Christ could. So there's an inherent superiority to what we're talking about, with what happened at the cross as opposed to Leviticus. And I actually think that's blurred a little bit with the way evangelicals in particular talk about Leviticus, if they ever talk about it at all. Let's move onto another concept, holiness, or the clean versus unclean language. Now fundamentally, I have to start out by saying this. Holiness in Leviticus, holiness in the Old Testament system, is not about morality though morality is included in the idea. In the Old Testament you have land, you have objects, you have garments, etc., that are called holy.

Now a piece of land and an object and a garment can't engage in moral or immoral behavior so holiness, the terminology itself, should not be linked primarily with moral or immoral behavior. There's something else going on here. The concept actually has to do with something being set apart for sacred space and the divine presence. That's really what holiness is about. I have another source here. JE Hartley did the entry on holy and holiness, clean and unclean, in the Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch volume. And I'm going to read you a little bit of that selection because I think he puts things well and helps us to parse what the terms mean and don't mean. So to quote Hartley beginning,

Two ideas commonly associated with holiness need to be qualified at the outset. First, holiness is often defined as separation, because objects and persons consecrated for use at the sanctuary are removed or set apart from ordinary use. However, separation does not get at the essential meaning of holiness - neither in reference to God, the Holy One, nor in reference to the variety of items described as holy - for it fails to provide any content to the concept of being the holy. Second, the ethical and the holy are often so equated that the terms are used synonymously. In biblical faith this is common because Yahweh, the holy God, is righteous. Consequently, holy defines the character of biblical ethics. Nevertheless, we need to be aware that holiness encompasses far more than ethical behavior. In fact, in most other religions holiness and the ethical are not connected. In non-biblical contexts, holy often refers to a sacred power that inhabits an element of nature, such as a tree or a stream or a specific space such as a burial ground. These sacred objects or places, being closely related to the spirit world, have numinous qualities. In the polytheistic religions of Israel's neighbors, only some of the gods possessed holy power, albeit imperfectly. Holiness as a spiritual force often stood over against the various gods of a pantheon. These rules on ritual purity were not designated or designed either to separate the Israelites from dealing with

foreigners or to set up classes within Israelite society, as was often the case in other cultures. This claim is supported by the fact that most causes of uncleanness come from a person's body, the body of every person, both priests and laity, not from contact with certain classes or with foreigners. The purpose of these rules was to establish boundaries in the routine of daily life in order that the Israelites might live as a holy people serving Yahweh, who is holy. The primary boundary was to prevent any impure person or thing from entering sacred space; therefore, all had to be ritually clean before entering the sanctuary lest holiness consume them.

MSH: Now to summarize all that, that's the end of the Hartley quote. To summarize all that, I hope you're seeing some major points. Holiness, it's not adequate to define holiness as separation because just the fact that a thing is removed from ordinary use doesn't really assign any quality to it. It doesn't really provide any rationale to the thing that's separated. It might be a cup. It might be a plate. It might be a garment. It might be some other ritual object. The fact that it's not used by people tells us that it's special, it's removed, it's "holy", but it doesn't really provide any basis for understanding what holiness means. That's one fundamental thought. Second is we can't necessarily equate ethical behavior, moral behavior, with holiness. They're related but they're not completely overlapping synonyms so we can't use them synonymously because inanimate objects could be holy. Inanimate objects can't engage in moral or immoral behavior.

And then also holiness doesn't really have anything to do per se with Israelites and, within the Israelite community, certain classes of people and even foreigners. Now what Hartley is getting at here is that we can't look at the Levitical system when certain people are excluded from holy ground or sacred space because they touched a carcass or because a woman is in her menstrual cycle. She is unclean but it's ritually unclean. It has nothing to do with morality. It has nothing to do with some sort of good or bad behavior. She is unclean because of the flow of blood and she is unclean in a ritual sense for some reason, we'll explore the logic of it later. She's not allowed on sacred space. She's no farther away though in a moral sense from God than someone who can step onto holy ground. Ritual impurity has nothing to do with someone's walk with God or their spiritual life.

Now it could. Let's say that someone says well, I don't care if I'm ritually unpure and I'm not going through any of the procedures and I'm just going to go violate these stupid laws as many times as I can during the day. That becomes a hardheartedness issue. But just the incident of becoming unclean, according to Levitical law, has no necessary connection with a person being "right" with God in terms of their spiritual life or their love for God. We have to be able to make these distinctions when we talk about Leviticus and we talk about the whole Old Testament system that we often put together and conflate in evangelical talk about the sacrifices. We tend to view this stuff through the lens of the New Testament, through devotional stuff, through preaching talk about walking with God and being close to God, oh, she couldn't be close to God because your menstrual cycle so in the Old Testament, there something wrong with; no there's nothing wrong with her.

The issue with her is that because of this bodily function, which is entirely normal, she is not fit for sacred space and it has to be taken care of. It has nothing, it's no commentary on that woman's love for God or God's love for her. These rules are designed to teach certain things about the nature of God and his otherness. As we go through Leviticus, we'll start to see some of this in more detail and with more specificity. Now lastly, one other concept is, and this is going to be related to what we just talked about, the concept of impurity, ritual impurity, versus moral sin. We need to say something about that. Essentially, what you have in the Levitical system and I am relying on the work of Jonathan Klawans or it's probably better to say I think his work

makes most sense of the material I've read on ritual systems in Leviticus. There are essentially to time two types of impurity in the Old Testament system, one is ritual impurity, the other is moral impurity. Let's talk about some of the differences. And I think you're not going to remember all these things but they're going to come up again as we go to the book.

Characteristics of ritual impurity are things like the following. Ritual impurity will result from contact with perfectly natural sources or events that are basically unavoidable in life, things like childbirth, Leviticus 12, that creates ritual impurity when a woman bears a child. It's no commentary on being close to God or not. There's a ritual significance to it because of the loss of blood.

We'll get to it. We've got contact with natural sources or events that are just unavoidable, childbirth, skin disease, Leviticus 13-14. You got genital discharges, both male and female, Leviticus 15, touching a dead body. So what it amounts to is things like birth, death, sex and disease can render you impure and they're all part of normal life. But we're talking about ritual impurity. And even some priests obviously could not avoid these because the priests have to have contact with the dead to dispose of the dead. They become ritually impure. It's part of their job. To become impure was part of their job. It's not a moral thing. This is ritual impurity. Becoming ritually impure is never described as sinful. You'll never see that and it would be nonsense given the nature of ritual impurity, just things in life that you can't avoid. Now if you refuse to take care of ritual impurity, there are passages in Leviticus and Numbers that talk about a person being cut off from the community, essentially banned. Some scholars even think it's a death penalty, but it's just says cut off from the community. So it can become extreme but in and of itself, ritual impurity, the characteristics are these are natural events, natural sources, natural things you encounter in life, and they're not described as sinful. Other characteristics, ritual impurity is contagious.

In other words, if someone, let's say a woman who is in her menstrual cycle, she becomes ritually impure because of that, she can touch another person and render them ritually impure like herself. Moral impurity, you're not going to have that. If a person commits adultery and goes up and touches somebody else, that doesn't make them an adulterer. There's quite a bit of difference here. Ritual impurity is contagious. Ritual impurity is also not permanent. There were procedural things you can do to become ritually pure. Ritual impurity also excluded people from certain ritual acts and entering sacred areas. If an Israelite commits adultery and nobody knows about it, they can bring a sacrifice and enter sacred space and nothing happens according to Levitical law. The issue with that problem is moral impurity, not ritual impurity. They are two different things. Now let's talk about the characteristics of moral impurity then. So we went through ritual impurity, just to summarize them, you're rendered ritually impure by natural sources or events.

They're never described as sinful. How could they be because you can't avoid them. Ritual impurity is contagious though. It's not permanent and it will exclude people from certain ceremonies or certain areas, but it can be taken care of through different procedures. Now, moral impurity, we're not talking about the same thing. These are acts that according to Leviticus, according to Old Testament law, were considered "defiling", that is, these are acts, these are sins that bring about an impurity that morally corrupts and defiles the sinner and even the land itself. If you want sort of a proof text for that, Leviticus 18:24-25 will illustrate that. Oddly enough though, it didn't really defile sacred space because if a person did this, one of these sins, and it wasn't known in the community, they can still bring an offering for something else and sort of go through the motions and hide their sin and there was no way to detect it. It would necessarily defile sacred space.

Now if it became known and the person entered sacred space, that's a different story. Then we have to repair the sacred area through ritual. So moral impurity, it is moral corruption, impurity that morally defiles and corrupts the sinner. Specifically, these are sins that are mentioned in Leviticus and in Numbers that are of this category, that constitute moral purity of

sexual sins. Leviticus 18:24-30 has a list of them. Idolatry is one of these, Leviticus 19-20, first couple of verses of chapter 20, and bloodshed, unwarranted bloodshed. This would be like deliberate intentional murder, that kind of thing. The taking of innocent life was viewed as one of these defiling sins. That's from Numbers 35:33-34. So these are quite a bit different. To summarize the differences, let's do it this way before we close, we'll wrap up with this. One of the differences between ritual and moral impurity that we will see in the book of Leviticus, number one, ritual impurity normally is not the result of specific sin. Moral impurity is the direct result of a specific and frankly a serious sin. Number two, ritual impurity is contagious. It can defile others by contact.

Moral impurity is never described that way. Touching an adulterer or murderer doesn't make you an adulterer or murderer. But if you touched a ritually impure person, you became impure. You had to go through the same procedures before you could occupy sacred space again. Third, ritual impurity is temporary assuming the procedures to restore purity were followed. Moral impurity is basically permanent in Old Testament law. What are the solutions? Well, adultery solution is the death penalty. Murder, solution is the death penalty. There are no sacrifices for these things. There is no restoration for these things. Now there are some in other laws that don't result in the death penalty. What happens if I steal? Old Testament law said you needed to restore, you needed to give back what you stole and then give beyond that. There's this remunerative idea to certain sins but there are a whole host of things in Old Testament law that you couldn't cure by performing a sacrifice because the sacrifice was not about moral impurity.

The sacrificial system is basically all about taking care of ritual impurity. Fourth, ritual impurities have procedural cures but moral impurities do not, overlaps with what I just said. The guilty are punished for moral impurities, death penalty, that sort of thing. Even victims of morally impure, morally detestable acts like let's say rape, even victims sort of are unfortunately permanently debased. In other words, they're never going to be what they were before. They might have a lesser social status. There might be a stigma to it even as a victim, especially something like a rape. I think of the case of Dinah, where Joseph and his brothers, their sister. Because she's defiled, she's not morally culpable for any of that, but her status in the community, not in terms of oh, you did a heinous act, but oh, this is just awful. You've lost your virginity and now it's going to be much more difficult to have you get married because a lot of men will not want to marry someone who's been defiled. So it has a social impact on people, even certain victims like that.

There's no cure for that because they didn't sin. It's just one of these things about the Old Testament law and how the people, conceptually at the time, how they would view a victim in a case like that. You couldn't just fix it, and frankly in our own culture when people are victimized by certain crimes, sometimes it's just not fixable. So the Old Testament system has its own situations that are similar to ours and their own way of coping with it or not than we would. But ritual impurity, none of that is ever concerned. Victims of morally heinous acts, sometimes you can't fix it. There's no sacrifice that can undo what was done and it's unfortunate that is the way it is. I would say the same goes for the land when we talk about individual victims. But according to Leviticus 18 for instance, the ultimate result of unchecked moral pollution is that the land is polluted and cannot be fixed. The ultimate way that you would have to deal with this is to exile the people. And at some point, the land would have to be supernaturally made new. And frankly in biblical theology, that's only going to happen at one time. That's at the eschaton, the Day of the Lord.

There are certain sins that, if left unchecked, were so serious that Leviticus says well, what happens here is that God will just have to drive the people out and the land is just polluted and it has to be made new by God himself. And that's eschatological language, you don't just reverse that. So it was a serious thing. Lastly, we're talking about differences between ritual and moral impurity. Even the vocabulary is different. Moral impurity has a unique vocabulary associated with it. Moral violations are described with certain terms that are not used for ritual

impurity and the two most telling are *To'ebah* in Hebrew, which is the word that gets translated abomination. You will never see a ritual impurity situation ever described as abomination. That language is reserved for moral impurity. And the other term is *Chaneph*, which is the verb for to pollute. That verb is not used of ritual impure situations but moral impurity you will see that term used. Even the vocabulary is distinct. So as we go through Leviticus, I just overviewed a few of the key concepts.

There are other things we're going to hit. But a lot of the book is about, I should say, is really decipherable only if you keep in mind the differences between ritual impurity, moral impurity, and if you start to get a grasp of ideas like sacred space, ground reserved for the divine presence, only others that only he can permit on it, and then the whole idea of clean and unclean or holy and unclean really in large part. Again, there's an overlap here because that terminology will be used of ritual violations and moral violations but those two are not the same thing. Holiness in large part really relates to making some thing or some person fit to occupy sacred space. It has nothing to do with someone's relationship with God in a spiritual sense or in an emotional sense or anything like that. So if you can wrap your mind around some of these concepts, it will help you keep the content of Leviticus in your head a little straighter, and as we go through, you'll see how the system sort of worked and how it applied. And I think a recurring lesson will be how much better off we are because of the cross as the writer of Hebrews says.

TS: Mike, can you touch on The Mosaic Authorship of Leviticus?

MSH: Yeah there is an issue here because of the Holiness Code. There are some who would take the Holiness Code, and if you recall from the introduction, that was basically the last 10 chapters. Some would apply this to, how can I say it, there are parts of Leviticus that some scholars would not attribute to Moses because they think that certain of the decisions, the way the laws work out, and the way they're put in place, is a reaction specifically to certain things that occurred like during the period of the judges or during the monarchy, in other words, a post-Mosaic time. I think some of that is possible but I don't, in the sense of authorship, I don't think it really matters when you're dealing with post-Mosaic or Mosaic material because the only way it would really matter is if something is unique in a post-Mosaic sense as opposed to a Mosaic sense.

In other words, to me that kind of talk only really makes a difference if there's something new that you could not find in Mosaic Law, like some later addition that was innovative or just doesn't have any precedent in the time of Moses. I think a lot of this is really quite ancient and the logic of it is quite ancient, certainly in a chronological sense overlapping with what would've been the lifetime of Moses. So I guess a short summary is there is some dispute over did Moses write all Leviticus or if not, what parts? And again, I'm bringing into the questions here, does it even matter? I've talked about JEDP in Mosaic authorship before. To me, I'm what used to be called supplementarian as I've said before. I think when we look at the Torah, a lot of it is certainly either written by Moses or would've been written down perhaps may be uttered by Moses and written down by somebody else either contemporary with him or shortly after his life, but it's still Mosaic, that sort of thing. But I'm willing to consider that certain portions of it could have been applications of older Mosaic material responding to new situations, new circumstances but still consistent with what would've been practiced during the time of Moses. So I don't know if that helps specifically but that's the way I look at the whole situation.

TS: Was the writing style back then to refer to yourself in the third person?

MSH: That happens a lot. That's actually a broad literary phenomenon known as illeism. You'll see this throughout the Pentateuch where God will refer to himself as the third person. You'll see it in Shakespeare. You'll see it in lots of different places. And it is a self-referential thing so we

can't take that language for instance and use it to say we must have two or three or a Trinity here because God uses the third person when he is the speaker. It is actually a literary phenomenon or technique that is often employed to catch the attention and therefore possibly to emphasize something that's coming. But it would catch the ear or the eye but it's still one speaker in the instance, the example you're bringing up.

TS: I'm also curious Mike, how do Jews parse Leviticus versus Christians in today's time?

MSH: Obviously, the Jewish experience is really a post-temple experience, a post-tabernacle, a post-sanctuary, a post-sacrifice experience because of the exile. And even after the exile, during the second temple period, the lack of complete control over their own land. Yes we do have Pharisees. We do have Sadducees. We do have some semblance in a small way to what would've been under the monarchy but once you get past 70 AD when there is no temple at all, and you sort of have a situation like you had during the exile after the first temple was destroyed and before the second temple was built, those circumstances actually really are more similar to what we have now.

Jews do not worship in temples. There is no temple. So we go to synagogue. That is the era when, instead of the Levitical system having such a focus because you need it, because you need to maintain sacred space so that you can bring your sacrifice, you can offer a burnt offering which was a worship sacrifice, you can do these sorts of things. You have to enter sacred space to do that. When you don't have that and you don't have a Levitical system, the thing that becomes primary is Torah because that is the written word of God and it can be taught in synagogues and, of course, was. So that is really the emphasis in synagogues now. What does the Torah say? We still try to observe the festivals, the major events that are described in the Torah even though we don't offer sacrifice.

They adapted how they do Passover. They would adapt other holidays. So there's still an effort to observe these things but it's really done in the absence of a system that involves sacrifices and whatnot. And they added some too. Hanukah, that's not a biblical festival and if you embrace the Alexandrian Canon and you have the books of Maccabees in there then you could say Hanukah belongs in the ritual inspired calendar just like anything else does because of the book of Maccabees and what happened during those events. Okay, but even if you don't, Jews are still going to celebrate that.