

Sermon Notes: October 29, 2023 **Focus:** Leviticus, holiness (OT reading)
[Lectionary Readings](#)

I have spent several weeks focusing on Jesus' tussle with the religious leaders. The gospel this week has more of that tussle. Maybe a shift to something different is in order? Let's look at Leviticus. It is a weird book for modern ears. It is full of confusing and dark proscriptions for how to behave. At root, it is meant to be a manual for how the covenant people can be "set apart" for holiness. It also provides means for the people to return to God when holiness becomes corrupted. For the ancient Hebrews that way home is centered on the Day of Atonement.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) In modern Jewish practice, the holiest days of the year kicked off with Rosh Hashanah that began at sunset on Friday, September 15th. They finished with the day of Atonement ending on September 25th, 2023.

Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of the Jewish new year. It is the start of "The Days of Awe" finishing with the day of atonement, Yom Kippur. I won't go into great details, but Paul himself still practiced this holy day, and Christians reinterpreted Jesus being at the center of the day of Atonement which involved not only repentance, but sacrifice.

Rebellion and Holiness in the book "The Lord called to Moses from the tent" Chapter 1 verse 1. Through Moses, God provides a way for sinful, corrupt people to live in God's holy presence. Holiness was a big deal then and is now. I suspect you long to see holiness, but if we see it, we are immediately suspicious of hypocrisy or dark motives.

Holiness is "to be set apart, unique." And more colloquially, we know what it is to be "whole"-ly: marked by sincerity, devotion, and completeness. God is holy, and we occasionally experience God's holiness breaking through.

The Celtic tradition calls this breaking through thin space. When we get thin, we experience the cleansing of holiness. If Israel wants to live in God's holy presence, they also need to become holy by finding a way back to the "thin space." Leviticus aims to be the handbook for this path.

Leviticus' literary structure is symmetrical, exploring three main ways that God enables Israel to live in God's presence. The beginning and end of Leviticus describe a ritual handbook for Israel to practice. The middle describes the role of Israel's priests. The middle of the middle focuses on Israel's purity. These outer, middle, and middle middle shells orbit around the center of the book: the "Day of Atonement".

Sermon itself I will do a little context setting for Leviticus and lead us in a sort of mediation and practice of holiness. I hope maybe we can touch the thin space if momentarily. The next page is a graphical overview of Leviticus. **Todd**

