

Introduction

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- [0 : 0 0] Alright, so let's get started briefly. I hope that there will be a little bit of discussion. I know 55 people are so kind of big for discussion, but a couple of moments maybe of discussion.
- First, it's really important to think about the structure of this book. And the structure is a chiasm. Now, I don't know if you've, you'll see on the handout, I don't know if you've read The Gruffalo.
- What a great book, The Gruffalo. And The Gruffalo is a chiasm. Almost all of Julia Donaldson's books are chiastic. What is a chiasm? So you can see it there in the handout.
- A chiasm is this, there's an intro. The mouse took a walk in the deep dark wood. And then you'll see an A, B, C, D, C, B, A structure.
- So in Julia Donaldson's book, the mouse meets the fox, the mouse meets the owl, the mouse meets the snake, the mouse meets the Gruffalo. And then the mouse and the Gruffalo meet the snake, the owl, the fox.
- [1 : 0 0] And so you see that it works its way in a ladder to the center and then back out again. That's a chiasm. So there's an A1 and an A2, a B1 and a B2, a C1, C2, and a D at the middle.
- So the most classic chiastic structures are sevenfold. So you see Julia was thinking so along the lines of the biblical redemptive story and making her, Gruffalo series like many others in her works, a sevenfold chiastic structure.
- There are a ton of these across the Bible. They're all over the place. And Leviticus is a sevenfold chiasm. Okay, and it's broken down into seven moments where we have this phrase in the Lord spoke to Moses.
- So this happens in a sevenfold movement and there's the breakdown of the sevenfold movement. There's an intro, the Lord spoke to Moses from out of the tent. That's the intro line, just like the mouse took a walk in the deep dark wood.
- And then there's ritual sacrifices, A1. Now just cast your eyes down to A2 at the end of the book and you have ritual feasts. So those are parallels.
- [2 : 1 2] If you see B1 priestly ordination, B2 priestly qualifications, and then C and C2 purity and moral purity.
- And then at the very heart is the day of atonement. And so meeting the Gruffalo and the day of atonement are the two central pieces of those two different books. It's a sevenfold chastic structure.
- Very important to remember. All right, part two, moving on. Now that leads us in the thinking about the context of this book. And when we talk about Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, that is the pentateute, the fivefold books of Moses, five books, pentateute, the Torah, we call it the law.
- And Leviticus is the third book of the pentateute of five. And when you have five, the third is the center, right?

And when you look at the books of Moses, the Torah, one of the things that's really important to ask is in each book of the first five books is where are God's people whenever the words of Leviticus or any other book are written.

[3 : 23] So let me throw that out for discussion. Does anybody have a sense of where is Israel when the words, the book of Leviticus, the instructions from God in history are given to Moses?

Where is Israel in that moment? They are in the desert. Yeah, they've been wandering through the desert. They haven't yet begun their 40 year wilderness journey.

Not yet, right? They're still at Mount Sinai. So they've been wandering, they've wandered for 50 days after they crossed the Red Sea and they're at Mount Sinai.

So they get to Mount Sinai in Exodus 19. They leave Mount Sinai in Numbers 10. The pentateute in English Bibles is 187 chapters and 57 of those chapters are Israel sitting at the bottom of Mount Sinai.

The pentateute covers well over a thousand years, actually much more than that. We don't quite know how long. And 57 of the 180 book, 80 chapters are covering 343 days while they're at Mount Sinai.

[4 : 32] And so that means that a third of the entire Torah is about the moment they're sitting at the bottom of Mount Sinai. The third of the whole Torah covers one year in the midst of five books that cover thousands of years.

Well over a thousand years at least, right? And so there's a real focus where all of a sudden you realize the heartbeat of the first five books of the Bible is what's going on at the bottom of Mount Sinai.

And when you look and see, oh, God gave us five books of the Torah, the centerpiece, the third is Leviticus. And that helps you to realize that Leviticus is the heart of the Torah.

It's the heartbeat of the Torah. It's the dead middle. Now let's broaden back out a bit. What is the narrative context of Leviticus? What has just happened in the life of Israel in the broadest brush strokes?

There are a few things that happened, Exodus, anything. It doesn't matter. They've just been liberated from slavery. Right, exactly.

[5 : 39] Thanks, Simon. So Israel was liberated from slavery in Egypt. So they come out of Egypt, they cross the Red Sea. Yeah, what else?

They come to Mount Sinai, they get the Ten Commandments. What happens while Moses is on the top of Mount Sinai? They make a golden calf. And so in the end of Exodus, about 2 thirds of the way through, we have this incident of idolatry that takes place while Moses is on top of the mountain.

So they've been caught out of Egypt, caught out of slavery by God's grace. They've come to Sinai. They've heard the Ten words, the Ten Commandments. They've set up an idol to worship and they're trying to approach God in completely the wrong way.

By the way, the golden calf incident is not an issue of them worshipping a false God, as it's sometimes thought. If you read carefully in the golden calf story, it's an issue of them trying to worship the Lord through the means of the golden calf.

So they're trying to worship God through an image, not worshipping another God. And that's an important distinction. And so the issue is they don't know how to approach God. They don't know how to worship.

[6 : 47] And they've got this impenetrable cloud, God's presence, covering Mount Sinai, and they can't approach. And so at the dead center of the Torah, Leviticus is answering a fundamental question that's based on that incident.

God comes down, he meets with them. As soon as they enter God's presence, they immediately worship God. And the most fundamentally wrong way.

And so there's a natural question that comes up, right? What's the question maybe in your mind that comes up? What would Leviticus be there for if that's the incident that God is addressing?

Any thoughts? How can you approach God? How can you approach God? Obviously you don't know how. And obviously you can't because Sinai is in a theophanic, an appearance of the Lord cloud of mystery and one where God says, if you touch this, you're gonna die.

And every attempt you've made has been a failure. And so God has saved them by His grace, brought them to the mountain, and they don't know how to approach the Lord. And so the question, as Day put it, is exactly that, how do you approach the living God?

[7 : 57] How can a person come into the presence of the living God? Now, one more thing, and we'll move to the third section. And I've not been looking at the handout, which might be slightly different from my notes.

Leviticus is also part as the center of a chiasmic structure in the whole Torah, in the whole of the five books.

Right, and so I think, did I put that there? Yeah, so you can see Genesis is about God choosing a patriarch to promise, I'm gonna make you into a people, and I'm gonna give you a promised land, and there's a journey towards the land.

And then Exodus is about a movement from slavery to the mountain, and then to the wilderness journey. You see in Leviticus, it's about how do you get into God's presence? And then the reciprocal happens in numbers and Deuteronomy, the back half of that, that fills out that chiasm.

And so you learn there that Leviticus really is the heartbeat of the Torah. And so the question there, I think there's a little blank on your handout is, if that's the case, if you put all these chiasms together, these structures, Leviticus is the heartbeat of the Torah, what is the heartbeat of the heartbeat?

[9 : 07] So if you think about that central chiasm, where Leviticus is the center of the five books of Moses, what is the center of the center? Sorry?

The tabernacle is at the center physically, but I mean in terms of the textual layout there, according to the chiasms, what's the center of the center? The day of atonement, D, right?

In a seven-fold chiasm, as the Old Testament books are so often put, there is a center. And so when you're reading a book of the Bible, one of the things, like with the Stardew Bible or something like that, is you wanna find out where are these structures?

Because then you can find out where the heartbeat is. And the heartbeat of Leviticus is the day of atonement. And so we've got, we're not gonna talk about it tonight, but we know now that we've got in a month or two to really understand what's going on at the day of atonement, to understand the Torah, the whole of the five books, because it's the heartbeat of the heartbeat, right?

And so we'll come back around to that in a little while. Why is Leviticus the heart of the Torah? Why is the day of atonement the heartbeat of the heartbeat? And so point three, the main idea. Read, flip over with me, you've got a Bible.

[10 : 16] Let's look at, we won't get into a ton of Leviticus text tonight at all, that'll be next time, but because we're just trying to understand what's around it. But Leviticus one, one, the Lord called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting.

Now, one of the most important words there is the word from or out of the tent of meeting. So where is Moses? Where would you think Moses is based on Leviticus one, one?

Any ideas? In the simplest way, where might Moses be? He's around the mountain certainly, but here one of the pieces of context is that the tabernacle has now been constructed.

So that's a thoughtful answer. The back half of Exodus is the instructions, go and build this tabernacle. So the tabernacle has been constructed. I should have mentioned that for context.

And so it says the Lord spoke from out of the tabernacle to Moses, simply meaning that Moses has to be where? Not inside the tabernacle, right? He's not in the tent, he's outside of it.

[11 : 27] Israel's committed apostasy by trying to worship God in the wrong way, even after he saved them. God said, now go build a tabernacle, go build a temple. And now that that temple has been built, the tabernacle, the very first thing we see is now the Lord spoke from inside of it to outside, Moses is not inside of it.

So the question that they mentioned, how can the mediator himself, the first priest, Moses, even get inside the tabernacle into the presence of God?

That's the question that immediately comes up at the beginning, right? So we're seeing the same theme of the main idea. What is the main idea of Leviticus? What is the heartbeat of the Torah?

What is the heartbeat of the heartbeat in the day of Atonement all about? It is about the simple idea of how can you get what you were made for? And what were you made for?

To enter into the presence of the living God. That's what Leviticus is about. That's what the Torah is about. You were made for God's presence, you were kicked out of God's presence, how do you get back into it?

[12 : 31] How do you get there again? And that's exactly what we see here in Leviticus 1-1. And so the Lord speaks to Moses from inside of the tent. Now if you just think for 30 seconds about the Psalms and about so much of the language throughout the rest of the Old Testament, we sing a hymnized version of Psalm 15 here, which is a paraphrase, but it asks, oh Lord, our Lord, who can dwell in your tent?

Who can abide on your holy hill? Well, what's it talking about? It's talking about who can go up Mount Sinai? Who can go in the Tabernacle? Right, that's what Psalm 15 is about. And then it says, he who walks in blamelessness, he who is never rude to his neighbor, he who never gossips.

That's the next few lines. And then you realize the point of Psalm 15 is to say, who can enter the presence of God? And the answer is, nobody. Nobody can.

He who is blameless can go in. And so we start to think, what is Leviticus about? How can you enter the presence of God? And that's when it comes clear again, where only the holy, only the blameless, only the person who is as holy as God is holy can enter.

So the Lord says later in Leviticus, be holy as I am holy. And you say, well, how in the world is anybody gonna get what they were made for and enter the presence of God? Let me just stop for 30 seconds here and ask, what does it mean to say God is holy, or a person is holy?

[13 : 59] Just throw out maybe some adjectives that jump out to you. Separate, unique, beyond reproach. Very, yeah.

What else? Different, just, right, good, pure. That's one of the things that comes out of Leviticus.

Holiness is purity, moral righteousness, all sorts of ways to talk about it. How are we gonna enter if we're none of those things? That's the question of Leviticus.

Here's what's so striking about Leviticus in such a simple way, is that God makes a way for people to enter. And so as much as Leviticus is a difficult book to read, it's actually very simple.

How can you get into God's presence? And the answer to Leviticus is not in any way, you must follow a thousand rules. That's not really the idea. The idea of Leviticus is when there is no way, God makes a way graciously by symbolic sacrifice.

[15 : 05] Those symbols are all pointing elsewhere, but the point of Leviticus is just to say, God is so gracious to give you a system by which you can enter into His holy presence.

The very thing you were made for, that's the main idea. So I think it's written on your handout there at the bottom of point three. In Leviticus, you don't enter God's presence based on your good works, you don't enter because you're pure, no, not at all.

You enter because God graciously and symbolically makes you pure through the means of a substitute. That's the point. What do you need to enter into God's presence in Leviticus?

You need a ritual. And that ritual is a ritual sacrifice of substitution. You need a mediator who is holy himself.

Those are the main two things. You have to have a holy priest engage in a ritual substitutionary sacrifice on your behalf. You don't do the sacrifice, the priest does it for you.

[16 : 04] And the priest enters into the holy place representing you. You need a mediator who is holy, a holy priest. And you need a ritual substitutionary sacrifice.

Does it sound familiar? We see already the Christological implications of what's building here in the Levitical system and how it's raising. Now, before we move to point four, and we're moving quickly, just flip over with me to Numbers 1-1 and see this.

You see how much Moses structured these books that he gave us. All right, remember Leviticus 1-1.

The Lord spoke to Moses from inside the tent. Right? Moses was outside the tent. Numbers 1-1, the Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai where?

In the tent. So did Leviticus work? You see how much this is how highly structured this is? Leviticus 1-1, God spoke inside to people who were outside.

[17 : 11] Numbers 1-1, God spoke to Moses in the tent while Moses was also in the tent, right? So you can see what Leviticus is up to and how successful God's program of redemption here is in the sacrificial system.

All right, let's pull out just a little bit. The point of Leviticus and the structure of the Tabernacle. We won't do the Tabernacle at all in any detail we can't in this space.

So one of the things I would really encourage you, if you really want to dive in and understand this book, I would say that understanding Leviticus will open the doors to so many passages in the Bible for you, for all of us.

And one of the things that is fairly necessary in that is to get a decent grasp of the Tabernacle and its structure and all the things that are going on with it. Now, I wanted to put up a really nice graphic of the Tabernacle and today, discussing with others, we found that it is...

I found nearly impossible to get a non-copyright image of the Tabernacle off the Internet. So the best one is in the ESV Study Bible. I have it here, but we can't publish it as an institution.

[18 : 21] So check it out sometime. But let me just get out of this way. The Tabernacle itself is a tent, the tent of meeting, the Tabernacle.

And in it, it has two compartments, the Holy Place and the Holy Holies. You make the sacrifices outside of the Tabernacle in the broader court.

So sacrifices don't happen inside of it, they happen outside of it. You can't enter the Tabernacle without the sacrifice already having happened. See that logic? Yeah. And you can see this if you pull up any diagram, you'll see the sacrificial altar outside the Tabernacle tent, outside the tent of meeting, more specifically.

Sometimes the word Tabernacle refers to the whole structure, including the court. But let me do this. If somebody... Can I ask somebody to flip over? Or I've got it actually right here, to Numbers, Chapter 8.

And I just want to highlight one thing to bring out the meaning of this. The depth of insight that is present in these five books that Moses has given us.

[19 : 28] It says this, Now the Lord spoke to Moses saying, Speak to Aaron and say to him, When you set up the lamps inside the Holy Place, that is, The seven lamps shall give light in the front of the lampstand.

Inside the Holy Place there is a menorah, a lamp. And it's described to us in Exodus as designed according to the look of an almond tree.

And here we learn that that lamp has seven branches. And here we're told that when the Tabernacle is set up, the lamp or the lights, which are referred to in a minute as blossoms, the lights are blossoms, like a tree, blossoming, are to be bent outward facing the front.

That's what we learn here. It's a tiny detail. And I just want to draw out one tiny detail and move on. Why? So it's one of those things that you pass over. You never stop for something like this.

But the light was to be bent. Well, if you read the order of the Tabernacle, you learn that the table of the presence is right across in the room from the lamps, the seven-fold lamp.

[20 : 41] And the table of the presence had bread always on top of it. And how many pieces of bread are there? There's 12 pieces of bread. And the idea here is that whenever the lamps are lit, the almond tree, with seven branches, they are to shine their lights on the table of presence.

Now, what's the symbol there, do you think? Any ideas? We can construct it together, I think. Across the Bible, what does light represent?

God's presence, exactly. The divine presence. The light of the world came into the darkness, right? And the light of life came into creation at the beginning.

God is holy light, it's a divine presence. And then the table of presence, as it was literally called, and on top of that table is what? 12 pieces of bread. And what do they symbolize?

The 12th of Jesus, the people of God, right? And so it's saying when you set up the Tabernacle and you light the lamp, the almond tree, you need to know that that is to tell you that God's presence is with his people.

[21 : 51] So turn the lamps, the blossoms, and make them face the table of presence so that you get that sense of it, right? Leviticus, the entire Tabernacle structure, everything about it, if you do in-depth study at every level is all about one thing, and that's how can you get what you were made for to enter the presence of God, the light himself, right?

That's the big point of the entire book. So just before that, we think about the Aaronic benediction. May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine on you, right?

This is Tabernacle language. We don't receive the Aaronic benediction like an Israelite would have. They would have immediately understood through the visual images all around them what that means, that when the lights are lit in the Tabernacle, we know that his face is now shining upon us, his theophanic, his divine presence has come down into this holy space.

Think about Psalm 16. You make known to me the path of life. There is the fullness of joy in your presence, and there are pleasures at your right hand forevermore. Almost the entire book of Psalms.

By the way, how many books are there in the Psalms? Five books. The Psalms are structured after the Torah, right? So book three of the Psalms is the centerpiece.

[23 : 14] This happens all across the Old Testament. All across David, Psalm 27, we preached on that a few weeks back. What does he pray and verse four?

I long to look upon your face in the holy place. I long to see the light of your presence, right? He says, so you see this language all across the Psalms. All right, let's move things towards the conclusion.

We only have about six minutes left, seven minutes. Coming up in this series, there's so much application to us as modern people. So details about lights and holy places and all this kind of stuff is so important because it's Bible.

And also it really does speak to us in pretty detailed ways. We're gonna see when we talk about ritual purity of some weeks from now, that being told, do not touch a dead animal in your normal life and if you do, you can't come to the temple.

That tells you something about how to be a Christian at the workplace. There's a direct connection to that in the New Testament to faith and work. When you read about moral purity at the back of Leviticus, it tells you how to relate to people who are poor.

[24 : 23] It tells you about sexual integrity. It tells you about what makes a city just or unjust and how to live in a way that promotes justice. When you read about priestly ordination, it stirs up in us a theology of why do we still ordain people?

So have you thought, one of the questions would be, when we come to that, have you thought about it? What exactly do we believe is going on when we lay hands on somebody to ordain them? And how is that different in our context from other Christian traditions?

Well, Leviticus has everything to say to that. We start with Leviticus to understand something like that. Leviticus teaches you about the conditions of forgiveness. We're gonna talk about that in the coming weeks.

Leviticus teaches you about the meaning of the cross, the day of atonement, the very centerpiece. Leviticus tells you about the gathering of God's people, the church, and why this building is no longer called a temple.

Why? In the Roman Catholic tradition, that's quite different. And why is that? What about Jesus makes that different? We've got to talk about that. That's something that's very important in this book.

[25 : 31] Leviticus tells you so much about the Lord's Supper and what's going on in the moment that the bread is broken and the Lord's Supper. Tons of ways. So that's what's coming, but let me close with a couple of things.

One, I just wanna make three quick points that we'll keep coming back to that are big ideas, but I think really important that this could be fresh material, but really significant.

First, point four, the Tabernacle's relationship to the cosmos and the Garden of Eden, that sounds very high, but it's in some sense just simple. Here they are. First, we will unpack this the rest of the semester.

The Tabernacle, this space in Leviticus that God instructs is a symbol itself of the whole universe, the whole cosmos.

And just a couple of quick reasons for that, and I'll save the rest for later. Genesis one, two, the wind of God, the spirit of God came down and hovered over the face of the waters.

[26 : 35] Exodus 31, Exodus 35, lots of places, the construction of the temple of the Tabernacle. The wind of God, the spirit of God, exact same Hebrew language came down and hovered for the instructions over the temple, over the Tabernacle.

Let there be light is the same word as let there be lamps. Same language, the luminaries that God set in the heavens, the sun, moon and stars are then compared to exactly the lights that we receive in the holy place.

God is a workman metaphorically in Genesis one, and he commissions in the same language the builders of the Tabernacle to be like him in that way. The cosmos is God's temple.

So here's the point of creation. God made the world to make the world his temple. The whole world is supposed to be his temple. And where's the holy of holies?

God makes creation, the whole creation is his holy created temple for him to enter in. Where's the holy of holies? In the beginning. The Garden of Eden.

[27 : 44] That's exactly right. In the beginning there was a temple. It was the whole cosmos. There was a holy of holies. It was the Garden of Eden. In the holy of holies at the very center, there was what, a tree.

And in the Tabernacle, you have trees, you have cherubim. What's embroidered on the entry gate to the holy of holies in the Tabernacle?

Two cherubs guarding the way. What do we have standing just outside the Garden of Eden? Two cherubim guarding the way. The Garden of Eden is the holy of holies within a cosmic temple.

God created the world. What is a temple? All a temple is, is wherever God chooses to be. That's it. So a temple is not, doesn't have to be any fancier than that.

It's just wherever God chooses to be. The cosmos is God's temple. He came to dwell with us. And the Garden of Eden is the holy of holies. The whole point of Adam and Eve was to spread to open the door of the holy of holies so that the whole world would be the holy of holies.

[28 : 47] And they failed at that. And when Jesus Christ rose from the dead, the temple of the curtain, the holy of holies, was ripped into. Why? So that the whole of the cosmos would once again be the cosmic temple of God, of the living God.

And so this is a book that's all about divine presence. I'm gonna jump ahead and skip every religion in ancient Near East has all this stuff. We'll come back to that and just conclude with this.

I wanna leave you with this. I love the Heidelberg Catechism question number six on this. Did God create people so wicked and perverse as Adam and Eve became and as we are? No, God created them good and in his own image.

That is in true righteousness and holiness so that they might truly know God, their creator, love him with all their heart and live with him in eternal happiness for his praise and glory. So there it is. That's the heartbeat of Leviticus.

We were made to live in God's presence. We were made, this world was made to be God's cosmic temple and the new creation is achieving that. That's the point of the work of Christ.

[29 : 47] And so we'll come back to this more and more. Can I challenge you to read the book of Leviticus a couple times this semester? And I'll leave you with a couple final thoughts where one minute passed.

The book of Leviticus is simply a manifesto of God's divine hospitality that he wants to be with you. He wants to welcome you into his house, into his temple and he wants to eat at the table with you.

It's the reason we celebrate the Lord's Supper. It's the reason we're gonna talk about hospitality and city groups which connects to Leviticus very closely all this year. And then the last thing is this. I don't wanna leave this without bringing this home to modern people in a particular way.

And so again, we're gonna build, build, build all semester. But one of the problems I think for modern people that comes out of a book like Leviticus is if you were and I were made for God's holy divine presence, so many people in our city that don't know Jesus are struggling with a question like, if God would show up in holy divine smoke, like he did at the mountain of God in the Old Testament, I would bow the knee.

It's the problem that's often expressed of divine hiddenness. If God would show himself to me, if I was made for his presence, why is it that God seems far away and distance and I can't see him?

[31 : 15] And I'll leave this quote from Alex O'Connor who's a very well-known atheist with you because we're out of time. But Alex just simply talks about how he's looked everywhere for God and he just wants one experience of this presence that Leviticus talks about.

And he doesn't seem to be able to find it. And in Alex's case, in anybody's case, one of the things I would say is what Leviticus tries to do is simply ask have we looked for God's divine presence particularly in the cross of Jesus Christ.

And in that seeing that if God is God, he might have reasons for not unveiling himself fully to me right now that I can't understand because he's bigger than me and smarter.

And the one thing I can say that we can say is that Leviticus points us directly to Jesus and in Jesus, Jesus experienced ultimate, ultimate divine hiddenness. The presence of God, the Father was fully taken away from him so that we might experience the presence of God in the temple of God in the whole cosmos one day.

I don't know all the reasons why God doesn't unveil that right now. I don't know, but I do know that you can look at Jesus and say that I know that he loves me and I know that Jesus lost that presence so I could have it and I'm gonna trust him until the new creation and the moment that the whole universe becomes a visible temple of the living God.

[32 : 47] And I think that's what Leviticus drives us to. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for this great book. We just ask that you would focus our hearts on it this semester so that we would be transformed, Lord, and more and more.

And I think the prayer this semester, Lord, is just that we would long for your holy presence in our lives, that we would seek it, that we would grab hold like Jacob and just wrestle for it.

So give us that heart to just want to be near you more and more and more. That's the message, I think, of Leviticus. So we ask for that heart in Jesus' name, amen.