

Welcome and Care

SCOTT HOEZEE

It has been said that when some exclusive, members-only club opens its doors to a group of people who used to be banned, that group then becomes the first to protest the opening of the doors to the next group. What is the sense of having an exclusive club if certain people are not kept out? Even though you once felt bad when you were the one left out; well, that memory can fade once you get on the inside. God worried something like that might happen to his people in Israel, too. Today on *Groundwork*, we will see how that showed up in the book of Leviticus. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, this is the fourth, and now final, program that we are doing on the third book of the Bible, the book of Leviticus. We have observed throughout this series that Leviticus probably isn't a lot of people's favorite Bible book. I don't think I have ever asked somebody: What is your favorite book of the Bible? And they said: Oh, Leviticus. But we have been seeing how relevant Leviticus is for us today still as Christians.

DAVE BAST

In the first program, we had kind of a general overview of the book, and we established what is really the theme of this series, how to live in the presence of God; because here they are, in the middle of the wilderness, at Mount Sinai, actually, where God has given his Law. He has given directions for the building of the tabernacle, and then he has come and filled it, as we see at the end of Exodus, with his own presence, the cloud of his glory; and immediately, he begins to call to Moses and say: Now, here are the implications of that. Here is how you need to live; and so, we talked about holiness, which is kind of the theme of the book: You shall be holy because I am holy; and we talked about how all the sacrifices went together to show that sin had to be dealt with in order to live with a holy God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Now, we want to talk about something that is a little bit surprising in the book of Leviticus, because most of the focus is on Israel, and how they have to be distinctive, and so, the words are addressed to Israel: This is how you must sacrifice...how you must be holy; but surprisingly, weaving through Leviticus, and through the wider Old Testament, is this focus on how you were to treat non-Israelites...foreigners...what some Bible translations, which I heard every Sunday when I was growing up, Dave. I am not sure what Bible translation it was, but in the Ten Commandments, this came up in the Fourth Commandment: The seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord, thy God. In it, thou shalt not do any work, neither thou, nor thy son, thy daughter, thy manservant, thy maidservant, nor thy cattle...and then I always remember this phrase: Nor thy *alien* who is within thy gates. I remember when I was a kid I was kind of into science fiction so I kind of wondered what aliens we were talking about...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Was it Vulcans or Klingons? But, it is really the stranger, the immigrant, the foreigner, who somehow or another comes into Israel, and God is really concerned about how those people get treated.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; the non-Israelite; and it opens a window, really, on the actuality of what life was like in ancient Israel, even during the exodus—even during the wilderness journey—they were always somewhat of a mixed group—a mixed bag. We tend to think, those of us who have maybe been raised in the Church or gone to Sunday school, well, there are twelve tribes and they are all huge and they are all pure, and...no, no; there were always odds and ends floating about...human flotsam and jetsam that traveled along with them or came into the land with them or after they arrived. It was a more confused picture, really, ethnically; and especially if we remember that countries weren't defined back then by flags and by clear borders and maps. People sort of wandered about. There were migrations. So, there were always strangers in the midst of Israel.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And they became among the most vulnerable people in Israel. We have talked in other *Groundwork* series, including one we did not long ago on justice, that there is that triplet of vulnerable people that God refers to again and again in the Old Testament: The widow, the orphan, and the alien, or the immigrant, we might call that person today. These people were vulnerable to exploitation; and so God's laws in Leviticus, laws like the gleaner laws and the like, make extra provisions for those people. You not only were not supposed to actively mistreat immigrants or orphans or widows, you were actually so actively bend over backwards to help them with extra assistance because God didn't want them to be mistreated; and a classic Old Testament example of somebody who was kind of in all three categories at once, but was certainly an immigrant, was Ruth.

DAVE BAST

Right; a couple moved from Bethlehem to Moab because there was a famine in the land. The husband died; there were two sons, they each married women...local women...local girls, one of whom was Ruth. Then both those boys died. So we have a widow, Naomi, and her two daughters-in-law. One of them goes back to Moab, the other, Ruth, clings to Naomi and says: No, I am going to go with you, your God will be my God; and they move back to Bethlehem; and there they are. So, what is going to happen, because in that culture, it was the man, basically, who protected and provided...the father and his sons...so, if you didn't have that...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

There was no social security. There was no safety net.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And thankfully a man named Boaz kept the laws of Leviticus by providing extra for Ruth and for Naomi, saving her life; and of course, as we know, Ruth and Boaz become great, great grandparents of no less than King David; and so, great, great, great, great, great, great grandparents of Jesus. So, when the laws of Leviticus to take care of the alien within your gates were followed, good things could happen, because this is what Leviticus 19 says. You can think of Ruth here, but anybody...

³³When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. ³⁴The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

So, just two little verses there from Leviticus 19, but boy, do they pack a punch.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And notice the preeminence of the need to remember what happened to *them* when *they* were the immigrants in Egypt. They were treated like dirt. They were enslaved, and God is saying don't you ever dare do that to somebody else.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; and again, the big impact: I am the Lord your God. That just happens over and over and over. We saw that especially in the holiness program—program two in this series. So, I am the Lord your God is rooted in the character of God, and it is also emphasizing their own experience: Remember what happened to you and be careful; and we want to really dig a little deeper into that aspect of it, and we will do that next.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this final program in a four-part series on Leviticus, where we are looking at an interesting side note, but it is much more than a side note in Leviticus, Dave, where God is really concerned, not just with Israel, but non-Israelites...foreigners...immigrants...who live in the land; and we just saw that the Israelites were not only to not mistreat them, they were to love them as though they were native-born; and God reminds them: Hey, this happened to you in Egypt...bad things happened to you, don't do it; and God needs to say that, Dave, because as we said in the opening of this program, it is a sad human tendency, and it begins on the playgrounds of life, frankly...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That if you finally get let into a club that never wanted you to be in before, you would think that would make you as a new member of the club more open to let in other people, but it sometimes doesn't happen that way.

DAVE BAST

Oh, no; not given our human nature. In fact, Scott, when you were saying that, it reminded me of an essay by C. S. Lewis entitled *The Inner Ring*. He spells out...it is something I think we can all identify with...what a tug it is to be in the in crowd...in the in group...in the exclusive club...however that is defined, and as you say, it begins already with kids; and then, how do you keep it exclusive except by keeping others out; and sadly, something like that was a constant temptation for Israel because they were called to be holy, to identify themselves as the people of God: We're the ones; we're chosen; we're in; we need to be pure; yes, it is a big challenge to us; it involves all of life; but, we are there, so let's pull up the drawbridge and not let anybody else in.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; forget about Egypt...forget about that; and unfortunately, that is exactly what happened, because later in Israel's history, not long before the people are actually exiled as punishment for their sins, you get the minor prophets, you get Amos and Micah and others...Zechariah...and what is their number one complaint? You abused the immigrants in your midst, you abused the widows, you abused the orphans, the people I [God] told you to take extra special care of...again, including these immigrants that we are focusing on in this program, Dave, you turned right around and abused them or did your level best to keep them out; and you know, we talked about Ruth earlier in this program, Dave, as the classic example of the stranger...the immigrant...who was vulnerable, but if you treated them right, good things would happen; but now we need to do another character on whom we also did a *Groundwork* series who is a good example of the insularity of the Israelites, and that was the prophet Jonah.

DAVE BAST

Yes; so the conclusion of the book of Jonah is one of the greatest passages in the whole Old Testament because it is intended to get the audience, who originally would have been these same Hebrew people...these same Israelites...to see how ridiculous it is to exclude the outsider or to look down upon the outsider or the stranger or the foreigner.

So, at the end, Jonah is angry because Nineveh has repented at his preaching...

SCOTT HOEZEE

His preaching worked!

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; he is the only successful preacher who was ticked off by the fact, and:

^{4:2}He prayed to the Lord, "Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? This is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. ³Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

I mean, he would rather be dead than see the Ninevites brought into the grace of God; and the truth is, for so much of the Old Testament later on, as you said, in the prophets, Israel forgot her vocation; and the whole fact that she was chosen, made holy and separated for God, that was provisional, that wasn't the end-game God had in mind. It was a means to the end of drawing all people to himself, and that was made clear right at the beginning with the call of Abraham.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right: You will be a blessing to all nations; but again, it is so interesting when we look at Abram, Dave, we go back to Genesis Chapter 12...so, we were just saying that the experience of being slaves in Egypt was supposed to be part of the spiritual DNA of Israel: Remember how you were mistreated so you don't mistreat others; you have been an immigrant yourself. Abram became an immigrant at God's command, because when...Abram was settled; he was older; he was rich, he had land, flocks; but what was God's first word to him? God comes to Abram out of a clear blue sky and says: Go; hit the road; leave; become an immigrant; and indeed, Abram does...Abram and Sarai and their families; and Abram never has a home country again. He has to negotiate at the end of his life just to buy enough of a plot of land to bury Sarah after she dies. He never has a home again; and somehow, that identity of being a wanderer was supposed to be part of it. In fact, by the end of the Pentateuch—the first five books of the Bible—in Deuteronomy Chapter 26 one of Moses' last words to the people of Israel was:

⁵Then you shall declare before the Lord your God, "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with few people, and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. ⁶But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labor. ⁷Then we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, and the Lord heard our voice."

But the point is, my father was a wandering Aramean...that was supposed to be like a slogan for Israel. We know what it is like to be strangers ourselves, so we want to be open to strangers and be kind to them in a way the Egyptians never were to us.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and one of the ironies of the story of Israel is that at the very beginning when Abraham was called out, he was promised that he would have a land forever for himself and his descendants; well, he never got one...he never got it; he remained a wanderer all of his life, as did Isaac, his son; as did Jacob. They lived in tents. They never settled down; they never actually possessed it; and that was supposed to be something that they remembered. The whole history of the people was to be stamped with this realization: Hey, don't forget; we know what it is like to be enslaved; we know what it is like to be foreigners; we know what it is like to be dependent on the mercy of others. So, treat others the same way. Bear that in mind. That is the story that Leviticus tells.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; you are supposed to be a hospitable people. Hospitality toward the stranger is supposed to be high on their list; and of course, taking care of those other vulnerable groups, the widows and the orphans as well; but again, we might say: Well, okay; that was Israel. Israel was a unique nation in the history of the world. It was a theocracy; it was ruled by God. No nation on earth, not the United States, not New Zealand, not Germany, no nation on earth today is the equivalent of ancient Israel, so this was supposed to be within the borders of Israel. Does this have anything to do with the Church now, this core principle of providing for the alien...the immigrant...the stranger? Well, it does. The New Testament shows us that, and we will conclude this program and this series by looking at that in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, you know, we have been talking about this whole idea of immigrants and so forth; and the opening verses of the Gospel of John kind of give us this theme, believe it or not, if you read it the right way: ^{1:1}In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God...

In a sermon I preached on this a while back, I said: You know what? Another way you could translate that: In the beginning was the Word and the Word was home. The Word was the Son of God, and he was home; but then we read: but he couldn't stay home. The Word had to leave home and had to become flesh and come into our world; and that sort of makes Jesus the ultimate immigrant, if you will...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The ultimate stranger in our midst; and the sad thing about already in John 1 is that when Jesus came to this world that he made, no one recognized him; when he came to his own people...that famous verse from John 1:10...they received him *not*...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He was the ultimate alien within our gates.

DAVE BAST

He came to that which was his own, and his own people received him not; yes, a powerful warning, really, to us. Could Christ be present in our midst as the stranger...as the alien...as the immigrant? Israel, as we have seen, was told to remember their own experience. Once you get into the inner ring, don't try to keep everybody else out. It is not an exclusive club. God's heart is for the nations; God's ultimate desire and destiny is that all people would come to him and be restored to him through Christ, and that is why Jesus came; and so, this is such an important biblical theme, and it has continuing repercussions for us as Christians. If we really do say we are Bible people, this is what we need to listen to.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, we have talked about this before on *Groundwork*, Dave. We did a series a while back on some of the unsung virtues. I mean, we've got gifts of the Spirit, we've got the nine fruit of the Spirit, but we noted in another series that there are a number of virtues in the New Testament that don't get as much attention, one of which is hospitality; and it actually comes up a lot in the New Testament. There seems to be this

expectation that Christian people would be hospitable people, and we would bring in strangers, and we would welcome them and treat them as our own. Same thing God told, in Leviticus 19, the Israelites to do with foreigners: don't treat them like they are foreigners, treat them like they are your kids...treat them as though they were native-born; and the New Testament says as people who follow Jesus, who was the ultimate stranger in our midst, we too must be hospitable; but beyond that, Dave, we could wonder a little bit about some of the other implications of this Leviticus focus on the alien, because, as we said a minute ago, no nation on earth today just is ancient Israel, so how do we appropriate this within the Church?

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly; and I think we have to recognize that we cannot simply pick up the Bible, cut out a verse, and then say: Well, this should be national policy.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

There are difficult political questions that need to be resolved. Politics is by its very nature the art of compromise...the art of finding the best way in an imperfect world, a way that may not be perfect, to do justice and to show mercy. So, nations have a right to have and set their own immigration policy. No nation is completely without borders or control of those borders. You know, we are not going to get into some kind of policy pronouncement here based on Leviticus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; the Bible isn't a cook book, the Bible is not a science book or an economics textbook, and it is not a policy manual for governments today in setting their immigration policies; however, what about those of us in the Church, no matter what country we live in? Certainly, if we want to get an idea of what our own individual as believers, but also as congregations...maybe as denominations...if we want to get an idea of what our core attitude toward strangers should be, of what our core attitude toward people not like us should be, well certainly, there is a lot to apply here.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; and you know, you have only to think of a parable like Matthew 25, where Jesus says: Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these. The sheep and the goats are both mystified. When did we see you hungry or a foreigner or in prison and we clothed you, we visited you? Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these.

So, we may find Christ in the guise of the stranger, of the immigrant. That is one important principle for Christians. The other important principle is from Leviticus: Don't forget; you were like that once...you were on the outside, and God has graciously received you. So, we need to treat others with the same kind of grace.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And the Apostle Peter picked up on this; and of course, Peter had to learn some of this the hard way himself, as we have talked about from the book of Acts. He initially didn't think Gentiles...non-Jews...could be accepted, but he had to learn it; but he did learn it, and in 1 Peter 2 he writes, starting in verse 9:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (And now this, 1 Peter 2:10) Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

I love that line: Once you were nobody...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You were nobody; you didn't belong to the nation or the household of God, but by grace you have been brought in. Do that for others, Peter is saying.

DAVE BAST

Right; it also makes me think of a wonderful verse in the book of Hebrews, which brings it down to a personal level, where it talks about the importance of showing hospitality; and then it adds: 13:2b for by so doing, some have entertained angels without being aware of it.

That is probably a reference to the story in Genesis about Abraham welcoming these three strangers one day, who came to tell him specifically that he was going to have a son; the time had come; and it was the Lord himself appearing in human form; and when Abraham welcomed that stranger into his home and fed him, he was actually showing hospitality to God. So, something like that can happen with us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And the Bible needs to emphasize it as much as it does, Dave, because the sad fact is, we are all very, very good at exaggerating even slight differences among people. A little bit of a different speech accent, a little bit of a different colored skin, a little bit of a socioeconomic background difference, and we can run with that and turn that other person into the *other*, whom we shun, whom we don't like. We take any difference between us and among as an excuse to mistreat other people. Wars have been fought this way...genocides are founded on that *non* welcome of the other; but instead, we are supposed to see Jesus in the other; and no matter how different they may be from us, this could be Jesus...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jesus said: Actually, it *is* me; and so, we welcome them because that is what God calls us to do. It is supposed to be part of our own spiritual DNA.

DAVE BAST

So, what have we learned from Leviticus? We learned that God has graciously dealt with our sin. We learned that God has made us holy, belonging to him. We learned that if we are holy, if we are God's special people, we need to act like it; and one way we can act like it is by expressing and extending that same kind of grace to others.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thanks be to God. Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast, and we hope you will join us again next time when we continue to dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

We have a website: groundworkonline.com. Please visit it, share what *Groundwork* means to you. Make suggestions for what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

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