

LEVITICUS (Teacher's Edition)

Part One: The Laws of Acceptable Approach to God:

Sacrifice (1:1--17:16)

- I. The Laws of Acceptable Approach to God 1:1--7:38
- II. The Laws of the Priests 8:1--10:20
- III. The Laws of Israel Regarding Purity 11:1--15:33
- IV. The Laws of National Atonement 16:1--17:16

Part Two: The Laws of Acceptable Walk with God:

Sanctification (18:1--27:34)

- I. The Laws of Sanctification for the People 18:1--20:27
- II. The Laws of Sanctification for the Priesthood 21:1--22:33
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ABOUT THE BOOK-

As the Book of Exodus deals with **the communion** which God offers on His part to Israel and culminates at last with **His dwelling** in the tent of meeting, the book of Leviticus contains the ordinances which were to be carried out by His people in religious, ethical and cultural matters, in order to **maintain this communion** with God, in spite of their **guilt and imperfections**.

At first God spoke to the people out of the thunder and lightning of Sinai, and gave them His holy commandments by the hand of a mediator; but henceforth His presence is to dwell not on the secret top of Sinai, but in the **midst of his people**, both in their wanderings through the wilderness and afterwards in the Land of Promise. Hence the first directions which Moses receives after the work is finished have reference to the offerings which were to be brought to the door of the tabernacle. As God draws near to the people in the tabernacle, so the people **draw near to Him** in the offering. **Without offerings** none may approach him.

You may have noticed something interesting: all the regulations respecting the sacrifices, etc., fall into groups and each of these groups consist of a "declogue" of instructions. This principle runs

through all the laws of Moses, probably modeled after the pattern of the Ten Commandments.

Lev 1-3, contain the first decalogue, namely, the burnt offering in three sections, the meat offering in four, and the peace offering in three. The second decalogue is in Lev 4-5, the sin offering in four cases; three kinds of transgression needing atonement; the trespass offering in three cases. Then, Lev 6-7, five decalogues. Then, there are seven decalogues in all as to putting away guilt. After that seven chapters are about putting away impurity, Lev 11-16. Then, Lev 17-20 contain seven decalogues as to Israel's holiness. Lastly, Lev 21:1-26:2 contain the concluding seven decalogues.

The decalogues are closed with promises of **rich blessing upon obedience**, **awful threats** upon disobedience; the latter predominate, for already Israel had shown its tendency to disobey. The first division of the law, the covenant (Ex 23:20-33), ended with blessings only; for there Israel had not yet betrayed its unfaithfulness: but now (Ex 32-33) when Israel had shown its backsliding tendency, the second division of the law (Leviticus) ends here with **threats** as well as promises.

The only history in Leviticus is that of Aaron's consecration, Nadab and Abihu's death, and the doom of the blasphemer (Lev 8-10; 24:10-23), a solemn exhibition of God's laws in their execution. Aaron's "holding his peace" as his sons are judged is a marvelous exhibition of **grace**; yet his not eating the sin offering in the holy place shows his keen paternal anguish which excused his violation of the letter of the law in Moses' judgment.

Since **atonement** is an essential theme in this great book, it is important to note here that the Hebrew word is, "**kippur**" and it has as its primary meaning "**to cover**" but also connotes "to make reconciliation, to pacify, to clear or purge or cleanse". On the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur, see Chapter 16) a special sacrifice is made: **one sin offering** for all the people. The object of the offering was clear: **cleansing** (16:30). The striking feature to observe in the ceremony of Yom Kippur: **the scapegoat**, upon which the sins of Israel were symbolically laid and which was taken outside the camp and released into the wilderness.

The blood of bulls and goats so prominent in Leviticus had **no power** to **take away sin**. But each of these rituals was "a shadow of the good things to come" (Heb 10:1). They pointed forward to God's ultimate sacrifice, given freely on our behalf: "So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many" (Heb 9:28).

So many people consider Leviticus hard to grasp, but according to early tradition, in Jewish education it was the first book **to be taught to children**. It deals with God's **character and will**, especially in matters of holiness, which the Jewish sages considered to be of primary importance. They felt that before proceeding to other biblical texts, children should first be educated concerning the **sanctity of God** and **the responsibility** of each individual to live a **holy life**. Holiness is an important word in Leviticus, describing the sanctity of the divine presence. Holiness is being set apart from **the profane**, and holy is the **opposite** of the common or secular.

One final, interesting note: the book of **Hebrews** is like a NT commentary on Leviticus.

AUTHOR & WHEN THE BOOK WAS WRITTEN-

Nothing was more important to the nation of Israel in its earliest years than the development of its system of worship. Thus, worship rules would have been established at a very early stage in Israel's history. This argues convincingly for the early writing of these rules at the hand of Moses, probably about **1445 BC**. Indeed, there are dozens of instances in Leviticus where **God spoke directly to Moses** and Moses wrote down His instructions to be passed along to the people (4:1; 6:1; 8:1; 11:1).

A BASIC ASSESSMENT OF LEVITICUS (BASIC THEMES)-

This wonderful book continues explaining to us how we are to be God's special people. If you recall, in Exodus 19:6, God called us to be a people of worship and a people of holiness-may we be both! The word holiness occurs nearly **one hundred times** in the book of Leviticus, far more than any other book! As His representatives, His priests called to be His light, we are to be a people of **worship living a life of practical holiness** as is clearly mentioned in the NT in 1 Peter 2:5, 9.

OK, so I know there is a bunch of elaborate ritual here! But the fact that it looks way beyond itself cannot be doubted. This book contains much prophecy of what is to come; the shadow of what is in true substance Christ and His Kingdom. We may not always see what the exact relation is, but it is there!

You cannot read the Epistle to the Hebrews and not acknowledge that the Levitical priests "served the pattern and type of heavenly things" — that the sacrifices of the law pointed to and found their interpretation in the Lamb of God — that the ordinances of **outward purification** signified the truer **inward cleansing** of the heart and conscience from dead works to serve the living God. One idea, moreover, penetrates the whole of this vast (and burdensome) ritual, and gives it a real glory, even apart from any prophetic significance. **Holiness is its end. Holiness is its character.** The tabernacle is holy — the vessels are holy — the offerings are most holy unto Jehovah — the garments of the priests are holy. All who approach Him whose name is "Holy," whether priests who minister to him or people who worship before him, must themselves be holy. It would seem as if, amid the camp and dwellings of Israel, one could hear that great hymn sung by seraphim flying in God's courts above, "Holy, Holy, Holy".

The basic meaning of holiness as presented in the Book of Leviticus is that God demands **the absolute obedience of His people**. The root meaning of the word is "separation." God's people were to be **separate from**, and **different than**, the surrounding pagan peoples. This is actually the reason for God's instruction that His people were not to eat certain unclean foods. Only a clean, **undefiled** people could be used by Him to bring about His purpose of world redemption. Leviticus also makes it clear that the holiness demanded by God extended to **the daily behavior of His people**. They were expected to practice kindness, honesty, and justice and to show compassion toward the poor (Lev 19:9-18). You see, holiness affects not only the relationship that each individual has with God, but also the relationship of **love and respect** that each person must have for **his neighbor**. The code of holiness permeates this book because each **individual** must be pure even as God Himself is pure and because the purity of each individual is the foundation of the holiness of the **entire covenant community**. The teaching of Jesus Christ, "Therefore,

whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 7:12), reflects the text of Leviticus 19:18, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Holiness will enhance anyone’s life if they will see it for the health (spiritual) and beauty (you look more like Jesus) it affords, rather than as a rigid, legalistic, holier-than-thou separatism.

There are three elements to holiness worth considering in this age that does not understand it: priority, purity and practicality-

- ✓ **The priority** of being holy means we are to be Jesus’ alone- that is sanctified solely to Him
- ✓ **The purity** of being holy relates to our obedience in observing those ways which keep us clean and avoiding the things which pollute our character
- ✓ **The practicality** of holiness means simply that if a person walks holy, they will have whole relationships and better encounters with their world leaving them a happier person

The one thing Leviticus teaches us so well is that worship is blended into daily life and is not to be occasional; it is not impractical nor is it mystical. We are to walk in obedience at ALL times, glorifying the Lord in thought word and deed.

A POSSIBLE KEY WORD-

How can it be anything else but: **HOLINESS!** The entire book centers on this one theme. God is Holy, we are not, and He tells us how we can approach a Holy God in our sorry state.

KEY VERSE(S) AND CHAPTER(S)-

My key verses are: **Leviticus 17:11; 20:7, 8** and my key chapter is: **Leviticus 16**. These verses and chapter speak of the essence of what God requires and how He enables it.

Lev 16 is the grand center of the book. God can only be approached by **sacrifice** and man is full of "uncleanness" which needs cleansing. The annual atonement teaches us that **multiple cleansings** for various sins and types of uncleanness **cannot** remove guilt. One great covering of all transgressions must take place to meet God's just wrath, and then His people can stand accepted and justified (Lev 16:16, 20). Heb 9 and Heb 10, explains how Jesus is that one offering once for all!

What is so important in the key verses is a fact we can't miss. The people were told to bring many types of sacrifices or offerings to God: burnt offerings, grain offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, and guilt or trespass offerings. These were considered gifts by which a worshiper expressed his loyalty and devotion to God. But a **blood offering**- presenting the blood of a sacrificed animal to God- went beyond the **idea of a gift**. It symbolized that the worshiper was **offering his own life** to God, since the Hebrews believed that "the life of the flesh is in the blood" (Lev 17:11). Again, this familiar teaching assumed deeper meaning in the New Testament when applied to Jesus. He gave His life on our behalf when He shed His blood to take away our sins. And it is in chapter 20 we are told we must be holy **BUT** God is the one who makes us so. He does so through His Son who lives His life through us.

JESUS REVEALED IN THE BOOK-

Here are a few places

- All the sacrifices point to Jesus
- The book of Hebrews describes Jesus as the High Priest
- The lambs sacrificed are a picture of Jesus

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE BOOK-

Though the term Holy Spirit is not mentioned in the book, we can see the Holy Spirit symbolized in various ways:

- The oil used in various of the offerings is a symbol of the Holy Spirit's help in us presenting ourselves before God
- Anointing oil used to consecrate things is a symbol of the Holy Spirit
- Leviticus 9:24- the fire coming out from the presence of the Lord
- The scene with Nadab and Abihu is like Ananias and Sapphira. They grieved the Holy Spirit

SOME TRUTHS AND APPLICATIONS-

Leviticus 6:12, 13

God tells us that we must keep the fire burning. Stay zealous for God and full of His Spirit. A life or ministry without fire is one of desertion- God has left! See Romans 12:11 (NIV) - fervor means, "boiling over".

Leviticus 19:23-25

This verse speaks of the need for maturity in ministry and the need of it for those who minister. True and fruitful ministry takes time and overcome the various seasons of life. Immature people should never be encouraged to enter ministry. Their long-term success will be limited and their failure will cause a famine in many.

Leviticus 19:32

We need to show great respect for those older than us. We must resist the idea that the elderly are useless!

Leviticus 26:40-45

Sin is like cancer and must be dealt with viciously! It can spread quickly and defile a church, nation or family. We must deal with sin directly and completely. It is only by dealing with sin among ourselves that we can be delivered from its power. Never deal with it lightly. And don't be afraid! Confess your sins quickly, frankly and openly.