



A YEAR *with* GOD *Daily Devotional*

DAY 50



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DAY FIFTY

Leviticus 19 - 21

Love Your Neighbour as Yourself

Leviticus 19 is one of the most surprising chapters in the entire Bible - not because its content is strange, but because of where it appears. We expect this kind of teaching from the Sermon on the Mount. We expect it from the letters of Paul. We do not expect it tucked inside the priestly laws of Leviticus, sandwiched between regulations about offerings and instructions about skin diseases. But here it is. And it changes how you read everything around it.

The God who gave detailed instructions for burnt offerings also said: love your neighbour as yourself. These are not two different Gods or two different agendas. The God who cares about how you approach the altar also cares about how you treat the person next to you at the market. Holiness was never only liturgical. It was always also relational.

The chapter opens with the reason for everything that follows: be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy. And then it pours out in every direction. Revere your mother and father. Keep the Sabbath. Do not turn to idols. Leave the edges of your field for the poor and the foreigner. Do not steal. Do not deceive or lie. Do not swear

falsely by God's name. Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight. Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind. And then:

“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself.

I am the Lord.”

- Leviticus 19:18

Love your neighbour as yourself. Jesus will call this the second greatest commandment. He will say that the entire Law and the Prophets hang on this and the command to love God. And it is here - in Leviticus 19, in a chapter about not mixing seeds in a field and not eating fruit from a tree in its first three years - sitting quietly, waiting to be discovered by everyone who was paying attention.

The command to love your neighbour is not a New Testament upgrade on an Old Testament religion of rules. It was always here. God's heart for the person next to you has not changed between the Testaments. What changed is that the One who commanded it became the fullest expression of it.

The chapter extends the command to the foreigner: love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. The logic is memory. You know what it is to be the outsider. You know what it costs to be treated as less. So do not do it to others. The ethics of Leviticus 19 are rooted in experience. In what God has done for Israel. In who

they now know themselves to be - not masters, not original owners, but people who were themselves strangers and were carried on eagles' wings.

- You know what it cost you when no one left the edges of the field for you. Leave them for someone else.

Chapter 20 presses on the consequences of going the other direction. The laws of holiness are not suggestions. Worshipping Molech - the god who required child sacrifice - is capital. Consulting mediums and spiritists is capital. Sexual violations of the covenant are capital. The severity is not cruelty. It is the weight God places on the things that destroy the fabric of human community, the sanctity of the home, and the lives of the most vulnerable.

The harshness of the consequences in Leviticus 20 is the measure of what God is protecting. He is not being punitive for its own sake. He is guarding the things that, when broken, break everything downstream of them. A community without sexual integrity falls apart. A home without fidelity collapses. A society that sacrifices its children to any god - Molech or ambition or convenience - is consuming its own future.

Chapter 21 focuses on the priests - and the standard is higher for those who serve closer. The priest cannot defile himself for the dead except for the closest family. He cannot shave his head or trim the

edges of his beard. He cannot marry a divorced woman or a prostitute - he must marry a virgin from his own people. And no priest with a physical defect may approach the altar.

That last rule troubles modern readers and rightly prompts careful thought. It is not a statement about the worth of people with disabilities. The priest with a physical defect could still eat the sacred food. He was not excluded from the community or from God. But he could not serve at the altar. The altar required wholeness because it was a picture pointing to the One who would come - the unblemished Lamb, the priest without defect. The requirement was typological, not hierarchical.

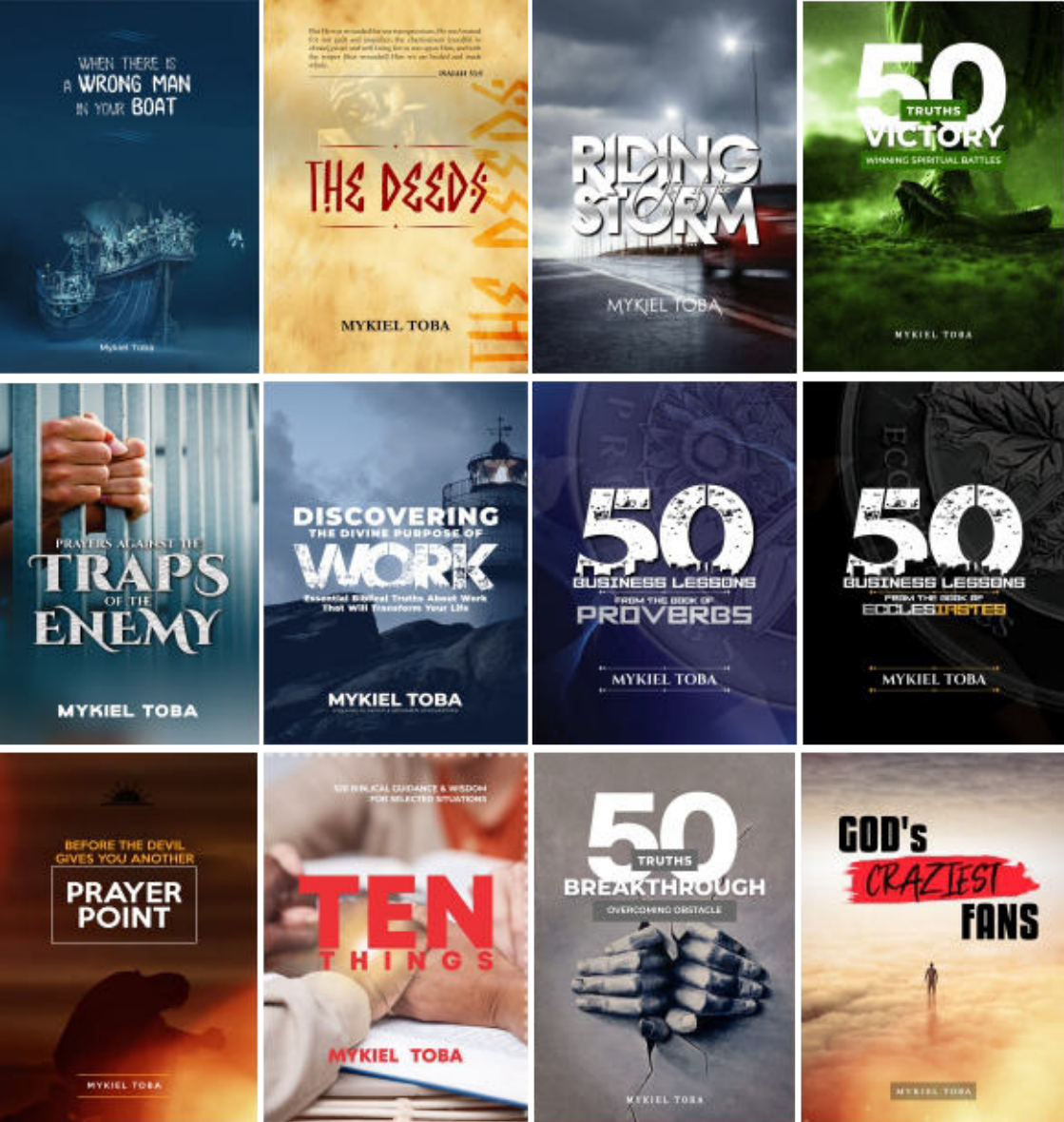
Jesus is the priest without defect who stood at the altar in our place. Every regulation about priestly wholeness in Leviticus was a finger pointing toward Him - the One who finally fulfilled the picture perfectly. We do not serve at the altar on our own merits. We serve through the One who met every requirement we never could. Speak this over yourself today:

*Love your neighbour as yourself.
Not as a New Testament innovation -
as an ancient command of a God who has always
cared about the person standing next to me.*

TOMORROW - Day 51 Leviticus 22–23

God has seven appointed feasts - and each one is a rehearsal for something that has not yet happened. Come back tomorrow, because the feasts of Israel are the calendar of the gospel.

Day 50 of 365



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