

## Understanding God in the Old Testament

# A God of Priests

### Leviticus 8-15

This morning I want to pick up our study of understanding God in the Old Testament and look at our God as a God of Priests. This closely ties in with our study of God being a God who demands a response of worship and the pursuit of holiness. We have seen that Leviticus is all about the holiness and purity of God. As we look at man's outright disobedience and this inability to do the right thing, we find that there exists a great canyon between God and man.

We cannot fully fathom the purity and holiness of God. On our own we are distasteful, we are bothersome, we are foolish, we are arrogant. We have already seen God's dealings with the Israelites and how God just couldn't stand to be around them because of their disregard. Yet, God still chooses to draw close by sending his son to clean us up.

The whole reason why God establishes the Tabernacle is so that he could be with his people. Yet, in order to remain one whom God listens to, one must be willing to worship and acknowledge the purity and holiness of God, and their inadequacies. Seeing God as he truly is should motivate our worship.

We now find ourselves at Leviticus 8 where God begins to establish the roles of the Priest. Aaron we find all through the story of Moses – he was the one who became the mouth piece of Moses and yes he was also the one who gave into the whims of the Israelite people and created a Golden calf for them to worship.

You would have thought that God would have given up on Aaron in regards to playing such a key role but just like his character shows, **the God we serve is a God of second chances and he is a God of restoration.**

Aaron was restored to a place of purpose once again. In **Leviticus 8:12** we read:

*12 Then Moses poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head, anointing him and making him holy for his work.*

Remember that the idea of being holy is to pursue or turn our ways towards God's ways. According to the key verse of Leviticus that we are to "be holy as God is holy". As we have seen in the book of Exodus the Priests were to be ministers to God. They represented the people to God. They needed to make sure that they were right before God before they could represent anyone else. **Hebrews 5:1-3** tells us:

*1 Every high priest is a man chosen to represent other people in their dealings with God. He presents their gifts to God and offers sacrifices for their sins. 2 And he is able to deal gently with ignorant and wayward people because he himself is*

*subject to the same weaknesses. 3 That is why he must offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as theirs.*

In fact, as we look at the life of Aaron and his beginning his new role later in chapter 9 we find that he does just that. In **Leviticus 9:7**:

*7 Then Moses said to Aaron, “Come to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering to purify yourself and the people. Then present the offerings of the people to purify them, making them right with the Lord,\* just as he has commanded.”*

The priest was the same as the people he represented – sinful. But confession, his God-given purpose and his God focused worship was what drew him closer to God. For Aaron, worship was a part of his everyday life.

It is the same for all of us here, that **if we confess who we are, if we are willing to acknowledge that God has purpose for our everyday lives, and if we are willing to worship God with everything that we have, God draws close and speaks to us and shows us things like never before.** **Psalm 100:4-5** tells us:

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and praise his name. 5 For the Lord is good. His unfailing love continues forever, and his faithfulness continues to each generation.*

*6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.* **Philippians 4:6**

When we come with gratitude and worship in our hearts God draws close. **The Priest was to draw people’s attention and life back into a Godward-gaze and focus.** The Problem with the earthly Priest of the Old Testament was that he was fallible, making mistakes, doing the best he could but he was after all human.

In chapter 10 in the mistakes of Aarons sons Nadab and Abihu who performed the sacrifice incorrectly and were struck dead. **Man will never have the ability to come before God based on his own merit.** No one is good enough, no one can change their eternal destiny based on their behavior and so we need a Priest, who just like us humans, but who is still holy enough to go into the presence of God and become our adequate representative. We have that in Jesus Christ.

The book of Hebrews talks about the role of the priest and how today Jesus fulfills all of these roles. **Hebrews 10:11-12** tells us:

*11 Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. 12 But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for*

*sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand.*

**What took the Old Testaments Priests a lifetime to do, Jesus came and accomplished it at one time.** The scripture tells us that he now sits.

In Leviticus 11-15 we read of all the rules and regulations, all the things that the Israelites were to avoid in order to remain holy and set apart to the things of God. In fact, it involved every aspect of life. Yet this law of holiness only showed more and more how man was inadequate to have a relationship with God. Paul put it this way in **Romans 3:20**:

*20 For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are.*

Every time an Old Testament Priest offered a sacrifice it was a reminder of a persons inadequacy. **Every time we focus our thoughts on the work of Jesus it should remind us of our inadequacy yet Jesus adequacy to bridge a great canyon between us and God.**

We now have a Priest in heaven – a representative who brings glory and worship to God. **Romans 6:10** tells us:

*10 When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God.*

**Every time we look at Jesus Christ, we should see our sin and God's sacrifice given to us so that we could be holy enough to stand in the presence of God, holy enough to have the Spirit of God living in our earthly bodies, holy enough to become priests ourselves to a world that is still in the dark about this Good News that we speak of.** **1 Peter 2:5, 9-10** tells us:

*5 And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. \* Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God.*

*You are royal priests, \* a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. 10 "Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy."\**

To God the role of the priest is so crucial to his kingdom. Just as the priests of the Old Testament represented people to God and made sure that their gaze was on God, for you and I today we are charged with the office of priest to worship God, to pray to God, and to give our lives in service to his Kingdom. It is not a kingdom built on money or power but a kingdom built on mercy and grace.

We have the great role of bringing a persons gaze back to God and away from worldly things, to bring them, through the message of Jesus Christ, into the presence of God, offering up sacrifices – not animal sacrifices because sin has been taken cared of, but sacrifices mentioned in **Hebrews 13:15-16**:

*15 Therefore, let us offer through Jesus a continual sacrifice of praise to God, proclaiming our allegiance to his name. 16 And don't forget to do good and to share with those in need. These are the sacrifices that please God.*

Our whole life is to be lived in praise and gratitude to God. **We are priests who are to lead people to the grace of God, feeling that it is our responsibility to represent them to God.** We are not the ones who save them, yet we are to be willing and ready to become the bridge to Jesus Christ, who then bridges them to God.

*9 For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus. 1 Timothy 1:9*

And as God's priests, I pray that our lives will be marked with the pursuit of holiness, the offering of worship from our lips and our lives, and prayers for the people that we have access to. As priests, I pray that we don't see our own lives as belonging to ourselves, but that we have been bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and that each and everyday we would value the grace of God.

Just this thought alone, I hope and pray changes your lives. You are a priest in this modern day world. It is not a position given based on qualifications, it is not an office that can be earned, but it is a calling to those who have experienced the kindness of God firsthand, and are charged with taking to the world.

We serve a God of priests, representatives, ministers, people just like you and I who have no calling other than to bring people to God through the work and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Therefore, represent well! Let pray!