



EPISODE 18

GUEST: DR. AVRAM SHANNON



“Holiness to the Lord”

Show Notes & Transcripts

Podcast General Description:

followHIM: A *Come, Follow Me* Podcast with Hank Smith & John Bytheway

Do you ever feel that preparing for your weekly *Come, Follow Me* lesson falls short? Join hosts Hank Smith and John Bytheway as they interview experts to make your study for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ *Come, Follow Me* course not only enjoyable but original and educational. If you are looking for resources to make your study fresh, faithful, and fun--no matter your age--then join us every Wednesday.

Podcast Episode Descriptions

Part 1:

What does a tent in the wilderness have to do with your Sunday worship? Dr. Avram Shannon unpacks the Tabernacle’s sacred architecture, priestly ritual, and sacrificial symbolism tracing the ancient roots of atonement through Exodus and Leviticus, revealing how these covenant practices still pulse at the heart of the Saints today.

Part 2:

Dr. Avram Shannon continues to unlock the divine logic behind Israel's sacrificial system and the Day of Atonement, dismantling the myth of the angry Old Testament God and revealing why Leviticus was the book Jesus read and why it is the surprising heartbeat of covenant life today.

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Part 1 -

- 00:00 - Part 1 - Dr. Avram Shannon
- 03:01 Why Leviticus matters: Order, holiness and finding God in structure
- 08:21 *Come, Follow Me Manual*
- 09:45 Building the Tabernacle as God's dwelling place among His people
- 14:18 What was the Tabernacle made of?
- 19:56 Sister Sharon Eubank: Temples as the greatest offerings from the wilderness
- 24:48 Golden earrings, Golden Calf: Giving to idols
- 35:00 Inside the Tabernacle
- 39:57 The Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat
- 45:16 Temple recommends and guardians
- 49:00 The clothing of the High Priest
- 57:21 Why does God need a place?
- 1:06:21 Atonement as Priestly, and a sacrificial word—*kafar*

Part 2 -

- 00:00 - Part 2 - Dr. Avram Shannon
- 00:07 The sacrificial system
- 03:20 Why does sacrifice create holiness?
- 06:19 What was the Tabernacle made of?
- 17:17 Ritual purity laws: Matter out of place
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- 28:58 Nadab and Abihu—No one is shielded from consequences
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- 57:29 Covenants and relationships, not transactions
- 57:45 Dr. Shannon's forthcoming book of the Law of Moses in The Book of Mormon
- 1:04:45 End of Part 2 - Dr. Avram Shannon

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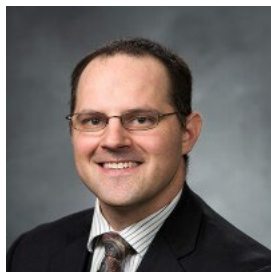
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Biographical Information:



Dr. Shannon was born in Quantico, Virginia, and spent most of his young life in Virginia. He served a mission first in the Oregon Portland Mission and then in the Washington Kennewick Mission after the Oregon Portland Mission was split. Dr. Shannon earned a BA in ancient Near Eastern studies from Brigham Young University (2007), a master of studies in Jewish studies from the University of Oxford (2008), and a PhD in Near Eastern languages and cultures with a graduate interdisciplinary specialization in religions of the ancient Mediterranean from The Ohio State University (2015).

He and his wife, Thora, have nine children.

Courses Taught: Pearl of Great Price, Old Testament, Jesus Christ and the Everlasting Gospel, Book of Mormon, Gospels

Areas of Expertise: Rabbinic Judaism, Ancient Mediterranean Religions, Jewish Studies, Ancient Biblical Interpretation, Pearl of Great Price Studies

Areas of Research: Idolatry and Image Worship, Jewish/non-Jewish Interactions, Tribal and Affinity Groups, Kingship and Priesthood in the Ancient World

Research Languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Other Languages for Comparative Purposes

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Holiness to the Lord PART 1



GUEST: DR. AVRAM SHANNON

- Hank Smith: 00:00:00 Coming up in this episode on followHIM.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:00:03 The word atone and atonement appears more times in Leviticus than the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine & Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price combined. Atone and atonement, it's a priestly concept. It's what God is doing through sacrifice. When the Book of Mormon often uses atone, it's basically always in temple contexts.
- Hank Smith: 00:00:34 Hello my friends. Welcome to another episode of followHIM. My name is Hank Smith. I'm your host. I'm here with my cohost, John Bytheway, who does not bear any grudge and loves his neighbor as himself. John, I was reading in Leviticus as one does. I ran across this verse, and John, that describes you, you're not a grudge holder. You love your neighbor.
- John Bytheway: 00:00:58 I am doing a really quick mental inventory right now, Hank. I'll try to live up to that with all of the other adjectives you give me. You're killing me.
- Hank Smith: 00:01:07 I'm going to come over and go door to door around your house and see if you actually do love your neighbor.
- John Bytheway: 00:01:12 Good idea. Just last night, my neighbor called, "What is going on in your backyard?" My brother-in-law came over and brought four dogs with him, and they were going crazy in my backyard.
- Hank Smith: 00:01:26 John, we are privileged and excited to have back with us Dr. Avram Shannon. Dr. Shannon, we're happy you're here.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:01:36 Thank you. I'm very glad to be here.
- Hank Smith: 00:01:38 I forget sometimes that the listeners haven't seen you because I see you quite often. John, Dr. Shannon's office is in, we are fairly close together. If I'm lucky enough, I will run into him in the hallway. Now, John, I have to tell you, when I was talking to Avram about this lesson, I asked him about Leviticus and he

said, Hank, I love Leviticus. I said, I've never heard that sentence before.

John Bytheway: 00:02:02 From anybody.

Hank Smith: 00:02:03 From anybody. I'm going to make a T-shirt, actually. I love Leviticus. Dr. Shannon.

John Bytheway: 00:02:08 Now, I heard a story, I don't know if this is true, from J. Golden Kimball said, I got to Genesis and I read it. I got to Exodus and I read it. I got to leave it to cuss and I did.

Hank Smith: 00:02:24 Leave it to J. Golden Kimball. John, what do you think of when you think of the book of Leviticus? What comes to mind for me is the tabernacle out in the wilderness.

John Bytheway: 00:02:34 I guess I'm remembering from four years ago how specific the Lord was in the way he wanted things to be. I thought it was interesting that he wasn't like, oh, whatever is good. But he was very specific about how he wanted things. I thought, I've got to think about what that means for us.

Hank Smith: 00:02:51 Yeah, exactly this color, exactly this many loops. I'm excited to be converted to Leviticus. Avram, what are you hoping for today?

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:03:01 There's actually so much. Sometimes I'll tell my students when I teach the Old Testament class, you're reading the best book here in the Bible. If I keep saying enough people believe it.

Hank Smith: 00:03:11 Right.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:03:14 To that point, within Judaism, it's kind of the first book you really study. So Midrash is these ancient Jewish biblical commentaries, and the name of the ancient Midrash on Leviticus is [Sifra](#), meaning literally the book. There are a couple of things in there for this. One, the constant refrain, especially in the latter part. We'll see this when we talk about Leviticus 19. This notion he says, "Be therefore holy." God says this because I, Jehovah, am holy. The whole process of what Leviticus is trying to do is trying to make Israel into a holy people that is like God. We talk in the church all the time about our goal is to be like God. Leviticus says, well, here's how you do it. This is what it looks like to be like God. It's to care about order. We try to, especially in society today, you're trying to divide your various opinions and thoughts out.

00:04:16 You have your political opinions and positions, your religious ones, economic ones. We silo things. And Leviticus says there are no silos. Everything you do, everything you have is of interest to God. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we talk a lot about feeling and what we feel. Nothing to say here is to denigrate that position. I have friends, I have family members they go in the temple, their primary reason to go to the temple is because they feel peace there. The feeling and the serenity that they get there. That's not primarily why I go to the temple. I go to the temple because there's addiction. The fact that everything's the same, and the fact that everything's done, and there's a way it's done, and then there's a way it comes out. And for an hour and a half, the universe is ordered, and everything is okay.

00:05:20 There is beauty in feeling. There's also beauty in a well-run meeting. There's also beauty in an order and in hierarchy. And Leviticus is a book for people who find God in that. Whenever it's time for the sacrament prayers, I always mouth them along myself, and my kids are always like, Dad, what are you doing? And I'm like, I'm centering myself in the universe, guys. And Leviticus presents ... In some ways, it's a secret Genesis one where we have this ordered universe, and Leviticus says, and here's how you put yourself into that.

Hank Smith: 00:05:56 John, it's already happening.

John Bytheway: 00:05:58 I'm already glad I came.

Hank Smith: 00:06:00 I'm already going. I'm getting converted to this book. Now, John, this is in Dr. Shannon's blood. When you talk to him, it's not just in his head, it's in his heart. What do we know about him? He's been on the show a couple of times. Longtime listeners will say, oh, I know this voice. Do we have any information on him? What'd you find out?

John Bytheway: 00:06:24 According to my sources, [Avram](#) was born in Quantico, Virginia, spent most of his young life there, served a mission in the Oregon Portland Mission. He earned a bachelor's in Near Eastern studies from [Brigham Young University](#), a master's in [Jewish](#) studies from the University of Oxford, and a PhD in Near Eastern languages and cultures with a graduate [interdisciplinary specialization](#) in religions of the ancient Mediterranean from

Hank Smith: 00:06:54 The Ohio State University, and he has not corrected me once or twice.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:06:59 It's really funny. All of my stuff says The Ohio State University. I'm like, it's the name on my degree. I'm sorry. Did your university try and copyright the word the? Mine has.

John Bytheway: 00:07:10 On his bio, the is capitalized, and that's how you know how to say it. The Ohio State University.

Hank Smith: 00:07:15 The Ohio State University. That's it's name right Avram? That's it's name.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:07:19 That's it's name. Yeah.

John Bytheway: 00:07:20 And Avram, you have nine children?

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:07:23 I do have nine children. Yes.

John Bytheway: 00:07:25 Can you run down their names?

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:07:27 The eldest is Lydia. She turns 20 on Monday. And then Elisheva, she just got into BYU. We're super excited for that. Then Guinevere, Enoch, Athena, Eve, Gareth, and then the twins are Artemis and Rowena.

John Bytheway: 00:07:50 Wow. Those are great names.

Hank Smith: 00:07:51 That's a beautiful family. Avram, give us a quick background on why you would know so much about Judaism outside of your degrees.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:08:01 My mother was Jewish before she joined the church. She named me Avram. And at a certain point with that, I had no choice but to go into Jewish studies, at that point. So, you know, I grew up with a taste for matza, even silly things like that sort of led me in those paths even as I started my specialization.

Hank Smith: 00:08:21 Good. Folks who are listening, he is as good as he sounds. Just so you know, you think, is this guy really that good? He is. Through and through. I'm going to read from the [Come, Follow Me Manual](#). And then Avram, John and I, we just want to learn. The title of the lesson is called Holiness to the Lord, we're in the last few chapters of Exodus and then some chapters in Leviticus. Leaving Egypt, as important as that was, didn't fully accomplish God's purposes for the children of Israel. Even a comfortable life in the promised land wasn't God's ultimate goal for them. These were only steps toward what God really wanted for his people. Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord God am holy. How did God plan to make his people holy after they had lived in captivity for

generations? He commanded them to create a place of holiness in the wilderness, a tabernacle.

00:09:12 And he commanded them to make animal sacrifices to teach them about atonement for their sins. All of this was meant to point their minds, hearts, and lives toward the Savior. He is the true path of holiness for the Israelites and for us. We have all spent some time in the captivity of sin, and we are all invited to leave sin behind and follow Jesus Christ who has promised, I am able to make you holy. Exactly what Avram was talking about. With that, where should we go first? Dr. Shannon.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:09:45 What these last chapters are is they are the final building of this tent shrine, this tabernacle. Back in Exodus 25, God had said, we're going to do this. These chapters starting in 35 are the sequel to that because one of the things that's important to remember is for the Israelites, the whole thing, their life, their religion, their whatever, is going to be built around their experiences in temple religion, right? The Israelites don't go to church the way that we do. That's not really an ancient rite notion. They had Sinai, even allowing for the Pearl of Great Price. This is the first time in history that God has a house that we see in scripture. We could postulate maybe other times, maybe in the city of Enoch, maybe, but scripture doesn't tell anything about that.

00:10:35 For the first time, God says, I'm going to pick a place and I'm going to be there. If we look here in 35:11, he talks about we're making this and the Lord hath commanded the tabernacle. It says his tent, but it should be it's tent, it's covering, it's taches. We'll go through these KJV words. They're weird. And boards, it's bars, it's pillars, it's sockets. This word tabernacle is kind of a funny word. We use it to refer to this in Latter-day Saint discourse, it comes to mean these kind of like pre-stake center superchurches that we used to have. There are a couple that translate as temple. They kind of give us a sense of what's going here. One, sometimes it's just called the tent. Honestly, sometimes when KJV translates as tabernacle, it literally just says in Hebrew and they came to the tent.

00:11:22 But the word used here in 35:11 is a word mishkan. Mishkan comes from a Hebrew or shachan that means to be near, to dwell next to, to be with. The mishkan is the dwelling place. What we're seeing here is that when they're building this structure of what we call the tabernacle, they're building a place where God can be with them. We'll get to the end when we get to 40. That's what happens. This is being built to invite God into the midst of their community. And even some of the other

names for it, like in [Leviticus](#) one, which we look at a little bit later on, KJV has the tent of the congregation. Hebrew there's Ohel Moed. Most modern translations do tent of meeting. But in most places where it talks with the Moadim or Moed in the Bible, it means like sacred time.

00:12:19 It's like festivals. And the temple of the Moed, it's either this place where God and I meet together, but where they do that is in Sabbaths, in holidays, days of the day of atonement, days like Sukkot, days like Passover. It's a place where the whole idea behind the tabernacle and then we'll transfer into the temple, but here is that we're building this place so that we can meet together with God. And that's why it's so important to start there because that's how everything that God is trying to do through covenant is going to be framed through that. That's part of why he cares so much what it's made out of, what it looks like, what it is. There's some really interesting stuff in terms of how that's playing. There's actually some symbolism and how it's going to play out. We're going to talk through that too.

Hank Smith: 00:13:11 Avram, John and I have been talking this year about becoming holy. It's a fun little phrase that it was easy for the Lord to take Israel out of Egypt, difficult to take Egypt out of Israel. Perhaps this is part of that. Avram, the promised land is ready for you. Now you are going to get ready for it, and I'm going to give you this tabernacle and these laws to create holiness.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:13:36 Yeah. The whole idea, all the way back to Exodus 19. Just before Mount Sinai, God says, if you do what I say, I will make you a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. That's God's covenant purpose in every dispensation, and that's 100% the purpose of this structure.

Hank Smith: 00:13:56 I know we're jumping to a little application here, but I hope everyone can see it. It's easy for the Lord to give me places to get out of the world. I can go to church. I can go to Institute. I can go to the temple. I can even come home. Easy to get me physically out of the world. How do I get the world out of me?

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:14:18 Yeah. I think one of the reasons why sometimes we struggle with these parts of even Exodus, especially in Leviticus, how is this relevant? Well, again, it's God working in his people. It's God working with his people. The first thing he's going to do in 4-9, it's a sequel, Exodus 25. He has them gather stuff. One of the things about the tabernacle is it's made out of precious stuff. There's linen, there's gold, there's silver, there's bronze. KJV says brass, but KJV means bronze there, maybe some

copper too, depending on how you want to hash that word. There's all kinds of textiles, olive oil, perfumes, precious stones. In some ways this begs the question. They're out in the middle of the desert. Where's this stuff coming from?

- Hank Smith: 00:15:08 Where did they get all the ... Did they bring it from Egypt?
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:15:11 The primary wood is acacia wood. So shittim in the KJV is acacia wood, and acacia does grow in the Sinai. There's a source of timber there. If you go back to Exodus 12, God says, you need to ask the Egyptians as you're leaving, and they will give you stuff just to get you out of their land. So immediately after the whole thing with the 10 plagues, the death of the firstborn, ask your neighbors in Egypt, and they will give you stuff to leave them. It says.
- Hank Smith: 00:15:41 We'll pay you to leave. Reminds me of high school, John. People are like, I will pay you to leave.
- John Bytheway: 00:15:48 Will you just go?
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:15:52 That's one possible vector for this.
- Hank Smith: 00:15:54 Okay. Keep going.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:15:56 One other possibility that's important is remembering that all of our biblical texts circulated orally before they're written down. Hebrew is not a language in its final form until about 1000BC. Until we get to about David and Solomon, nobody in Genesis spoke Hebrew. Nobody in the Exodus spoke Hebrew. They're going to speak other languages, some Egyptians, some protocol that might become Hebrew eventually, but since our Bible's written in Hebrew, that means everything we're reading in this is either transmitted later or translated later across the board. There's some evidence that the tabernacle was actually improved on as the Israelites became more settled. God gives his pattern and they build it then, I mean, we're seeing that right now with Salt Lake City. The Salt Lake Temple, when it's finally finished, will be different than the Salt Lake Temple than it was built in the 1890s, even though we can still say the temple was built in the 1890s, even the temple we're going to is not going to be that same temple in a lot of ways. There may be something happening there with that as well in our text.
- Hank Smith: 00:17:10 Oh, that makes perfect sense. We may not have the original version, we have a version of the original that came later.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:17:19 That's a great way of thinking about it.

John Bytheway: 00:17:20 Not the original version, a version of the original, that was good.

Hank Smith: 00:17:24 Yeah.

John Bytheway: 00:17:25 2.0.

Hank Smith: 00:17:26 Yeah.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:17:28 As a fun thing on that, by the way, thinking through that actually, in 35:7 is talking about the various textiles. Ram skins died red and badger skins. Now, [badger skin](#), it's a little weird there. In fact, it's so weird that nobody actually knows what it means. Okay?

Hank Smith: 00:17:47 Okay.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:17:48 There's a pervasive suggestion that we're looking at here is actually this leather made from some kind of sea mammal. Dolphin skins, seal skins and arguments for sea manatee, like for sea cow. This is the outer covering of the tabernacle, and it seems to be designed for waterproofing, which again, it suggests we're looking forward a little bit because there's no rain in the Sinai Peninsula hardly at all it's basically Mars out there. Even translations will, they'll like leather or another kind of leather. They're just kind of trying to find a way to frame this. Actually, my favorite, just for how, like, cagey it is, is the New International Version says for ram skins and another type of durable leather.

John Bytheway: 00:18:36 Another.

Hank Smith: 00:18:37 We don't know what to say.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:18:39 We know what to say. So yeah, it's clear there's another kind of [leather](#). It probably wasn't badgers, but it could have been, it's something else that they were using. I do think there is some other sort of Canaanite and other ideas as to why they think it's going to be sea mammal skin, and there's place for that in terms of waters and dwelling in waters and things like that we get in some places in the Psalms. But one of the things I love is that God says all this, he says, and I want you to bring this of your own free will. Right? One of the cool things about what happens here is this is not God saying, oh, this is whatever. I need this much stuff. He says, bring so that we can build me a house.

Anybody who can help with this, anybody can do with this, just bring what you want.

00:19:20 And verse 21 is great, 35:21. And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him up, and everyone who his spirit made willing, and they brought the Lord's offering to the work of the tabernacle of the congregation, and for all the service, and for all the holy garments. Their hearts are stirred up. They're in the middle of the desert, and they're bringing all their precious things. It reminds me of Kirtland a little bit, the willingness of them in their poverty to sacrifice for this building, that they don't need to survive in the deserts.

Hank Smith: 00:19:56 Avram, I love this. I love that this tent, this tabernacle is going to be built with so many precious things that are a real sacrifice for these people, and how it is that same way today. I want to read this quote from [Sister Sharon Eubank](#). This was up in BYU, Idaho. She said, "I am occasionally asked, why doesn't the church spend more money on humanitarian work? Why doesn't it stop building expensive temples and focus its resources on relieving the poor? This is a legitimate question for the Church of Jesus Christ, but is it money that solves society's ills? The world has poured \$2 trillion into addressing chronic issues in Africa. Why isn't the situation better? Because money isn't the real issue. Lasting progress comes through trusted relationships, infrastructure, reducing corruption, and the ability of people to work together. Money doesn't necessarily create those things. They must be developed alongside the resources, and frankly, it is a much harder work.

00:21:02 I will never discount the one thing this church does that lifts entire communities in rapid development. It invites men and women of all social classes and backgrounds to enter sacred buildings and make the most binding and important promises of their mortal lives. In those buildings, they promise not to steal or lie, they promise to be faithful to their spouse and children. They vow that they will seek the interest of their neighbors and be peacemakers and become devoted to the idea that we are all one family, all valued and alike unto God. If those promises made in holy temples are kept, it transforms society faster than any aid or development project ever could. The greatest charitable development on the planet is for people to bind themselves to their God and mean it. So thank goodness the church builds 335 temples and counting. It is the greatest poverty alleviation system in the world. The most important thing you can do as a humanitarian is to keep your covenants with God. The second most important thing you can do is connect in goodness with others around you." Is that not

beautifully put? Avram, when she said, keep your covenants and connect in goodness with others around you. I thought of you and Thora. You do that as well as anyone I know.

- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:22:24 We try. It reminds me a little bit actually to this question of the ... There was a time when I was many babies ago. We were probably only at like five or six of them.
- Hank Smith: 00:22:34 Many babies ago.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:22:36 We were in a ward that had a lot of young families, and I had somebody ask me, they're like, how do you do it, Avram? How do you do these things? And I say, I do it badly. But there are things that are worth doing badly. You think about the process of being made holy and this process of building a place where God can be. Like, how are we doing this? Well, I'm doing it badly.
- Hank Smith: 00:22:59 I'm doing it badly.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:23:00 But it's absolutely worth doing it badly.
- Hank Smith: 00:23:03 Maybe I didn't do it as badly as I did last year.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:23:06 Exactly.
- Hank Smith: 00:23:07 Oh, that is so funny. John, I love that. Many children ago, it's like Star Wars. Many children ago in a land far away.
- John Bytheway: 00:23:16 I love that twice in Leviticus 19, it has love thy neighbor as thyself. When you think about what [Sister Eubanks](#) said, the one by one nature of the temple making covenants with God, and how that will changes society faster, if one by one, we are all love thy neighbor as thyself. I think the talk she gave was called The Sacred Life of Trees. You want to read that one slowly about what a society that starts going to the temple and making covenants with God, what that does to the society. It's a really interesting point.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:23:55 The other thing there is, if we talk about covenants, our [inaudible] covenant is consecration, which literally means to make holy. The whole idea here is we're pushing ourselves to this to give everything to God already anyway, all that we have, all that we are. Yeah, I love the next verse, this is great, in 22, and they came both men and women as many as were willing, and they brought bracelets, and earrings, and rings, and tablets, and jewels of gold, and every man that offered, offered an

offering of gold unto the Lord. I think you can make a comparison. I think you ought to make a comparison, actually, between this and what happened in Exodus 32. That's the whole golden calf thing. And they told Aaron, they said, Make us gods. And Aaron said, okay, break off your earrings, put them in, break them, and I'll make this for you.

00:24:49 There's a direct parallel here between breaking off your stuff and giving it to an idol, whatever's going on with the golden calf there, and breaking them off, and let's do this for the temple. Here, they're like, oh, we had this problem. It was bad. Now we've changed. Let's do the same thing, but now we're doing it for God. And there's a fun little connection there with that.

Hank Smith: 00:25:11 Avram, I was taught by [Dr. Dan Belnap](#), who's also in our hallway, something that I loved and I wanted to get your take on, you just said consecration to make holy. Four years ago, he was with us and he said the ancients didn't see themselves as giving something up. It was more, I'm making this holy. So I'm not giving up my money, I'm making it holy. I'm not giving up my time, I'm making this time holy. And you just said that very thing.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:25:41 I teach Pearl of Great Price classes, spend a lot of time, cause of Zion, I'll bring it up when we do 4 Nephi. And every so often, a student will ask me, So what about tithing? I'll do the thing. I'm like, look, guys, we can't make excuses and say we're not economically consecrated. Everyone who's been endowed has promised that their money is not their own. We are all part of this. Like, so what's the difference between tithing and consecration? When you tithe, you give 10% and you say, God, this is yours for your church to use. And when you consecrate, you say, God, this is yours. And then God says, for you to use for me. The idea is that it all still belongs to God. The tithing we give goes to the church's stewardship. The other stuff we've already given all of it, but now it's God's for us to use for his kingdom.

Hank Smith: 00:26:34 That's beautiful.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:26:35 In verse 10 (Exodus 35), it says, "And every wise hearted among you shall come and make all the Lord hath commanded." The people are not just giving their stuff. They're giving their time, they're giving their talents. These are people, the wise hearted here ... Chacham Lev literally means wise of heart, but it means here that they're people who are good with their hands, who are clever at building, who have something to give that's not just stuff. They're giving what they are. And we'll call out in 35:30, we have two unsung heroes in the Bible, Bezaleel and

Aholiab who are the foremans of this, but they have an entire team of people who are working on this who are literally volunteering their time and their talents to build this building for God.

- Hank Smith: 00:27:26 John, do you remember a couple years ago when [Dr. Wilcox](#) was with us, Brad Wilcox, he said, "All of our talents are in the Bishop's storehouse."
- John Bytheway: 00:27:34 The footnote under wise hearted says everyone that is talented or skilled, that's exactly what you're saying. You're bringing your talents and your skills. That's consecrated too.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:27:46 All that we have, all that we are. When he's talking about Bezaleel, and he's talking about Aholiab, he says, because I put it into their hearts, i.e. we have these abilities. We have these talents because they, as Benjamin reminds us, like the air we breathe are already a gift from God. We're just giving back what's his. There's reasons for this, good and bad, but sometimes we're a little hard on the ancient Israelites. We focus on their murmuring, we focus on the golden calf, the whole thing with the quails, partially because they're fun stories to talk about. But we don't talk enough about this. The primary thing you're going to see with the tabernacle is gold. Every time you go to the temple, you say, you can't see your earring. It's been melted down. It's right there. But you gave something that's now part of the whole that beautifies God's temple. I think there's a valuable image there in our notion. Even our little earring gets melted down, but you look there and you say, what I gave is what makes this edifice of God's church beautiful.
- Hank Smith: 00:28:54 That's fantastic. I'm going to walk up to the temple and be like, that brick right there. That's...
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:28:59 It came from me. Sometimes I'll turn a light on and say, yep, these are my tithing dollars guys.
- Hank Smith: 00:29:05 Yeah, got the lights on for the next 10 minutes.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:29:08 But recognizing part of what this does, again, purely anthropologically is that there are of course all the gospel benefits, but the fact is, is that, and Joseph talked, Joseph Smith talked about this a lot. Tithing, consecration, these ideas, they mean that we have skin in this game, that we are part of this covenant community. One thing I think is really important, [President Nelson](#), he emphasized very strongly the name of the church, and we spent a lot of time there talking about The

Church of Jesus Christ, and that's absolutely right. The Church is the Church of Jesus Christ, he's the head of it, we do what he says, he's our boss, but that's not the name the church gave us through revelation, that God gave us through revelation. The name of the church is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It's absolutely the Church of Jesus Christ. He is our head. It's also The Church of the Latter-day Saints. We are part of a covenant community where we meet together with Jesus and we build this thing together. Recognizing both those are an important part of becoming God's people.

- John Bytheway: 00:30:17 I remember hearing [Brad Wilcox](#) talk about, we don't want our young people saying, this is my grandma and grandpa's church, or this is my mom and dad's church. But beginning to sense, this is my church. I've always loved the name of the church. It's His and it's ours. It's my church too. Of Latter-day Saints, I like that.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:30:36 I've seen this in my children. It's a hard transition sometimes to move church from something that's done to you to something you do. We have these great youth programs and they're all planned for whatever. And I know I had friends even when I was undergrad. When I was younger, you moved to your first young single adult ward and like, okay, do church for me. And it's really hard then to transition to be, oh, I now do church. I now do this. I now do this for others. I think it's important and one of those people who we're seeing modeled here a little bit here in Leviticus and in Exodus.
- Hank Smith: 00:31:15 You might say, well, if someone is so poor, they should be exempt from tithing. But we don't see tithing as a bad thing. We actually see it as a blessing that you're contributing to this and God is going to see that contribution. Why would we say, no, no, no. We don't want you to contribute to God and have him see that contribution. No matter how small it is, even if it's the eight cents that you give, you gave.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:31:45 Because what God ultimately wants is you and I. Whatever that is, the amount doesn't really ever matter. Well, they didn't work as hard as I did or they didn't do ... We don't get to say that. We don't know. I think if people who have, you know, are depressed where everything it takes that day is to get out of bed and get dressed. They have worked harder that day than I have probably worked in the whole week. It is not my place to say, oh, you didn't work hard enough to build Zion today. They absolutely have.
- John Bytheway: 00:32:20 Hmm. And Hank, what you said reminds me of the widow throws in her mites. The Lord doesn't say, oh, take that out.

Give it back to her. She doesn't have anything. No, it meant something to her. It was her contributing. They kept that.

- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:32:38 Partially because if you think about something like fast offering, I was a clerk for a while, and of course, one of my jobs is to work through and disperse and distribute and things like that. And of course there, every dollar helps. Every penny helps. It's being used for God's kingdom.
- Hank Smith: 00:32:53 And you made it holy. You made that part of you holy.
- John Bytheway: 00:32:57 Sanctified, yeah.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:32:59 We're in 36 now. They're bringing stuff. Aholiab and Bezaleel in verse five, they say, the people bring much more than enough. We have too much stuff to work with now. And so God says, you know what? You don't have to bring any more stuff. And the people were restrained from bringing in verse seven, I love seven. For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it and too much. And I'm reminded of when the Lord talks about consecration in Doctrine and Covenants 104. He talks about his stewardship and he talks about how we do this and he says, for the earth is full and there is enough and to spare. These people are experiencing that kind of abundance. There is enough and to spare.
- John Bytheway: 00:33:57 I'm glad you said that thing about don't ... we sometimes are too hard on them. We notice the murmuring or this or that, but look how excited they were to give.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:34:05 Again, they struggle, but you know what? So do I. I do my fair share of murmuring. I do my fair share of lusting for the flesh pots of Egypt, which is way more, like, terrible sounding. It just literally means meat pots, which is really what I like. But this model for this is what it means to give to build God's kingdom and build God's house.
- Hank Smith: 00:34:29 Yeah. Isn't that a beautiful blessing to have? Stop. Stop.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:34:34 Exactly.
- Hank Smith: 00:34:36 Yeah. There's too much. We don't know what to do. Wouldn't it be great if President Oaks said we just are receiving so much tithing, so much fast offerings. We've got to slow down. It's -
- John Bytheway: 00:34:45 Stop it, people. Yeah.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:34:48 That would be a great thing to happen.

Hank Smith: 00:34:50 The people were restrained from bringing. Like, please let me give.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:34:55 The text here now moves into some technical stuff. I want to spend a little time with this because the biblical authors do. Sometimes people talk to me and they'll say, well, it doesn't seem very relevant or very important. It was to somebody who wrote it down to present what they're doing, but actually talking through what the tabernacle looks like can give us a better appreciation of our own temple worship. I'd like to spend a little bit of time just thinking through some of these things because the first thing to recognize is that when we say tent, it wasn't really a tent the way we think about it, in that it was actually a series, it was a structure of boards that was then covered by a series of overlapping curtains. So when they put the tabernacle, just in terms of our imaginations here, we shouldn't imagine it like pitching your popup tents, the three minute tents we buy now that are super easy. I remember my days as a boy scout, you had to like, it was terrible.

Hank Smith: 00:35:46 And now you just push a button, right?

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:35:48 It goes right up. In terms of size also, I want to think about this here because the Bible, of course, measures things in cubits. Like most ancient measurements, it was based on body parts. A cubit is a, you know, it's from your elbow, tip of your forefinger there, and of course obviously that varies from person to person. It would even vary from time to time and place to place. Usually when I'm calculating numbers in the Old Testament, I use 17.5 inches as my base cubit. It's ... Occasionally as we're talking about this, I'm going to give numbers to give a sense of the size of this. So for example, these boards I'm talking about, it says they're 10 cubits, so that means they're about 14 and a half feet or four and a half meters tall. About that big is how big this building is.

00:36:37 And again, when they're assembling it, they're going to be kind of working through this. This is just help for people reading it. This word tenons, it's a fine word in carpentry, but if you've never done any carpentry, a tenon is a little protrusion of wood they use to put into another, usually a mortise or another socket. Grooved boards that they then put together with these bars and this little structure thing. Then these boards are gilded, okay, which means they're covered in gold. So they're made out of acacia wood. They're covered in gold. By the way, we know this, we have gilding as early as the old kingdom in Egypt. It's a

very ancient technique. It's a way to make something gold be there. But again, gold's pretty heavy. So even gilded makes the wood heavier. As we think about the tabernacle being this portable temple, and it is portable in the sense that you can take it down and put it back up again.

00:37:31 But they're not doing this a lot. Even as you read scripture, you'll see it tends to stay in places sometimes for decades, because you set it up, it's going to take a day or two to set it up, a day or two to take down. Even when the Israelites are moving in the wilderness, they tend to set up camp, they're there for a while, take it again, and then they move again. Very, very heavy, heavy to set up. You'd have entire teams there standing there with the boards and said to put it in the right places, put the pieces in there, you'd take an entire crew to put this thing up and down. But again, part of it is this idea of, but I love this still here, that God doesn't wait until they're settled in the land. It's only another 40 years before they get in the land, give or take.

00:38:13 And from God's perspective, it's not that long. But it's important if he says, even though you guys are still traveling here in the wilderness, I want you to have a place where you can be with me right now. Then the tent part or after you've got the structure, then they have these layers of first sort of dyed linen, and then you have wool, and then you'll have the rams leather, dyed red, and then over top of that, you'll have whatever the badger skins are. We already talked about that in the beginning here. Whatever those happen to be. And then you have these coverings inside it. One thing I want us to think about here, our temples, they're very white, and I did my mission in Oregon. The ordinance rooms in the Oregon temple were made of a dark wood. It was like the accents for it, and it was a very different experience, but these would have been riotous in their colors.

00:39:03 Red and gold and blues and purples. Going there and looking at it would have been visually impressive, especially in a world that's important. For you and I, color is cheap because of chemical dyes, if I want a blue shirt, I just go and I buy a blue shirt. I don't even think about the fact that it's blue. They have to go and they have to find these colors. They have to dye these colors. They have to get enough to make the fabric for. Their clothes would have been a lot of brown. And then you go to the tent or you go to the tabernacle, and suddenly you see something just spectacular. We talk, consecration, we talked this before, holiness. It's this idea of being set apart, being different, being different from the rest of the world. And part of this is that this is something that's different from a day-to-day tent, from day-to-day clothing.

John Bytheway: 00:39:56 I love that.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:39:57 Again, you have these divisions here, and the temple, of course, is divided into the holy place, and then the most holy place, what KGV calls the Holy of Holies. All of them places where God is, but there's this division here in sacred space. You've got these curtains. So you have the over things, and then these curtains that we call veils. They would have been white like our veils. They were embroidered and they were shiny and they were covered in all kinds of cool stuff. So it would again, a visually impressive experience. Then the author of Exodus goes having kind of established, had this place, we built this up, covered it. Now we talk about the various parts of the furniture. So the first, probably the most famous is the Ark of the Covenants. Now, ark is Hebrew Aron. It just means box or chests.

00:40:44 It's about three and a half feet, so about a meter, 1.1 meters by about two feet, so about 6.67 meters. It's a relatively good size box. It's also made primarily out of acasia wood. It's gilded on inside and out. It's pretty heavy. It'll get heavier because on top of it is what KJV calls the mercy seats or the kapporet is the Hebrew word for that. It means covering thing, but the root kafar primarily means to cover, but it's also the source of our word for atonement, which seems to me part of what the KJV translators are trying to capture by calling it the mercy seat. This is the covering atonement thingy. Now, I want to talk about a little about this because on top of it, there are of course these cherubim. Cherubims, as you see in your KJV is an abomination.

John Bytheway: 00:41:40 Right.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:41:41 I will often joke with my students and I say, if any of you ever say the word cherubims, I will fail you automatically. You may not say the word cherubims. So the word is cherub, keruv. Then in Hebrew, you make plurals by adding yod mem at the end. So keruvim, cherubim, that's fine. Cherubs is fine. Cherubims is a double plural and is bad.

John Bytheway: 00:42:03 Yeah. It's like geeses.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:42:06 Yeah, exactly. Don't do that either, right?

Hank Smith: 00:42:10 Don't do that. You also fail.

John Bytheway: 00:42:14 I think that's in the calling of Isaiah, doesn't King James say seraphims?

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:42:19 I'm sure it does.

John Bytheway: 00:42:20 In Isaiah six?

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:42:22 Yes.

John Bytheway: 00:42:22 Yeah. And the Book of Mormon gets it right. Seraphim.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:42:25 [The Book of Mormon](#) does get it right. The Book of Mormon corrects it. Either Joseph knew better or whatever. When they did the 2013 edition of the scriptures, I'm like, I know we're not updating the text. Can we just change that one little...? Just take the S off the end. Everyone would be happier if we did.

John Bytheway: 00:42:44 That's great.

Hank Smith: 00:42:46 Fingernails on the chalkboard, yeah.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:42:48 No, but in some ways, it really does. I actually wrote an article about divided space here years ago for a Sperry where I talk about cherubim. They're actually not really very common in the Old Testament. They show up in Genesis one, rather famously with a flaming sword, guarding the way to the tree of life. They show up here as part of the furniture on top of the ark. They show up other places in the tabernacle and then in Kings for the same reason, it's talking about Solomon's temple. They're in a couple of Psalms and then they show up in Ezekiel, 1 and 10, and that's about it for what they're doing. They're not really common. It looks like they are actually composite animal beings.

00:43:35 The cherubs are like griffins or like the Egyptian sphinx, so there's some differences with that. There's a Mesopotamian figure called Lamassu that's a winged bull with a man's head. These appear to what cherubs how they're understanding them because like all those things, their purpose is they guard. They guard between spaces. This is why they put them on the veil of the temple. They are guarding the way into God's presence. This is what they're doing in the Garden of Eden. They are guarding the way to the tree of life. They're these guardians that stand in the way and keep the way, the whole thing is to protect us, because again, back to Book of Mormon, this idea that no unclean thing can dwell in God's presence. And of course, that means that if you do enter God's presence uncleanly, then you, words of scripture, you die. What God does is he puts covenants in place, he puts space in place, he puts people in place.

00:44:40 He puts symbolic, we'll call them semi-mythological if you want for this, beings in place that protects the way. It's not because he's so scared of us, it's to keep us from entering his place unfairly and unprepared. And in many ways, in our temples, we still use guarded space. The recommend desk is fundamentally a cherub place there to prevent you from entering unworthily. You don't go your merry self, you wait until you're invited, and the cherub's job is to keep you out until you're invited.

Hank Smith: 00:45:16 Could you say even the recommend process?

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:45:19 100% the same kind of thing of making sure that you are ready. The other thing they do is cherubs support God's throne. In Psalm 18:10, the Psalmist there cries to God. He says, please come rescue me. God actually rides to their rescue on the back of a cherub. In Ezekiel 10, when God leaves his temple before it's destroyed, he does so on the backs of a cherub. In fact, the full name of the Ark of the Covenant as given in 1 Samuel is the Ark of the Covenant of Jehovah, the God who sits between the Cherubim. This mercy seat here is God's throne on earth. It marks the presence of God.

Hank Smith: 00:46:04 Avram, if someone were to ask me something like, well, how come this bishop or this stake presidency member, they get to decide if I'm worthy to go to God's house. I've heard that question a couple of times. I like how you explain this that, no, no, no. That's not what this is about. God wants you to be prepared to come into his presence. This isn't about, are you worthy to come in? It's more, are you prepared? Yes, I am. Okay.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:46:33 We get caught up in word of wisdom or for most people with a chastity issue, but the final question is very key. Are you worthy? Are you considered worthy to enter the house of the Lord? You can say that that's in some ways the most important part.

Hank Smith: 00:46:48 Worthiness is almost a form of readiness.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:46:52 Absolutely.

John Bytheway: 00:46:53 I remember just the question coming up in class about there's so many different judges. Is God the father of the judge? Is Jesus the judge? And then places where it says The Twelve will judge, the house of Israel a possible judge. I found an Elder McConkie quotation where he said, "In reality, there are a whole hierarchy of judges." I always bring that up in the temple.

You think it's the bishop? No, what's the bishop's last question? You're your judge there. Then you'll go to the stake president and you yourself again. There's partial judgments. Coming to earth meant that you supported Heavenly Father's plan. What happens at death, spirit prison, spirit paradise, there's partial judgments happening. To break it up that way is interesting and helpful, but yes, the last question is yours. It's not someone judging you, it's you judging yourself.

- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:47:52 So even in the endowment, before it starts, you've got a chance to say, I'm not ready yet. I shouldn't be here. I really appreciate this notion that one, these levels are a chance for [everybody](#) to make sure that yes, I got people coming to my office and like I don't really feel I'm worthy or not. And I'm like, well, Jesus has said you are in certain levels. You're putting levels on yourself that he has not. But I do appreciate this willingness to say, if you're not doing this, you come back when you're ready.
- Hank Smith: 00:48:25 I like that. It's not a matter of I'm judging your worthiness. It's, hey, are you prepared? Are you taking this seriously? Because the Lord is. So we're just making sure you are.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:48:38 And in Old Testament context, because if you don't, you'll die.
- Hank Smith: 00:48:41 Yeah.
- John Bytheway: 00:48:43 So it's kind of an important question.
- Hank Smith: 00:48:47 Avram, this has been fantastic. I really have learned a lot and had, like, light bulb moments. What do you want to do next?
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:48:55 In Exodus, first of all, there's this really interesting thing with the furniture is that everything inside the temple is overlaid with gold and everything outside the temple proper, the Holy of Holies, is overlaid with bronze. There's the successive holy space kind of things. The sacrificial altar is a bronze altar. The laver you wash with is a bronze altar. The incense altar is a gold altar. The other thing that I want to talk about just briefly is this figure of the clothing of the high priest because he's like the tabernacle in microcosm. He's dressed in the same kind of stuff. It's the same kind of clothing. He's got gold and he's got the same kind of dyed linen on him, and he's ... There's some evidence that he kind of maybe even blended in, maybe even the actual same fabric that he had on him. In a story that probably lets you know more about me than I want you to know.

00:49:49 My mother's a great sewer. She's a wonderful woman. She used to make Halloween costumes for us. And one year when I was a teenager, I went as the Aaronic high priest for Halloween. Oh, and we spent hours reading over this passage here and trying to figure out what was meant by all these parts. We made an ephod. We didn't have pomegranates. We put little like bells on the end because we couldn't get pomegranates as such, but it had bells, so I jingled when I walked.

Hank Smith: 00:50:17 Wow. That is awesome.

John Bytheway: 00:50:19 So who are you? I'm Spider-Man. Who are you?

Hank Smith: 00:50:23 That's funny. As he goes through the elementary school parade, right?

John Bytheway: 00:50:26 You have to explain everybody what you are in the original Hebrew.

Hank Smith: 00:50:30 Who are you? Quick note. Those of you who are watching on YouTube, you may see some of the B-roll of what Avram is talking about. That comes from our friend, [Daniel Smith](#), his YouTube channel, which is [Messages of Christ](#). Fantastic channel. Daniel does incredible work there. So we want to thank him for allowing us to use some of his footage. Avram, tell us more about the high priest. I just picture you going trick or treating.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:51:00 It was fun. Part of it, and actually we'll see this again with Leviticus, is both very, very specific and sometimes not very clear about these things. For example, the primary [garment](#) for priests, whether the high priest, regular priest is this linen coat. Linen is undyed. It would've been a white linen. And there was what's called the robe of the ephod over that. And then you get this question- but that begs the question, there's this thing called the ephod. And biblical scholars aren't sure what it looked like. It's some kind of overgarment. It seems to be some kind of long aprony thing, but it's not entirely clear what it's supposed to be, partially because you can wear it alone. So Samuel, when he officiates in a linen ephod, when David dances before the ark, when he brings it in there in Samuel, David's wearing an ephod and Michal says it's not covering enough.

00:52:00 So it seems to be some kind of, like, brief garment that goes over everything else, but can also be worn by itself. We don't know. Mine was this weird fabric. It was kind of this weird hard fabric. But I had to like, I had to have help getting into it

because it was hard to dress myself with. Went over top of my head. Very constrictive. On top of the ephod, there's this breastplate, and it's not a breastplate in terms of armor. It's this, like, little square, actually linen thing that is then embedded with gemstones, that represent the 12 tribes of Israel. And then it's connected to these onyx stones, mine were just buttons, but these onyx stones that have inscribed then the names of the 12 tribes on the shoulders, because the whole idea is God says to the priest, to Aaron and his sons, you will bear the name of Israel before me.

00:52:52 And the idea is, the priest puts Israel on him, and then he carries that into the presence of God. So the other thing they know is that he has this special hat on. I think KJV says mitre, because of old church, whatever, it's a turban is what it's going to be. And there on the front there is a gold plate that says Hebrew is Kadosh Adonai. That means KJV has holiness to the Lord, but holiness there means consecrated to, set apart to. When we say holiness to the Lord, that's what we're meaning. It means that this is consecrated to, this is set apart to God. So literally, God puts his name on the priest's forehead and says, you belong to me. And the priest puts Israel on his body and then goes and walks in and represents God's presence before God.

Hank Smith: 00:53:39 Wow. So he represents Jehovah. So when I see him walking across, I think of Jehovah, wow, look at that.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:53:48 Right. He's representing God on the, he belongs to God, and then he's the other way around. He's representing Israel back to God.

John Bytheway: 00:53:55 Did he also have the Urim and Thummim with him?

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:53:58 Yes. And also probably is kind of the answer to that question. The Urim and Thummim seem to have been primarily used in antiquity by the priests. It's looked like one of the early responsibilities of priests is to obtain God's will through, like, divination. In Israel, that means for the Urim and Thummim. So we associate it because of Joseph or the Book of Mormon with prophets. It's a priestly prerogative in the Old Testament. You only see priests using Urim and Thummim in the Old Testament. Whether it folded up, whether it was the one behind it, it's actually kept in the breastplate because they put it right next to their heart, it says, and then they use the divine however that worked. However, they obtained gods. Well, obviously we have the Book of Mormon, we have Joseph Smith's experiences. The

Bible is very vague on what they're doing with them, but priests would use the Urim and Thummim to obtain God's will.

- John Bytheway: 00:54:48 Would it be true then, I just feel like we hear in our conversations, in our classes, a lot of Hebrew, are we putting together that anytime there's an IM on something that's plural? Is that good?
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:55:04 Seraph, seraphim. Heruv, keruvim. The only place that's a little bit tricky is Elohim.
- John Bytheway: 00:55:10 So urim and Thummim... Say it the way you would say it, is plural.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:55:15 So lights and perfections is how it's translated.
- John Bytheway: 00:55:20 So interesting.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:55:22 The other thing with this notion of the priest representing is, of course, this brings up Aaron's family and talk about an everlasting priesthood. This is where, if we're going to talk about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints here, when we talk about the Aaronic priesthood, this is where we're tracing it back to. And if you make a connection, the Aaronic High Priest is like the presiding bishop in that he's the head of all Aaronic priests, not just an individual, but should be sort of like all of them all together would be a place to think through what he's doing.
- Hank Smith: 00:55:55 Avram to what we know, was the high priest at the tabernacle every day?
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:55:58 It's tricky. Probably he was, yes, because that's his job. He's the head of it. His job is to basically be in charge of what the priests are doing there. He's sort of a presiding officer there. He probably wouldn't be offering sacrifice very often, but there are a couple of things, as we'll see later on in Leviticus, that are his job exclusively. Probably his role is mostly ceremonial administrative.
- Hank Smith: 00:56:25 And all the other priests are dressed the same. They're in the white linen.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:56:28 That's right. They just wear undyed [linen](#). They've got different hats and they have these special underclothing breeches, it says in KJV. They're some kind of breech cloth because it says to protect their modesty, so it looks like they go up to the altar and

you can kind of see up their skirts. It actually seems to be what the Bible's suggesting, actually.

- Hank Smith: 00:56:49 Yeah. The first guy was like, whoa. And they're like, we're going to do something about that.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:56:53 The only final thing about Exodus is, of course, in 40, the one of the most important things is they built the [Mishkan](#), this dwelling place for God to come to. They finish it, they dedicate it, they anoint it, and then God comes. And his glory fills the house, and he's there and he says, yes, this is my place. I will be in your midst in this house. Powerful stuff there, and it then becomes the center in a lot of ways.
- Hank Smith: 00:57:21 Avram, we might get to this later, but I'd like to ask you now, if someone has a concern that, well, why can't I just go to the mountains? Why does God have a place? Because I can, I can commune with God. I can pray to him in my home, I can pray to him in my closet. That's all throughout the scriptures. Why does God want a place? Why does he seem to want, I should say. I won't make you speak for him.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:57:49 So it's intriguing because we do sometimes see God taking people to mountains. They've just come from Sinai. What makes Leviticus special and unique in this notion of people will tell me, and correctly, I can feel the Spirit in the mountains. Maybe even I feel the Spirit better in the mountains. That could be true, but that suggests to me that because God makes other spaces, that he's looking for more than just you feeling the Spirit, that there's something else that's being done because you're right. You can feel the Spirit there. You do feel the Spirit there, but that seems suggests then that feeling the Spirit is not perhaps what's going on here primarily. Back to Exodus 19, when he talks about what he's going to make Israel, he doesn't say, I'm going to make you Hank Smith a holy person. I'm going to make you, Avram Shannon, a holy person. I'm going to make you into a holy people, a kingdom of priests, a community. Part of this is that the purpose of temples, of church, of covenants is to build community. It's something you do together.
- Hank Smith: 00:59:12 I really love that. I can go be spiritual by myself, but go put me around some humans. It was way back in Mosiah 18, [Dr. Melissa Inouye](#). She said, God wants us to love our enemies so he put them in our wards. And then John said, so many enemies, one convenient location. I just had never thought of this, but a temple, tabernacle, or a church building, brings people together. The Lord's like, now watch what happens when you

get a lot of humans together. They bump into each other and you get to deal with that, and that is so good.

- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:59:53 Moving ahead a little bit to Leviticus 19, you know, the second great commandments, you love your neighbor as yourself. It's really, really easy to love your neighbor when your neighbor means somebody you've never ever met.
- Hank Smith: 01:00:07 Right. Someone you never see.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 01:00:10 It's a lot harder to love your neighbor when that's that person sitting in the pew in front of you who totally dropped the ball in planning that last activity and you had to put up all the chairs by yourself. Suddenly you have to learn how to love that neighbor, not neighbors generally.
- Hank Smith: 01:00:26 So the Lord could say, yeah, you could all go to the mountains, but then you wouldn't be next to each other. I want you next to each other because that, you're going to grow next to each other.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 01:00:35 And it's worth noting the tabernacles, courtyards, only about 10,000 square feet. So big, but not, not very big. Especially think about the animals and the place for that. God's in his temple, he says it and we turn the page and we're in Leviticus. There's almost no narrative in Leviticus at all. There's like one story, two stories. Most of it is a series of legal and ritual instructions. The first seven chapters are about how you do a sacrifice. And in sort of 8 through 10, Aaron and his family, how they serve God. 11-16 are about ritual purity. How do you keep yourself the right way before God? And then 17-26 are a subunit called the Holiness Code, which is about how you become like God through specific behaviors. We have stories to emulate and those are great, but Leviticus says, let's stop and let's talk specifics.
- 01:01:33 Let's talk theory. Let's talk about how we do this. The center of Israelite religious life was the sacrificial altar. Most of their temple worship, they never went into temple proper because the sacrifice altar is in the courtyard rather than the holy place or the most holy place. For most of Israel, when they go to the temple, they never get past, in some ways, recommend desk in that sense. This can be fully compared to our own experience in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The endowments, the sealing ordinances, the other temple ordinances, these are the highest ordinances we perform and practice in The Church.

- 01:02:15 And for most of us, we do them periodically. We work through them. You'll do an endowment so often until you have enough to do sealings, cycle through your names. However, the most important meeting in the church is sacrament meeting. And we do that weekly. And of course, the focus of sacrament meeting and therefore, in some ways, the focal point of our ritual experience is the sacrament of the Lord's supper. That for you and I, the place we encounter God is at the sacrificial altar. It is no mistake that is Aaronic priests who officiate the sacrament. They are doing now what they have always done. This notion that, that we think about sacrifice, the temples are the fullest expression, but we still only go so far almost all the time, and we still encounter God right there in the sacraments.
- John Bytheway: 01:03:18 When someone says, but I can go feel the Spirit in the mountains. Yeah, you can, but where can you go get the sacrament from authorized servants?
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 01:03:27 There's a relationship created when you eat together. This is why when you take people on dates, you take them out to eat because you are creating a relationship by eating. This is why when you have tough meetings, you put food in there. There's good science on this. And this is why in the sacrament of the Lord's supper, you eat together, you eat with everybody around you, you eat with Jesus. One of the other names for the sacrament is communion.
- John Bytheway: 01:03:57 You're community.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 01:03:58 Community. Exactly. When you eat together, when you drink together, you are part of a covenant community. And of course, Mosiah 18 does this notion of this is us together. The prayer, sanctified, there's that made holy again, to the souls of all those who partake of it, that they may eat in remembrance. To all those who drink of it, that they may drink in remembrance. We're remembering Jesus, but we are coming together as a covenant community, experiencing that sacrifice every week. Together.
- John Bytheway: 01:04:36 How often in the New Testament was Jesus criticized for eating with sinners? Because he was inviting them and he was affirming them and that's, isn't that what's happening at the sacrament table? Come and eat with me. Come and have the last supper with me.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 01:04:50 We take it and you have that sacrament tray. You're sitting next to that guy who dropped the ball. Your pew. You hand it to them and you see them take Jesus' sacrifice just like you did.

And you say, you know what? It's hard, but we're all in this together.

- Hank Smith: 01:05:09 Wow, Avram, that connection to the sacrificial altar, because that's where they were going, right? Avram, that's what they saw of the temple, the bulk of them. That's what they saw of the temple.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 01:05:19 And again, we don't like to talk about it because it's weird and whatever for this. We put this white cloth over it and it's white for symbolism and whatever, but it, it's also, it's a shroud. This is what we're doing with this. And he says, eat my flesh. Drink my blood. This is a sacrifice. This is one of the things, by the way, where Leviticus informs so much in ways that we don't always think about as Latter-day Saints are his body. The word atone and atonement appears more times in Leviticus than the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price, combined. Atone and atonement, it's a priestly concept. It's what God is doing through sacrifice. When the Book of Mormon often uses atone, it's basically always in temple contexts. It's not a generic word in the scriptures. It's a specific sacrificial word.
- John Bytheway: 01:06:21 Talk about kaphar, K-A-P-H-A-R, isn't yom kippur the same word.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 01:06:29 So it's the same root. Hebrew does this thing where words are built from mostly three letter roots. So zabach means to sacrifice, but a Mizbe'ach is an altar, a sacrificial place. Shakan is to sort of dwell with, be with. Mishkan is dwelling place. Shekhinah, same root, is God's actual presence. Hebrew loves to do things called cognitive accusative will use the verbal form, the nominal form. The other thing that Hebrew does though, and this is to your question, John, the other thing that Hebrew does is it has a series of what are called in Hebrew, they're called Binyanim. They're forms. You can take a root and you can do different things with, and it'll mean slightly different things. There's a form called bo. Bo means to come. But then you put it into a form called the hif il, avi, and it means to bring. Literally to cause to come.
- 01:07:31 It's a causative. Do that with all kinds of words. So kafar to cover is in this form we call it the Qal ... It's kind of the base form, and it means to cover there. But kippur is in a form called the pi'el, and it's there suddenly then it means reconciliation. It means atonement. It's the same root, but it's, it's in a different form, and that form gives it a different nuance. Usually that form has an intensive nuance or a narrative that's doing over and over

again, but it seems to biblical scholars entirely clear how you get from cover to reconcile. Is God covering our sins? Is it always covered that's happening with that? Maybe, but the fact is that Kippur itself as this form just means reconcile or expiate or bring together or atone, if you like.

- Hank Smith: 01:08:26 I want to keep going, Avram. What specific things do we want to look at in Leviticus?
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 01:08:32 One through seven describes a complex sacrificial system. I want to highlight this for us because it's really easy for us to say, oh, male lamb, without blemish, Jesus, the sacrifices all point to Jesus.
- Hank Smith: 01:08:49 Why did they take seven chapters just to say that? So apparently there's more. Yeah.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 01:08:54 Partially because they sacrifice how does a female goat represent Jesus or a pigeon or for that matter, a handful of flour. All of those are sacrifices under the sacrificial system.
- Hank Smith: 01:09:09 Coming up in part two.



Holiness to the Lord PART 2



GUEST: DR. AVRAM SHANNON

- John Bytheway: 00:00:02 Welcome to part two with Dr. Avram Shannon, Exodus, and Leviticus.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:00:07 One of the hardest things for us as Latter-day Saints, and I think it's a problem with broader Christianity anyway, to see and do was recognize the sacrificial system is a complete religious system. It brought them closer to Jehovah. They don't just say, now I know who Jesus is and I have to do something with these sacrifices. The sacrifices are how they met with God. Back to the sacrament for a second. We think about Jesus, we remember Jesus. The bishop stands up there and says, okay. Now, for 15 minutes, we're going to think about Jesus. Remember what he did for us. You sit there and you think. No, the priest kneels down, breaks bread, blesses bread, we eat it. There's more than just a mental thing happening with sacrifices. We talk about how they all point to the Savior. They absolutely do, but they don't necessarily all point to the mortal ministry and the resurrection, if that makes sense.
- 00:01:06 I.e., remembering what [President Oaks](#) and [President Nelson](#) both repeatedly taught. Jehovah is the God of the Old Testament. And the purpose of sacrifices was to reconcile Israel with Jehovah. It was to make that relationship right. There's a whole burnt offering that we read in one. There's a trespass offering, peace offering, and then sin offering. That's the five main offerings. They do different things. You do a trespass offering for different reasons than you do a peace offering. This was their sacrament. This was their baptism. This was their endowment. This was how they interacted with God was through these animal sacrifices. The whole burnt offering. That's one we see described in nine. This one's unique because almost every sacrifice you ate. The priest ate a portion, the sacrifice ate a portion, the whole burnt offering, you burned the whole thing. You took the animal, you flayed it, you cut it in pieces, and you burned it. Just for the fun of it, I did a little bit of math. The going rate of a cow for, you know, a male cow for food is about \$2,000. The whole burnt offering is equivalent of

taking a stack of \$50 bills, setting them on fire and saying, that's yours, God. I don't want it. This is for you.

Hank Smith: 00:02:35 Can you imagine taking cash to the bishop and he's like, thank you.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:02:39 And then putting, setting it on fire. That's literally what the whole burnt offering does. By the way, we have texts from other people around the ancient Israelites and especially around the Jews later on, and they're flabbergasted by this. Why are you wasting all this food? To [Belnap's](#) point, it's not a waste. We're giving it to God. We're making it holy. And so part of the intriguing things about Israelite religion is we see that seeing things, seeing holiness does not require you to get anything out of it. A whole burnt offering is 100% that kind of offering.

Hank Smith: 00:03:20 Avram, what is it about sacrifice that creates holiness? Why can't it be sit in a hammock and you will become holy? This lesson today is sacrifice brings forth holiness. Why?

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:03:36 If we go back to Leviticus 10, Leviticus 19, be therefore holy, because I am holy. When we're talking about holiness, we're not talking about some kind of ineffable characteristic. We're talking about being like God. That straight to this idea is holiness is being like God. I think about our dearly beloved President Holland. He gave this talk, you're probably familiar with it years ago, Missionary Work and the Atonement. In this talk, it's to missionaries. It's an MTC talk. It was given, we're talking like 25 years ago. I was a missionary when he gave it, so it was a long time ago here. In it, he asked this question of these missionaries. It's like, look, guys, we have the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have the truth. We have the Holy Ghost. Why isn't missionary work easy? Why is the only problem of missionary work getting hypothermia from being in the font so often? He says, because salvation is not a cheap experience.

00:04:47 At a certain point, those of us who claim to follow and emulate Jesus have to feel a little bit about what Jesus felt. It wasn't easy for him, [President Holland](#) says, "How could we ever think it's going to be easy for us?" Talk about the ultimate act of sacrifice. Our Lord and Savior, God himself, nailed to a cross. We have this great Old Testament background for Christians. When it comes down to what it means to sacrifice, it means letting yourself being tortured to death because you love the whole rest of humanity. I talked with you a few years ago about Moses seven and about how God weeps. Our heavenly Father loves us enough to still be vulnerable with us. I think the reason that

sitting on a beach and sipping pina coladas is never, ever going to work because that is not how you be like God, because that is not what God does. Sacrifice makes us holy because sacrifice makes us like God.

- John Bytheway: 00:06:00 There's also that common saying that God is more interested in our growth than he is in our comfort. Sitting on a beach with a pina colada.
- Hank Smith: 00:06:12 Sounds like growth to me, you guys.
- John Bytheway: 00:06:16 It's my kind of growth.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:06:19 It's worth remembering for these Israelites, they're in the wilderness. You get a little bit of Mosiah here and all these things in wisdom and order. We talk about [symbolism](#), and one of the things about [symbolism](#) to always remember, A, which is that X always equals Y. Sometimes you say, oh, it's symbolic but what you mean, I don't know what it means. But then with that also, one of the cool things about what God does with the sacrifices and with you and I, is they all have pragmatic purposes. Think about an agricultural environment. You think about these animals. How many male animals do you need in a herd? One or two. Just a few. So what do you do with the rest? You sacrifice them. There's a preference for male animals because of the symbolism of Jesus, you know, the first one, things like that. There's a preference for male animals for pragmatic reasons.
- 00:07:10 And in the same way, the altar of incense in the holy place. The smoke represents, you know, the prayers going up to God. It represents another veil of protection for humanity, but also any of you have ever been to a stockyard and have ever been to a slaughterhouse? Our former colleague, Byron Merrill, used to actually take his students when BYU used to have a slaughterhouse. He would take them there when teaching these chapters and have them witness a...
- John Bytheway: 00:07:39 Oh my goodness.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:07:42 It was just slaughtering. And I, actually, when he told me about that, I'm like, that's experiential learning before it's time, Byron. But this notion that it smells. Blood smells, animals smell. You and I are used to a temple experience that's very, very antiseptic.
- John Bytheway: 00:08:00 Mm-hmm. Smells like beautiful clean carpet.

- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:08:04 The ancient temple would have been an assault to the senses in that sense. The incense covers that and makes it sweet. That's why you add salt, because it transforms burning flesh into meat. This idea that they're transforming this, that's part of this beautiful thing about consecration. The sacrifices transform something like burning flesh and turn it into meat. They turn it into something wonderful. I've had callings that I've loved, callings I'm not very good at. I was a ward mission leader once. I was awful at it. Just the worst. But you know what? I kept trying. I kept doing it. God took that sacrifice and made something of it. He took what I was doing and did more with it than I could do. The other key part of this, I think, is that according to Leviticus, one of the primary purpose of sacrifice is to make atonement.
- 00:09:10 That's what they do. They set right the relationship between God and him and what does that, and this is actually really fun, is blood. Leviticus 17:11 says, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood." So the ancient Israelite notion is, is that what makes the thing alive is that it has blood. And I have given it upon you the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that make an atonement for your soul. And this is the important thing about sacrifice. You are taking a living thing's life. You are pouring that life on an altar so that you can live, so that you can be right with God. Sacrifice always asks the question what or who has died so that I can live? It's so important in thinking through what Leviticus is doing and it undergirds basically the core of Christian doctrine is in Leviticus.
- 00:10:15 Jesus Christ poured out his life blood so that we could live. That's why with the sacrament, we eat the bread, but we drink the blood so that we can live. And Leviticus, it says this is why this is working. There's a reason why we do this. It's not because God thinks killing animals is fun. There's an actual reason and doctrine why this works and how this works. And that actually feeds into a little bit less profoundly in some ways, but I think about the dietary laws. A funny story about that, my mother was meeting with the missionaries. They asked her about the word of wisdom, like no tea, no coffee. No smoking. Do you think you can do that, Sister Shannon? She said, Elders, I keep kosher. This is nothing. Kosher is this idea of you can't eat these animals, you can't eat these animals.
- 00:11:14 But the thing about that is there's actually a logic there as well. There's a reason behind it. It's actually easy to see with fish because the kinds of fish that are appropriate to be eaten are fish that have scales and fish that have fins. Sharks are out. Sharks have fins, but no scales. Catfish are out. Catfish have fins,

but no scales. Shellfish, totally out. Shellfish have neither fins nor scales. Because what Leviticus is saying is it's all about this notion of putting things in order, putting things in their proper categories. And it's not making a statement, by the way, that these are evil or bad. The statement it's making is, these are things that are in the categories that I want you to be looking for. Land animals, chew cud, have cloven hooves. Pigs have cloven hooves, according to Leviticus we can get there, whatever for that, but they don't chew cud.

00:12:15 They're outside the categories. As Leviticus frames it, actually in Leviticus 10, it was before the food laws. It says, the priest's job is to make a difference, it says, between clean and unclean, between holy and unholy, and to teach the people how to do that. This process of making a difference, learning how to differentiate between these things is, again, this is divine behavior. The verb that that verse in Leviticus 10 uses to separate is identical to the verb that God uses when he divides light from darkness, when he divides waters from waters, when he divides land from land. When we make these kinds of distinctions, we are engaging in divine behavior. I was talking to one of my Jewish friends the other day, I just got off teaching an evening class and he was joking about, well, at least you can have a cup of coffee to do it.

00:13:13 And I said, I'll drink coffee the day you eat bacon, Rabbi. Part of the purpose of our food laws is the same thing. It's to make distinctions. It's to make difference. In some ways, do these things matter? Sure. I mean, if you eat too much bacon, yes, you'll die. That's fine. But if you're too much of anything, in some ways, yes, you'll die. But the experience of saying, oh no, I can't drink that. I don't drink coffee. The experience of saying, oh no, I can't drink that. I don't drink tea. That makes distinction. That makes division.

John Bytheway: 00:13:54 So it might not be that there's some scientific reason, some chemical reason, some physical reason necessarily. It's just that we are setting ourselves apart even in diet. Is that fair?

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:14:07 That is fair. Even though all the ancients drink wine, although it is worth remembering that the primary table beverage is wine mixed with water, and it's usually like one part to six parts, or one part to 10 parts. When we're talking about them drinking wine, they're not drinking a lot of wine in that sense, but they're drinking enough wine to kill all the bugs that are in their water. But that's in some ways irrelevant to what God is saying, which is you're mine. And because you're mine, you do something different.

Hank Smith: 00:14:42 I think so too. At least in our day, might cause some conversations. I had a student just come up to me this week. He said, well, my brother says that wine's okay because Jesus drank wine and how is that a problem? And I said, well, let's just talk about in Jesus' day, they had different dietary laws, but in our day, the Lord probably saw, what's everybody going to drink? One of three things at least, alcohol, tea, or coffee, and that's going to create a lot of conversations for you, right? When someone offers you this, you're going to go, I don't drink that. Really? Why not? I could just see the Lord going, what should we choose? No, those will be good. That'll create a lot of conversation, a chance for my distinct people to tell people why they are.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:15:38 And not always negative. For example, I was in graduate school, I was in a class, it was on Jerusalem, it was mostly Jews in the class because of the nature of the program I was in there at Ohio State, and this girl had just come back from a study abroad in Turkey. She had bought a Turkish coffee maker. She was going to bring coffee for the whole class. It was really exciting, whatever, this whole coffee set. And I said, oh, well, I don't drink coffee. And she said, why? I said, well, it's against my religion. And she was so excited to meet a Christian with dietary laws.

John Bytheway: 00:16:14 Interesting.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:16:16 Her entire life she said, no, I can't eat that I'm Jewish. I can't do that because I'm Jewish. And people say, I can't do that. I'm a Latter-day Saint. She actually ended up bringing me orange juice separately because she was so excited about this notion of dietary law. So it's not even always just this mission thing, but sometimes there's a connection can be made there by saying, no, I don't do that.

John Bytheway: 00:16:33 Can I sing you guys a song that I heard on a bus in Israel? And I can't remember who it was, Hank, just singing about how an Islam, they don't eat pork and the Jews don't eat pork, so it was like a song being sung by a Jew to a Muslim or a Muslim to a Jew. You don't eat pigs, we don't eat pigs, seems it's been that way forever, and since you don't eat pigs and we don't eat pigs, why not not eat pigs together?

Hank Smith: 00:17:09 You just fixed all the Middle East problems.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:17:11 You did right there. Right there. Whatever happened, the wars, whatever, it's all done. I love how Leviticus teaches in these very embodied ways. Even something that seems really weird, just

like purity laws. We do this in the New Testament, we do it really badly, actually. The first thing we do is we associate [ritual](#) impurity with sin, and that's ridiculous. Basically, every ancient Israelite, and therefore the New Testament, every Jew could expect to contract some kind of ritual impurity all the time. Frankly, since women contract ritual impurity every month, this is not sin, but even you have sexual relations with your wife, you're both ritually impure. This is a normal part of life. Two things with this I want to talk about. One, this is why it's worth reading Leviticus, by the way, again, because you may have heard things sometimes in the New Testament, Jesus and Jairus' daughter, and he touched her even though she was a dead body, therefore he was ritually impure. If they'd read Leviticus, they would know that dead bodies can transmit ritual impurity by overshadowing, which means that everybody in the room was already ritually impure.

- Hank Smith: 00:18:20 Oh, really?
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:18:21 You don't have to touch the body to get to ritual impurity. It's a different kind of it. So all the mourners, Peter, James and John, they already had ritual impurity. It's a different kind of thing, and it's important to be able to, this is independent of what is spiritually, provisional, purely pragmatic level when we understand Leviticus better, makes us better readers of the New Testament. But even with that, when you have ritual impurity, you wash with water, you're unclean until evening, and then you're done. But there's a logic there too. This is God teaching them something. I want you to imagine, this is for Hank, okay? You're going to be our guinea pig this time.
- Hank Smith: 00:18:58 Okay.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:18:58 You look at your shoes right now, they're not so dirty. You go to your kitchen table, you take your shoe off and you put it on the table, and your wife says, what are you doing? Get that dirty thing off the table.
- Hank Smith: 00:19:14 Yeah. Are you 12?
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:19:17 It wasn't dirty when it was on your foot. It became dirty when you put it in the wrong place. One of the primary ideas of purity laws is matter out of place. You've got to put things in their right places. This is why some kinds of things are by blood, why other bodily substances can cause a ritual impurity, because they belong inside your body. This is why touching certain things is because it's in the wrong place.

Hank Smith: 00:19:52 Avram, is it that word impurity? We think, oh, sin.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:19:55 I think part of it is because it actually is a useful category for sin. The Book of Mormon does this all the time, which is unfortunate in some ways. The Book of Mormon uses it as a metaphor for sin, but then we take it back and forget that it's being used as a metaphor rather than this is what's actually happening.

Hank Smith: 00:20:13 I've had students say that, why can't a woman who's just given birth go to the temple? She didn't do anything wrong.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:20:20 This has nothing to do with her personal state and righteousness. This only has to do with and actually in some ways, and this is one of those pragmatic things, there's probably a hygienic aspect that's important there as well. And again, I can't read God's mind, but there may be something going on with that. One of the things that's so great about this whole thing with Leviticus is that there's logic there. There's logic in how God is doing things. There's a theory, God's laws aren't arbitrary. Even if we don't always understand the logic, there's something there that's teaching us something. And the whole point of that always is to make us like God.

Hank Smith: 00:21:02 I can't imagine bringing that much money or just of my stuff and then just burn it. At least the bishop takes it and it's going to go to something. It's going to go to a building. It's going to go to a publishing something, missionaries. This is I'm making it holy by destroying it or burning the whole thing.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:21:22 On that point, right? We talk a little bit about atone. One of our readings for this Come, Follow Me, is the day of atonement in [Leviticus 16](#). We love it because of Jesus and atonement and the priest and all this imagery for that. Let's ignore the fact that actually it's really kind of weird. There's logic there too, but it's weird because part of it is the scapegoat. It's actually for a demon who lives in the desert named Azazel. But that's what the Hebrew says, is that there's a demon out there. You put some sins on this, others on that, and then you go and it goes and eats it, and it eats him out in the desert. So it's actually kind of a strange conception of sin. It's useful as a symbol in that it reminds us that there are things that we can't take care of ourselves.

Hank Smith: 00:22:13 Speaking of Day of Atonement, we haven't talked much about this. Isn't this the most important day to them?

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:22:20 It's the most holy day. The most important day is probably Passover, because that's when God makes Israel. And you see this actually in scripture where Day of Atonement doesn't actually get a lot of truck in scripture. You don't see much references to the Day of Atonement in the prophets. You don't see them referenced in other places. Passover's everywhere because Passover is the primary saving story. In fact, actually, even in the Book of Mormon, they'll talk about the Passover event the way that we talk about Jesus Christ's redemption, resurrection. What's interesting about that is actually we then conflate, put together both Passover and atonement, but it is the holiest day of the year, and that's because this is when God is looking at us.

Hank Smith: 00:23:05 This is the day the high priest does not dress in his ...

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:23:10 That's right. He wears just like every other priest. He wears white. This is when God opens his books and he looks at us and he says how are we doing? How are things going? And we look and we say, well, we're doing okay, or we're doing badly, we're doing whatever. And he writes our name down in the book of life and says, you guys are doing okay. But then the book's closed. Well, actually, there's a kind of a fun connection, Doctrine and Covenants 128 here, where Joseph Smith talks about the book that God is writing and that our records actually help go into the book that God writes. Suddenly we're thinking, oh, these books are open. What have I done? What do I need to make right? How do I fix this? That act of atonement, the act of reconciliation happens as we turn to God.

00:24:08 As we turn, and for Latter-day Saints, as we turn to Jesus and say, oh, you're right, this book is open. Please inscribe me for good in it, and here's how I'm changing to be inscribed for good, because then suddenly you're watching. And again, he's always watching, but we act like it. And the Day of Atonement is symbolically looking and the door is open, we got to do this, we've got to fast, we've got to be prepared. It's important in Judaism. You reconcile things in the past year. Back to the temple recommend. Any unrepented, unconfessed sins, anything you need to take care of. Day of Atonement, you have to do it before that, because if the book's open and they're not repented of, they're going to be there when the books close. Got to get everything fixed. There's a really nice connection between our own notions of approaching God and saying, okay, am I right? How does this work? Because again, we repent all the time, but the sacrament's a little bit different. In the same way, Jews repent all the time, but the Day of Atonement's a little bit different.

Hank Smith: 00:25:12 I've always wondered that. I have a friend in Israel, can I say his name's Ya'ir. He said, I don't go to synagogue much. And I said, when do you go? And he said, Yom Kippur. I want all my sins forgiven. Okay.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:25:26 God's watching.

Hank Smith: 00:25:27 Yeah. I don't know if Ya'ir will ever hear this, John. Yeah, if he texts me, he's like, I heard you on the show. Avram, so that's chapters one through seven, this sacrificial system.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:25:44 On that I want to add into the sacrificial system, the whole burnt offering with that teaches, each one does teach you something different. So in chapter four, you have the sin offering, terrible translation, I'm sorry. But the reason they do that is because the word for sin is chata, and the word for this offering is hatta't. It's an offering. I translated this purification offering because this is the sacrifice, it's placed on the altar to purify the altar. This is the offering you do for inadvertent sin. There's stuff we do that's an act of open rebellion, where we say, you know what? I know that's wrong. I'm going to do that anyway God. The hatta't is not for that. The purification offering is not for that. This is the offering for what if you've done something wrong and you could become aware of it? How do you work?

00:26:39 What do you do with that? Well, I think that's really interesting for us in terms of thinking through things, is if you go to the Book of Mormon, and King Benjamin is one of those places I mentioned earlier that atonement appears in the Book of Mormon in temple contexts. One of those contexts is in Benjamin's speech there in the book of Mosiah, and especially when the angel is revealing to Benjamin.

Hank Smith: 00:27:04 Chapter 3

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:27:06 In 3:11, he started talking about this, and he says, "For behold, and also his blood" Jesus, "atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned." This is a direct reference to the purification offering. You read back in Mosiah two, they've been offering sacrifices at the temple, everybody in Benjamin's audience would have known that. They said, oh, that's what this is. Then what he says is, is that the reason then this works is because Jesus Christ has already covered it. So this purification offering then is a specific pointing to what Jesus has already done or will do for them. It's this really fun connection and really important

connection. I'll sometimes joke that there's no Jesus shaped hole in the law of Moses.

00:28:09 By which I mean, it was designed to point them to Jehovah and not always to point them to the redemption per se, the incarnation, the mortal ministry. Part of what Benjamin, and Abinadi do is say, yes, but let me make one for you and show you where that fits. Let me plug Jesus right into that hole. A lot of ways that you see there in Mosiah three is the angel saying, here's this, and here's how Jesus fits into it. It's powerful stuff. The Book of Mormon presumes and understands a law of Moses background in it.

Hank Smith: 00:28:43 That's fantastic. Avram, I never thought I would say that I found the first seven chapters of Leviticus pretty interesting. I'm excited about this. Now you said the next section, it starts with chapter eight.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:28:58 That's right. This is eight through 10. It's kind of a mini section where it's about Aaron and his family. This is where we get the kosher laws. This is where we get him being set apart. It's also where we get this weird story in chapter 10, where this is the one narrative in Leviticus, and it's a weird narrative. Two of Aaron's sons take their fire pans, I think censer is what KJV has, and they offer strange fire before God, and they get killed. Nadab and Abihu are their names. Aaron has four sons, and the dad, Abihu, Ithamar, and Eleazer. They get killed for this. It's this interesting story, because part of it is one of the things that's intriguing about Leviticus, we saw this a little bit next to this 35, it's this notion of priesthood, but as Latter-day Saints, we have a very specific idea of what priesthood is.

00:30:01 We're not wrong. God's power, all this stuff, but that's not always what's operative in the ancient world. We trace ourselves back to Aaron as Aaronic priests. We talked about the priests at the altar. We've talked to the priests at the sacrament table. There is absolutely continuity, but there's also a difference there in that priests are primarily, of course, going to be associated with the temple, which is, I think, still something we could actually talk about more in this church. This idea that the temple is fundamentally a priestly place, I mean, that it's a place for priesthood. And of course, President Nelson and President Oaks, that actually men and women both receive priesthood in the temple and receive priesthood power. Thinking about that, but also this recognition that part of what the story teaches, it's very keeping with Leviticus, but maybe a little trickier for us in the modern age is a reminder that nobody is insulated.

- 00:31:03 By which I mean, being Aaron's sons, being Moses' nephews do not protect Nadab and Abihu from breaking the commandments and from the consequences. And that's a hard lesson. It's not a nice lesson. It's an important one. We talked about this idea of temple recommends, cherubim, this idea of being part of the truth of God's kingdom is we come in at God's permission. Because he [loves](#) us so much, he says, yeah, come on in. But the fact is, we don't get to force our way into God's kingdom. With that, we don't get to tell God what to do.
- 00:31:54 You and I, you and I broadly, I don't know you and I specifically, but certainly me specifically, always wants to tell God what to do. To say, this is how I think my life should go. This is what I think is the best part of what we can do. Actually, one of my favorite verses in Doctrine and Covenants is Doctrine and Covenants one. He says, "what I have spoken, I have spoken. I excuse not myself, whether my voice is of my voice or my voice of my servants, it is the same." And we do that verse, we always focus on the latter half. Oh, this is about prophets and prophetic teachings. That's great. That is absolutely part of this. But I love the first part where God says, "What I have spoken, I have spoken and I excuse not myself." I don't have to explain myself to you.
- 00:32:50 Sometimes I will, because I love you, but frankly, I'm in charge here. In some ways, these two sons had decided that they knew better to do it than God had done it. It's a weird story within that, but I think the principle here of, oh, okay God, you're right. You don't need to explain yourself to me. You are in charge of this. I had an experience once, actually it was many years ago, actually now at this point, I'm getting old. It was when I first went up for hire at BYU, when I first put my application in, and I did not get hired that year, and again, it's fine. Right, you know, these things happen. And I had a friend, we were in grad school together, he got a job, and I remember sitting in a stake conference and saying, God, this isn't fair.
- 00:33:41 Why? This isn't fair. This is one of the strongest spiritual revelations I've ever had in some ways. And God said, you're right, Avram. It's not fair. And I'm like, oh, oh, okay. Sure. And then it was funny because in the stake conference and the stake president started talking about the things that were happening in the stake about a mother with, like, three kids under four who had cancer and was going to die in the next three months about poverty, about sickness, about accidents. Then after the stake president finished, I got, again, God said, do you really want it to be fair, Avram? And I said, no God, I'm good. We're fine. This is great. I'm okay with this. My trials are just great,

Father. The story about the family, again, Leviticus cares deeply about Aaron and his family, Aaron and his children. But part of the story teaches us is that doesn't insulate you from, A, needing to keep the commandments and B, from any kind of hardship. That story, even though it's weird, it fits into this whole broad narrative about Leviticus and about holiness in some ways is kind of the hard side of holiness in that sense.

- Hank Smith: 00:35:04 I wrote, don't play with fire next to my... This is where that came from. So it sounds like it was something unauthorized. They didn't respect Jehovah. It-
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:35:14 The word strange there actually means foreign.
- Hank Smith: 00:35:17 Okay.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:35:18 Everywhere the KJV says strange, it means foreign. It doesn't mean strange like weird, whether that's an Egyptian style, whether that's something from the Midian, a strange fire, a foreign fire, and not properly Israelite. And so they did something wrong. The other part of this, by the way, and this is intriguing in terms of internally, it also teaches that priests are held to a higher standard. That priesthood here is that there's more that they're required to do than other people. Aaron's not allowed to mourn his sons. He's not allowed to tear his clothes.
- Hank Smith: 00:35:52 He held his peace, right?
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:35:54 He held his peace.
- Hank Smith: 00:35:56 For God will not be mocked is what that sounds like.
- John Bytheway: 00:35:59 I know. It really does. I saw that too.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:36:02 Very much so. For our modern age, certainly for me and for my children even, it's a harder lesson for us to listen to God's authority. We love the loving God who holds us, but the loving God who corrects us is a lot harder for me, personally.
- Hank Smith: 00:36:19 That's a sobering lesson.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:36:22 This is how we learn to enter into the presence of God. God uses a teaching moment.
- Hank Smith: 00:36:31 That's verse 10.

John Bytheway: 00:36:32 This is not the point, but it's similar. They're not insulated from having to follow the letter of the law, but it's similar that some of the most, in my view, righteous people have amazing trials. [President Oaks](#) losing his father when he was young. President Oaks losing his wife, President Nelson, losing his first wife. They're not insulated from the trials.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:37:01 I had somebody in one of my wards once. They were very well meaning, like, you know, the gospel of Jesus Christ makes things easy. Makes our lives easy. I'm like, does it? Makes some things easier to deal with, but actually easier? I don't know that it does.

Hank Smith: 00:37:19 You can say sin makes life hard.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:37:21 Okay, in that sense, yes.

Hank Smith: 00:37:23 Yeah, none of this is easy.

John Bytheway: 00:37:25 It's maybe easier, but life is just hard all the way around.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:37:31 My kids make fun of me because, and probably correctly, but from, when they're very small, they're babies, I'll comfort them. I'm like, you know, I know, guys. I know. Life's hard and then you die.

John Bytheway: 00:37:44 It's like a bumper sticker. Yeah.

Hank Smith: 00:37:45 Dad!

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:37:46 Yeah, exactly. But I actually find that to honestly be incredibly, incredibly comforting. That sometimes you just need to sit out and say, you know what? This is just hard and then it's over and it's whatever, right? That we don't have to imagine that somehow there's some kind of special thing in life that makes everything easier for us.

Hank Smith: 00:38:04 Yeah. My mother-in-law used to say when we had twin babies, which you've done, Avram, she said, sometimes when you can't take it anymore, go out on the porch, sit down and tell the Lord you're done and then get up and go back in and keep going. Okay.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:38:25 We have some examples of scripture of that. Even this, you see, after this whole thing in Leviticus 10, Moses is like, what are you doing to my brother? And God's like, look here. And then it says,

Moses was content, that God says, no, he can still do this. Moses says, okay God, that's enough. But-

- Hank Smith: 00:38:45 He was content. That's verse 20. Then there's more dietary laws.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:38:50 12 through about 16 is mostly purity laws. It's leprosy laws, laws after childbirth. One thing I do want to say, in Leviticus, actually in the entire Old Testament and most of the New Testament, leprosy never refers to what you think of as [leprosy](#). It is not Hansen's disease. The Hebrew word is tzaraat. It's a wide variety of skin diseases, psoriasis, really bad eczema, and you know it's not Hansen's disease because it can be healed. And there are rules for what you do when it goes away. And of course, Hansen's disease never goes away. It just kills you because as a Jewish concept, as a biblical concept, tzaraat, it's this whole panoply of diseases. It could be one of those.
- Hank Smith: 00:39:40 Yeah, because you read this and you think, wow, leprosy is super common. The Lord really wants to talk about it, but it's any sort of skin disease, wide variety.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:39:48 It's stuff that causes ritual impurity.
- Hank Smith: 00:39:51 The shoes on the counter.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:39:52 Exactly. It's a kind of skin disease that makes things difficult. That's why he looks at it and he says, okay, is it this kind of skin disease, that kind of skin disease? Which are these that actually qualify in these categories? These purity laws, they have different ways of transmitting, and there's a logic to it, and it's very much God's way of putting things in their proper places.
- John Bytheway: 00:40:11 Interesting.
- Hank Smith: 00:40:12 I love that example of putting your shoes on the table. That makes sense. Don't bring that in here.
- Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:40:18 They're animals, they're called like mice and lizards and stuff. They're impure, again, because there's a little bit of ickiness that then feeds into how this works in terms of what God is teaching us about ourselves. Again, it's a symbol in terms of, yes, that's gross, and here's what you can mean with that for some of this stuff. Some of it's broad purity things. And for most things, the solution is just washing with water.

John Bytheway: 00:40:41 There's hygiene things in the law of Moses that were very practical and should have-

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:40:47 Yes. 100%.

John Bytheway: 00:40:47 If people had done them, really would have helped with infection and everything else.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:40:52 This, I think, is part of the genius of God's laws. Because God sees and knows and does more than we do, even the purpose, something like the word of wisdom, something like the diet laws. Even if the primary purpose is to teach us to separate ourselves, the primary purpose to do that doesn't mean it's not good for you to not do these things.

John Bytheway: 00:41:16 There's a good consequence in there perhaps, yeah.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:41:19 Same with washing your hands. Same thing with, like, again, the woman who separated because of after giving birth, ritually impure. We used to have this thing where women would with babies, there's a recovery time that we, in the modern age, don't talk about. We expect women to just bounce back right afterwards. Giving birth is hard on the body, and there's stuff that happens afterwards that needs to be taken care of. Even though it's for ritual purity, it actually provides a useful benefit there. There's this intriguing thing within that, that teaches something about separation, but also says, maybe take some time and rest a little bit, and let the woman recover. There's some misogyny in the law too, because it's an ancient law code, but God, of course, is not, and he's there saying, let me find ways to help you guys help each other.

Hank Smith: 00:42:11 I like that. Let me help you help each other. Avram, what do you want to do next?

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:42:17 17-26 is called the Holiness Code. It's an entire self-contained law code. One of the things we see actually in the Old Testament broadly is we have this broad law of Moses. Within it, there are sort of these subcollections. There's a covenant code, an Exodus, there's a [inaudible] code, and here this is the holiness code. The whole thing is about how do we be holy. In some ways, I like to think of it as a handbook of instructions. The basis for Latter-day Saint religion and practice is the Doctrine and Covenants. Doctrine and Covenants 20, the constitution of the church. We say where are we getting this from? We're getting from the Doctrine and Covenants. But of course, the church in 2026 doesn't look like the church in 1830.

In terms of priest organization, in terms of hierarchies, Joseph Smith never went to a sacrament meeting because there weren't any in his entire lifetime, right?

00:43:22 But we can say our church is built on Doctrine and Covenants. That is the basis of revelation for our religion, even though what we're doing is building off of extrapolating from ... And we see that happening with the law. Moses received the law from Mount Sinai, but we see places where they're building from, extrapolating from. It looks like we see different people of different times extrapolating that an editor like Mormon has put together for us. It's kind of like having instructions from 1969 and from 2013 and from 2026 all together in the same volume. This explains, for example, Exodus 20 has a slavery law that says if you have an Israelite slave, after seven years, you let them go free. Deuteronomy has a slavery law that says if you have an Israelite slave, after seven years, let them go free, and you give them stuff. You give them gifts to set them up in life after you've freed them.

00:44:29 Leviticus 25, our holiness code here has a slavery law that says you can't make Israelite slaves. All three of those are clearly built around the same idea, but they're building it in different ways because they appear to be different instantiations of God's law in different times and different places. Because of course, there are two reasons to make laws. One reason to make a law is because somebody's doing it and you want it to stop. That's one reason to make a law. The other reason to make a law is to say, this is something that we believe in that matters to us. And you see that in some of our commandments, you see that in some things where, in Doctrine and Covenants, especially, right? You guys are doing this bad and you do better at this. And there are clearly commandments from God is like this is what the kind of people I want you to be. So don't do that. That's never, it's never actually been a problem. Just don't do that so it never becomes a problem.

Hank Smith: 00:45:26 Because that's important.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:45:28 And in some ways, a lot of the laws and holiness code feel like that to me, demarcating what it means to be an Israelite. So it's certain behaviors, certain foreign practices are forbidden, magical practices, divination practices, don't eat blood because blood is where life is. This is why Jews, by the way, don't eat blood in their meat. Kosher meat, you slaughter it, but you slit their throat as quickly as you possibly can, and you hang it till all the blood drains out. Because if you eat something's blood,

you're eating its life. And it says, we don't need to eat the life. It's respect for the life.

Hank Smith: 00:46:04 This has been very, like, enlightening, and it does help me think of the New Testament, which I teach more often than the Old. I'm like, oh, that makes sense. That plays into a story about Jesus.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:46:16 I go into the very beginning of this, Leviticus is the book. When they're talking about the law of Moses, they mean all of it, but they start with Leviticus. Leviticus is the single most important book in Jewish thinking.

Hank Smith: 00:46:33 Okay. So this is the book Jesus read.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:46:35 This is the book Jesus read. This is the book he thought from, and it's the book his opponents read. And of course, to our famous verse, part of being like God is being good to other people, being willing to treat people the way that God treats them, which of course is why he says, look, guys, don't avenge or bear a grudge and love your neighbor like you. Leviticus 19:18, when Jesus is looking for places to teach, I always bring this up when we talk about in this church, we talk about, you know, oh, we don't live the law of Moses anymore. And I'm like, well, we don't offer certain animal sacrifices anymore, and we don't live certain purity laws anymore, but there are absolutely parts of the law of Moses that we still 100% absolutely live. I don't even like the distinction between higher and lower law.

00:47:30 I don't think it's useful because if we talk about, well, what's the higher law? Well, the higher law is to love God with all your heart straight out of Deuteronomy. And the higher law is to love your neighbor like yourself straight out of Leviticus. This idea that somehow we're dividing up. Now we can talk about higher, more knowledge of Jesus about ordinances. Maybe there's something higher law, lower law in terms of ordinances, because of course, the tabernacle and therefore the temple was basically exclusively Aaronic ordinances. In our temples, we perform both Aaronic and Melchisedek ordinances. So there may be something in that. But in terms of what God actually wants to do and what the law's purpose is, the law of Moses, it's God's highest law in the sense of love God, love your neighbor, is straight out of the law of Moses. It's straight out of Deuteronomy, it's straight out of Leviticus.

John Bytheway: 00:48:39 That's a great insight. I like that.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:48:42 Something I encourage our listeners, ask yourself, if I were to do this, would I be a better person? Would this help me to be a better follower of Jesus? And if the answer is yes, then do it.

John Bytheway: 00:48:59 Then it's a good idea.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:49:02 Leviticus 19:11, don't steal, don't lie. This is, Leviticus version of ten commandments. 19:13, don't steal from people. Don't rob. Don't take the wages of somebody that's hired. Even says, don't even wait to pay them. If you hired them to a job and they finished your job, don't sit on that money, that's their money, right? So even how you treat employees, don't curse the disabled or differently-abled. Those who have difficulties, they're not there for you to make fun of. Don't gossip. All these things we read in Leviticus 19 are really, really important behaviors for us to being like how God wants us to be.

Hank Smith: 00:49:44 A talebearer.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:49:46 Yeah.

Hank Smith: 00:49:48 I was going to ask you how you feel about the myth that, oh, the Old Testament God, he's angry and the New Testament God, oh, he's so kind. And then you read Leviticus 19, love thy neighbor as thyself. Don't steal, don't lie. Don't gossip.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:50:08 Couple of things. On some levels, the myth is rooted in occasionally antisemitic ways of talking about things. The Old Testament's the Jewish book, the New Testament's, the Christian. Sometimes it falls into that and this breaks to previous things, so we need to be always very careful about that. Oh, the Old Testament's an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, and it does say that, but as I've argued before, and I'll continue to argue, it's a law about limits. It's only an eye for an eye, only a tooth for a tooth. If I get in a fight with John and John punches out my tooth, I can't then gouge out his eye.

Hank Smith: 00:50:46 Yeah, that's not the way it works.

John Bytheway: 00:50:47 It needs to be the same one too, right?

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:50:50 Even in my Jesus Christ and the Everlasting Gospel class, I'll do this. I'll say, okay, give me some words to describe the God of the Old Testament. And they'll say harsh and unforgiving. I'll say, okay. Now give me some words to describe Jesus. And they'll say [loving](#) and forgiving and approachable. And then I'll, because I'm that kind of guy, put up a quote from President

Nelson or President Oaks where they say, we need to recognize that Jesus is Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament. And I said, so how do we reconcile the fact that according to our doctrine, these are not, not just the whatever, these are actually the exact same person. They get taken aback a little bit here for this. I said some of this, of course, is we're not, as you point out, we're not good enough readers of the Old Testament.

00:51:39 We don't read closely enough because again, the Old Testament insists Jehovah's mercy. The idea that justice and mercy are competing categories is a Book of Mormon notion. Now, I love the Book of Mormon, and I'm not going to say this is not to rant on the Book of Mormon, but in the Old Testament, God's justice and God's mercy are the exact same thing. God is merciful because he is just, and he cannot be merciful unless he is just. There's a great quote from [President Holland](#) where he said at a BYU devotional many years ago now, where he said, "As scary as it is to imagine a just God, imagine how much scarier an unjust God would be to imagine." But this myth comes from focusing on something like Leviticus 10 and not Leviticus 19 or on something like Exodus 32 and not on Exodus 35. And it also comes, of course, on focusing on some parts of the gospel, but not other parts of the gospel. Jesus says to people who abuse children, it's better for them to have a giant rock tied around their neck and be drowned.

Hank Smith: 00:52:51 Yeah, and you haven't read Matthew 23. Woe unto you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites. You're like a cup that's dirty on the inside and clean on the outside.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:53:02 And by the way, that's reference of purity laws in Leviticus incidentally.

Hank Smith: 00:53:05 Hey.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:53:06 Cups of insides and outsides comes from Leviticus.

Hank Smith: 00:53:09 I'm going to write that down.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:53:10 Well it's back to this idea we talked about sort of earlier here in Leviticus 10, this idea of telling God what he can do and who he can be. It's the idea of saying, well, obviously what makes God good is being nice to me.

John Bytheway: 00:53:26 Answering all my prayers and fixing all my problems.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:53:32 Even though we understand doctrinally, we understand whatever that that's not the case, each and every one of us feels that inherently. Inherently, we all feel that what makes God good is being good to me. We need to recognize that God is good, and God is kind, and God is just. So whatever God does will be good and kind and just, but good and kind and just is not the same thing as nice. That's hard. I'm not suggesting that we who are less good and less kind and less just should not be nice. Let's be nice. Right.

00:54:18 The phrase in the Old Testament, he talks about this about how he is slow to anger, it says. It says he's a jealous God. It says, "For God is a jealous God, visiting iniquity on the sins of the third and fourth." And then we stop there and it says, "But showing mercy unto thousands of generations of those who love him and keep his commandments". He's slow to anger, quick to forgive. The Old Testament continuously insists on God's mercy. That is the chief characteristic they see in Jehovah is how much he follows them and loves them. So I think you're absolutely right, Hank. It's a myth. It's a myth rooted in misunderstanding ancient culture. It's a myth rooted in trying to compare Jesus to whatever. It's a myth rooted in our own desire to want God to be nice to us. Let's go to our discussion earlier about trials.

00:55:17 There's a great midrash in a Jewish text called [Hebrew]. It's a midrash and Exodus. One of the rabbis, he says, we are not like other nations. He says, other nations, they praise their gods when things go good and they curse them when things go bad. But we, we praise our God when things go good and we praise our God when things go bad. In many ways, it's that perspective that we need to have to see how merciful really God is.

John Bytheway: 00:55:55 Sounds like Job.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:55:57 Yeah, it's very much like Job.

John Bytheway: 00:55:58 The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:56:01 Blessed be the name of my Lord.

John Bytheway: 00:56:03 Yeah.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:56:04 When I've had moments where I've, I felt like that, where I'm like, there's been a lot more taken away than given right now, God.

Hank Smith: 00:56:13 But hallelujah anyway.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:56:15 Exactly. Hallelujah anyway. You are my God, and I'm not going to leave you just because things feel difficult.

John Bytheway: 00:56:24 Otherwise, it's just a, it's a transaction. It's the vending machine. If you give me what I want, then I really like you.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:56:31 And covenants are about relationships. When God talks about being a holy people, he's not talking about jumping you through hoops so you could be a certain kind of whatever. He's talking about you entered a relationship with me. Of course, [President Nelson](#) a blessed name and memory introduced the church broadly to this Hesed. You do your Hesed. You do what I ask. I'll do my Hesed and whatever, but we're bound together. Sometimes that means that you think about your own relationships. Sometimes that means I'll give more. Of course, God always does more than we can possibly can. This is not an equal relationship, but covenants are about relationships and what the law of Moses is trying to do in Leviticus and everywhere else is say, this is what I want you to do in my relationship. This is what we're doing together because we're in this together.

Hank Smith: 00:57:27 We're in this together.

John Bytheway: 00:57:29 Avram, I have noticed the law of Moses being addressed so much in the Book of Mormon. I'm excited to tell our audience that you have recently [written](#) about the law of Moses in the Book of Mormon. Can you tell us more about that?

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:57:45 Yeah, sure. Thank you. It's been a long time project I've been working on for, in some ways far too long, but I'm publishing a book with Greg Kofford books. It's forthcoming. We're hoping to have it out this year. And really in this book, I work through everywhere I can see where the law of Moses is hitting on the ground, sometimes in places that are more usual, that they're easy to see. Other times where like, this is not something we think is law of Moses, but they absolutely would have been seeing a law of Moses basis for this. Places where sacrifice, places where they're talking about making oaths. I walk through the Book of Mormon, sort of analyzing where these are coming from. The idea is if you're ever interested in, is there anything about, anything about the law in 2 Nephi 5? Here's at least what one guy saw about it.

John Bytheway: 00:58:37 I bet this increased your testimony of the antiquity of the Book of Mormon. Because what? Did Joseph Smith just make that up, put that in there?

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:58:45 In terms of making space for Holy Ghost to testify, there's a lot there where suddenly the Book of Mormon is incredibly rooted, not just in the Bible, in the law of Moses.

Hank Smith: 00:59:00 I love it. John, today has been so helpful.

John Bytheway: 00:59:05 Yeah. Really good information.

Hank Smith: 00:59:08 Yeah.

John Bytheway: 00:59:08 I feel more curious and interested about Leviticus.

Hank Smith: 00:59:13 Yeah, me too. I can see what Avram said when he said there's beauty in order, and that's a lot of what this is. Clear boundaries. I want two rings here. I want two chains of gold here. There's beauty in that.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:59:30 Things in their proper places.

John Bytheway: 00:59:32 Yeah, I like the idea of a place for everything and everything in its place. It sounds like a Leviticus idea.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:59:38 It does, yeah.

Hank Smith: 00:59:40 John, I'm sad I saw this at the end. Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head. I should have described you that way.

John Bytheway: 00:59:48 The hoary head?

Hank Smith: 00:59:49 The hoary head. It means old age. It means rise up. Stand up when an old age is-

John Bytheway: 00:59:55 Sorry, I can't hear you. What?

Dr. Avram Shannon: 00:59:57 Hoary is white, so the hoary head is the white hairs.

Hank Smith: 01:00:01 Yes. Go find someone with white hair and say, hey, you're a hoary head. See how that goes over. Avram, this has been a really good day. It's so fun.

Dr. Avram Shannon: 01:00:11 Honestly, at the very beginning, you know, why do I love Leviticus? Because I find God there. That's why I love Leviticus. I

find God. More importantly, he finds me. I appreciate you letting me talk about it a little bit.

John Bytheway: 01:00:24 Yeah. You know, going back to Fiddler on the Roof, Tevye wanted to be a rich man, but why? So he could talk about the holy books with the rabbis. I love that that was the whole why that he had. I would just love to sit and talk about the holy books, and that's what we got to do.

Hank Smith: 01:00:43 With that, we want to thank Dr. Avram Shannon for being with us today. We want to thank our executive producer, Shannon Sorensen, our sponsors, David and Verla Sorensen. In every episode, we remember our founder, Steve Sorensen. We hope you'll join us next week. We're continuing in the five books of Moses on followHIM. As a thank you to our wonderful listeners, we'd love to gift you the digital version of our book, Finding Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. It offers short, meaningful insights drawn from our past Old Testament episodes. Visit followhim.co, that's followhim.co to download your free copy today, and you'll also find the link to purchase the print edition. Thank you for being part of our followHIM family. Of course, none of this could happen without our incredible production crew. David Perry, Lisa Spice, Will Stoughton, Krystal Roberts, Ariel Cuadra, Heather Barlow, Amelia Kabwika, Sydney Smith, and Annabelle Sorensen.

followHIM Favorites



- Hank Smith: 00:03 Welcome to followHIM Favorites. This is where John and I are sharing a single story to go with each week's Come, Follow Me lesson. John, we are in Leviticus today. Do you have a story for us?
- John Bytheway: 00:14 Yeah, Hank, this is from Brad Wilcox's book, our friend, called Changed Through His Grace. And he tells a story about the woman who's just trying to do the right thing. He said one single mother was struggling to rear her children in the gospel after her husband left the church and divorced her. She told me tearfully how difficult it was to be the bad guy who enforced bedtimes, stressed nutrition, required church attendance while her ex-husband did the opposite. On the weekends, the children were with him, he'd let them stay up late, eat whatever they wanted, took them to amusement parks instead of church. I assured her she was doing the right thing even though it was difficult.
- 00:53 Just two weeks later, this mother shared with me a note her oldest daughter had written. "Dear mom, thanks for being our mom. Dad is just trying to be our buddy. He's trying to win us over by spending money on us, but I am old enough to see what's going on, and I appreciate you for expecting us to make something of our lives. Maybe the little kids don't get it yet, but I do. The parent with the rules is the one who really cares."
- Hank Smith: 01:26 Wow. What a great story, because that's really what Leviticus and the end of Exodus, they're about. The rules. The commandments, the sacrifices.
- John Bytheway: 01:36 A little kid said once in primary Jesus has rules, with the three words so profound. God has rules. He has boundaries. And they're there to bless us in the long run, right?
- Hank Smith: 01:46 You do a cheer with your family. The gospel rules. The gospel rules. All right. Let's study the gospel rules. Let's study the rules.

John Bytheway:	01:55	Good, good double meaning.
Hank Smith:	01:57	Yeah, I love it. Well, thanks, John. Come join us on our full podcast. It's called followHIM. You can get it wherever you get any podcast. We're with Dr. Avram Shannon this week. He loves the Book of Leviticus. If you're thinking, no way. Come on over and you'll see why. And then join us next week. We'll do another followHIM Favorites.