

# **BIB103 OT1: Creation and Covenants**

## Unit 4b Day in the Life of a Priest

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John: A lot in the Pentateuch has to do with what we here talked about: duties, responsibilities, guidelines, restrictions, feasts. All those are kind of wrapped up in there and to the point where it becomes monotonous at times. And I think we miss that God didn't just throw that in there because he was feeling space up. He had a purpose for those feasts. He had a purpose for those regulations. He had a purpose for what they did. So as you think about and as you study, I should say, this section of Scripture and really try to evaluate it in relationship to, again, the breadth and depth of the whole of Scripture but the foundational aspects that come from the Pentateuch, what are some ways that you have seen God at work or you see the way that God is at work through the regulations and the priests that he laid out there and their responsibilities and the feasts and the different, what seemed to be, mile markers for the children of Israel that even flushed themselves out into today?

George: Right. Right. Well, one of the things that strikes me in the Pentateuch, especially in the Book of Leviticus, is the role that the priest plays. The priest is the mediator.

John: Right.

George: And we know today that that mediatory role is fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ, right?

John: Right.

George: And thank God for that.

John: Amen.

George: But when I study Leviticus, I look at the priestly role, and in particular, all of the sacrifices that he was responsible for, not just keeping them straight, which is probably hard enough.

John: Yeah.

George: But performing them on that daily, weekly, monthly, whatever it was. Performing them on that regular basis. And the difficulty that that would be to do that work and also the pressure that it would put on them for what that work meant. And I think God puts that in the Scripture even for us in our day to see how seriously God takes sin, how ugly sin is, and how gracious God is to at least provide a way of atonement for sin.

John: Yeah. And when you consider that, there was a lot of very specific responsibilities that the priest had. You mentioned that. I remember reading later on, which we'll get to at a different study, but when

they, Solomon, had all the sacrifices, I mean, a hundred thousand or so, I can't remember the exact number, when the temple was dedicated. And as you study Scripture, what are some of those specific responsibilities and those day in, day out things that the priests had to deal with?

George: Yeah. Well, we often romanticize the Levitical priesthood and the sacrifices. We look at the symbolism and we look at the detail, and we think, "Oh, wow. That's neat," or "That's cool," or "I'd like to see that."

John: Right.

George: But think about a day in the life of a priest.

John: Yeah.

George: Okay? So Mr. Priest, let's say he's second generation Levitical priest. He's working in the wilderness.

John: Okay.

George: So let's just imagine we're in the wilderness. We're maybe a year or two away from entering the Promised Land. They've been in the wilderness almost 40 years. The unbelieving generation has almost died off.

John: Right.

George: Let's say you have this young priest. His dad was one of the original priests.

John: Okay.

George: Let's just say. And so this young man, he's different from his dad. He's a believer. He understands who God is. In his heart, the Spirit has given him that gift of faith. And he understands the importance of these sacrifices and he trusts God, and yet he's struggling with his daily life.

John: Yeah.

George: Okay? In Leviticus 4, 5, and 6, we have sort of an outline of various sacrifices. This is only a few of them. There's a lot more. But as I've studied Leviticus, I just think and imagine what a typical day would be like. So the priest gets up in the morning and he realizes that he has sin in his own life that needs to be taken care of. So before anything can be done on behalf of the people, the priest, for his

own sin, it was different from sins of the people and there were different requirements. But for the priest, for his own unintentional sin, by the way, not even something he meant to do...

John: Yeah.

George: Something that's discovered after the fact.

John: Right.

George: This priest has to find a young bull and kill it. Now, just that alone, think about what that must have been like.

John: Yeah.

George: You have to wrestle this animal, tie it up somehow. You didn't have a gun back then where you can just shoot it.

John: Right.

George: You didn't have lethal injection materials.

John: Yeah.

George: So you have to get this animal. And it says a young bull, but I would imagine even a young bull would be a few hundred pounds and pretty strong, right?

John: Yeah. Yeah, I would think.

George: You have to take this animal. You have to slit his throat. So now you're a mess. You're wrestling this animal. Maybe the animal gets away from you three or four times before you can finally kill it. You wrestle this thing to the ground. You slit its throat. Now blood is going everywhere. You have to kill it in a particular way. You have to cut it up in a particular way.

John: Right.

George: You have to collect the blood in a particular way. You have to go to the place of the altar and you have to put blood on certain parts and not other parts. And you have to be very careful about how this is done.

John: Right.

George: Then you take this carcass of this animal and you have to separate the fat from it. So this is not a five-minute activity.

John: No.

George: This is taking perhaps hours at the beginning of your day to make atonement for yourself so that you can make atonement for the people.

John: For your unintentional sins.

George: Unintentional sins. Right. Not even the stuff that we willfully do.

John: Yeah.

George: Just stuff that we forgot to do or something that we made a mistake or failed to observe some finer point of the law.

John: Right.

George: Then, as a priest then, this young man has to go through all of this. He's dirty. He's filthy. He's touched a dead animal in its own right, and so he's unclean in certain aspects.

John: Right.

George: Then he has to take the fat and take it outside the camp. He couldn't just jump in his car. He doesn't throw it in the back of a pickup truck.

John: No.

George: He doesn't do any of that. He has to walk the fat of this animal, so say 50, 60 pounds, conservatively speaking, and he has to burn that in its own sacrifice in the vein of a peace offering before God. So say the priest wakes up at 5:00, 6:00 in the morning, crack of dawn. It's probably 9:00 or 10:00 in the morning now. He's probably already exhausted. He is spent because he has just performed the sacrifice. And that's only for himself.

John: Right.

George: Now he's ready for business, as it were, to use a crass term there.

John: Right.

George: Now he's ready for people to come. And so we find a lot of rules and regulations in the text, but one that just boggles my mind in a sense is there were different requirements for rulers, tribal rulers, and different requirements for common people. So let's just say in this day in the life of the priest, a ruler comes and he's a new ruler. He's been appointed over a subset of a subset of a subset of some tribe.

John: Right.

George: Okay? And he's bringing his goat. He has to bring a goat.

John: Right.

George: He doesn't have options. He has to bring a goat and it has to be male because he's a ruler. Now, I don't know why God did it that way. We don't understand. We're not told why, but he has to bring a male and it has to be a goat. Well, let's say he comes to the priest. He brings this male goat. That's the only male goat that he has at the time, or it's the best one he has at the time. The priest has to take that goat and, again, go through all of the killing. But let's say the priest spots a blemish on the back hind corner on the left side.

John: Yeah.

George: Okay? And this ruler has missed it. He didn't see it, but it has a blemish. The sacrifice can't be made for him.

John: Right. Nope.

George: He has to find a male goat. Now, a commoner comes along and let's say he brings a male goat because he forgot that for this particular form of offering, because he's a commoner and not a ruler, he needs a female goat. So this poor priest has to turn people away probably all day long because the animals have blemishes, they're the wrong gender, or they're the wrong animal.

John: Yeah.

George: The commoner is supposed to bring a goat and the text allows for a lamb if he can't bring a goat. But regardless, the priest is in charge of all of this.

John: Right. Yeah.

George: He has to administer this. Can you imagine someone coming into your office and they want to counsel over some sin in their life? And while you're not in a position to make atonement and forgive them of their sin, they want you to help them through it. But you have to turn them away because they drove the wrong vehicle to the church office.

John: Yeah.

George: Or something like that.

John: Yeah. Yeah.

George: You have to turn them away because they didn't have the right color shirt on that day.

John: Right.

George: I mean, the priest would be under an enormous amount of pressure and stress to allow things to slide, to allow things to slip, which incidentally, when we get to the Book of Malachi, that's exactly what the priests were doing.

John: Yeah.

George: And God said, "You know what? I'd rather you stop sacrificing altogether because it's meaningless to me." But that aside, this poor priest has exhausted himself for half of the morning killing this bull on his own behalf.

John: Right.

George: And now he's trying to remind people and keep people straight on what they can and can't bring, what they can and can't do. He has to inspect the animal just in case the person who brought the animal for sacrifice was mistakenly overlooked a blemish.

John: Right.

George: Or brought the wrong animal.

John: It's huge because... And what I think we sometimes think is "Well, that wouldn't have really happened that much because they knew that." And yet in our churches, how many things are missed? There is simple announcement things that you say over and over again. So we got to remind ourselves in the culture, we live with a lot of forgetful people or that want to take the shortcuts.

George: Yes.

John: “Well, it’s close enough. Maybe the priest won’t notice that mark.” Not even realizing how God viewed the sacrifice that they brought when he viewed them in relationship to what they were doing.

George: That’s right. That’s right. And also remember, these people did not have the law in a nice little handy leather bound book.

John: They couldn’t just pull out and double check every day.

George: “Okay. So it’s this offering. So what do I do?”

John: Right.

George: That’s not what you have here. These people, the law was written in stone. Moses would be composing this law, but think of this people group, a million or more people perhaps. And they’re in the wilderness and they don’t have their own copy...

John: No.

George: ...to look at and to make sure they’re doing it the right way. So they’re just giving it their best effort, I’m sure. But at the same time, the priest has to administer all of this.

John: Yeah.

George: Just imagine how stressful that would be. Later in the day, so he goes through this with the ruler. He goes through this with the common person.

John: Yeah.

George: Again, for the common person, he has to carry the fat of the sacrifice outside the camp. So he has probably now walked several miles. He’s killed three animals. Blood is everywhere. Who knows what his garments look like?

John: Right.

George: This is not some “I have a smock gown, and I have my latex gloves on, and I have a mask.” None of this is available for them in this day.

John: Right.



George: The priest has to remember to put the blood on the horns of the altar a certain way. He has to, like I said, dispose of the fat outside of the camp. And so he's hauling this material, if you will, outside, setting it on fire. I'm sure that was pleasant.

John: Yeah.

George: And then he's coming back to the camp to take his duty to take place at his station or whatever it was for that day. And so now you're probably in mid-afternoon on a very busy day, but it was probably very common.

John: Yeah.

George: And let's say he's just getting ready to be done for the day, and now a poor person comes to him for a trespass offering. So this person comes with a trespass offering. Now, the trespass offering, there were a lot of options. God sympathized greatly in this case with the fact that even in the wilderness, as communal as that was, there would have been people who had more than others.

John: Right. Absolutely.

George: Certainly.

John: Yeah.

George: So one of the examples that's given in chapter 5 of Leviticus is there's a person who, again, unintentionally comes across the carcass of a dead animal. Let's say he was taking after one of his sheep. He went into some bushes and he happened to trip over the carcass of a fox who was killed by a lion or something like that.

John: Right.

George: So he finds himself unclean. He finds himself in a position to need a sacrifice, to need some kind of atonement. Well, in the text, we see that the priest was to look for either a lamb or a goat, a female, again without blemish. So let's say the person comes to the priest. It's mid-afternoon. The priest is exhausted.

John: Yeah.

George: He's had enough for the day. He's frustrated with the people. He's dirty. He's filthy. He feels terrible. He's smelling nothing but blood and dead, burning flesh. Okay? And this poor guy comes to him

and he brings a female goat, but again there's a blemish. And so he has to turn him away. Remember, this is atonement for sin.

John: Yeah.

George: And you're turning people away. So the guy, he doesn't have another female goat or lamb. That's the best he has. So the text allows him to bring two turtledoves or pigeons. So this priest tells this poor young man, "You need to go back home. None of this will work. You need to bring back two turtledoves or two pigeons." And so the man goes back home. He doesn't have any. Let's just say he doesn't have any, but he thinks he can catch them. So he goes out in the brush or whatever and he spends, say, two hours trying to catch two turtledoves. He can't do it. So he comes back to the priest and he feels badly. But the priest reminds him, "Well, if you can't get two turtledoves or two pigeons, you are allowed to bring a little container of flour and we can burn that on the altar." The man forgot. He could have brought flour all along because he didn't have the right sacrifice. But three hours later, he's going back to his tent, he's getting a little container of flour, and he's coming back and the sacrifice is finally made. So I picture this priest, right? I picture him exhausted. He's put in no less than 12 to 14 hours, depending on the length of daylight, right?

John: Right. Right.

George: He's doing this probably six days a week, save the Sabbath.

John: Right.

George: He's exhausted. He's frustrated. Sounds like a pastor.

John: Yeah.

George: He's feeling inadequate. I think the believing priests, the ones who really respected the law probably felt inadequate.

John: Right.

George: We see in the text, just in Leviticus 4, 5, and 6, those three chapters alone, you get no less than seven or eight instances in the text where at the end of the command, the Bible says, "And the priest will make atonement for him," for them, whatever the case, "and their sins shall be forgiven."

John: Wow.

George: The priest is doing this.

John: Wow.

George: What the priest is doing has a direct impact on the ability of this Israelite to be forgiven.

John: Right.

George: So I picture the priest late at night. He crawls into bed and he's exhausted. And in his mind, he's frightened because he wants to make sure he's performed all the sacrifices properly.

John: Right.

George: He is frustrated because people keep forgetting the law, or like you had said earlier, they're trying to take shortcuts.

John: Yeah.

George: They're trying to circumvent some of the specific instructions maybe. He feels inadequate, no doubt, because he sees that he has to do this every day. It just doesn't stop. And he probably sees the same people over and over and over again. He probably feels guilty because even though he's offered a sacrifice for his own sin, the fact of the matter is he's still as much of a sinner as anybody else. So probably in his heart of hearts, he feels like a hypocrite.

John: Yeah.

George: He feels inadequate.

John: Sure.

George: And I just wonder if a priest back in that day would have had the thought, maybe fleeting as it might be, "I wish there was some way that somebody could offer a sacrifice that was so great, that was so pure, that was so adequate that it would take away the need for any more sacrifices." Can you picture that?

John: Oh, yeah.

George: A priest just lying there exhausted and he's covered in blood and he didn't get enough time to get a shower that night, you know? And he's filthy and he's just at the end of his endurance.

John: Right.

George: Physically, spiritually, emotionally. And he cries out to God for a sacrifice that would take care of it all.

John: Yeah.

George: And then you and me, as we read Leviticus, we can think about Jesus.

John: Yeah. Absolutely.

George: It's our privilege.

John: Yeah.

George: It's our privilege to look at all of this, as detailed as it is, as laborious as it is sometimes to read.

John: Right.

George: I get it. But you look at that and you think of Jesus.

John: Right.

George: I don't see how a true Christian could read the Pentateuch and not come away edified, rejoicing, encouraged, and praising God for what Jesus did for us.

John: Oh, man. And because, again, the devil, no matter what era of life we live in, likes to have his focus on, as the devil did way back with Adam and Eve, the questioning of God. Man, God, what a waste of time for all this. And God was trying to do the very opposite, that was, to try to say "You're right. Even in your greatest, it's limited. The only way that's going to be really taken care of is if I intervene to provide the perfect sacrifice which would be Jesus Christ." And what a beautiful picture that paints that we miss a lot of times that this was a big job for these priests to do this.

George: Impossible.

John: Yeah, exactly.

George: I would have quit.

John: Yeah. Certainly incapable. And we haven't even touched on the high priests and what they had to do going before with the sins of the whole people.

George: Absolutely.

John: With the holy of holies. So it's a great picture again of the beauty and the relevance and the magnitude and yet the simplicity of the gospel.

George: Yes. And you know what's so unique about Jesus? And I want to make sure... That Jesus comes as the priest *and* as the sacrifice. That's the uniqueness of the whole gospel.

John: Yeah.

George: The priest is laying there thinking "Wouldn't it be great if someone could fix this?"

John: Right.

George: And God says, "The only way to fix it is that I myself, in the second person of the Trinity, my only begotten Son, the only way to fix it is to have him come in flesh and be both the gift and the giver." The spotless lamb and the priest who offers the lamb.

John: Wow.

George: At the same time.

John: Yeah.

George: And the Book of Hebrews, by the way, if you ever want to make Leviticus come to life, read Hebrews in tandem with it because you'll see the fulfillments of Christ within the Levitical revelations and you'll see that picture of, yeah, there was a plan all along and there is a way, that sacrifices don't have to be made anymore. And it's amazing. It's edifying. I know it's difficult reading. I know it's hard to understand sometimes. But when we put it in the context of what Jesus has done, we put it in the context of the whole biblical story, it just comes to life.

John: Amen.

George: And it should make us thankful.

John: Amen.