

Old Testament Survey—Leviticus

Discuss: What comes to your mind when you think about the book of Leviticus?

Guidelines for our Survey of the Old Testament:

1. As a general rule, we will devote one week to one book.
2. Read (or scan) the book prior to our study, looking for the big picture.
2. Our aim is to discover and remember the following details about each book:

Who wrote the book?

When was the book written?

Why was the book written?

What is the outline of the book?

What is the message of the book in one sentence?

What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?

Who wrote the book?

Moses, the author of the Pentateuch. The name "Leviticus" comes from the LXX name, "the book pertaining to the Levites" (but actually, much of the content of the book has to do with the responsibility of the common people, not just the Levites). The Hebrew Bible calls the book, "And He called."

When was the book written?

Key: The revelation contained in Leviticus came from God to Moses (see 27:34) while the Israelites were at Mount Sinai (15th century B.C.). It's likely that the revelation was given over a period of time, and not all at once ("God spoke to Moses" appears 19+ times in the book).

Why was the book written?

The book is closely related to Exodus, and builds upon it. The Law is given in Exodus, and further details of the Law are applied in Leviticus. Exodus gives the Tabernacle structure, while Leviticus tells how the Tabernacle is to be used.

Discuss: What is the central theme in Leviticus?

Main Idea: The central theme in Leviticus is holiness.

The word "holy" appears 94 times in the book (a printout of 7 pages of verses!). "Atonement" is used 49 times. "Sin" 89 times. "Commanded" 27 times, and "commandment" another 10 times (in KJV).

God was giving the Israelites childlike instruction in Leviticus. He was teaching them the importance of holiness. To be "holy" means to be "separate." The details are not as critical for us to see as the theme. He didn't give them dietary laws to say that certain foods were bad (He later approved the eating of pork in the NT). The issue was not that houses with mildew are inherently evil. The issue was holiness, "differentness." God is saying, "I am unique and different and set apart. I expect My people to be unique and different and set apart, in the way that I determine."

Key Verse: 19:1-2

What is the outline of the book?

Outline:

I. Regulations concerning Sacrifices (1-7)

- A. Burnt Offering (1, 6)
- B. Grain Offering, (2, 6)
- C. Fellowship Offering (3, 7)
- D. Sin Offering (4, 6)
- E. Guilt Offering (5, 7)

Summary: 7:35-38

Lessons:

1. Sin cost the people something.
2. No leader is so big, or commoner so small that his sin is excused.
3. Worship is something done by the people. There are no spectators.

Worship is doing, not watching.

II. Consecration of Priests (8-10)

III. Regulations concerning Clean and Unclean (11-15)

- A. Dietary Laws (11)
- B. Hygiene Laws (12-13)
- C. Procedures for Cleansing (14-15)

IV. Day of Atonement (16)

V. Various Laws & Guidelines for Living (17-25)

VI. Rewards and Punishments (26)

Key: The Covenant (26:42, 45)

VII. Regulations concerning Vows & Offerings (27)

Various Observations:

Sacrifices

Implications:

1. Sin cost the people something.

Sacrifices were something you raised, something which represents to God part of yourself (your time, your money, your work). The animal represented the person. He raised it (e.g.--think of your family pet).

Sin cost the people something. The offerer helped kill and skin the animal (according to Rowland, classnotes on Pent., p. 18). The priest took the blood, and put the parts on the altar.

2. No leader is so big, or commoner so small that his sin is excused.

Generally, blood is associated with atonement and forgiveness (17:11). However, a poor person could bring a non-blood cereal offering. But no one was excused from bringing offerings.

Note: What were "unintentional" sins (4:2, 13, 22, 27)? The KJV says, "If any man sin through ignorance." These are sins which were not done in calculated defiance of God and His covenant. Notice that ignorance is no excuse for sin. Sacrifices were required. Notice also that the penalty for the "high-handed" sin of presumption was death.

3. Worship is something done by the people. There are no spectators.

The people were actively involved in worship. For them, worship was doing, not watching.

Discuss: Some people go to church. Some people worship. There's a big difference between the two. How so? What can we do to make sure we are involved in actively worshipping on Sunday morning?

The Priests

The people could not approach God directly, but had to go through a priest.

Note: The priests primary task was teaching. He performed sacrifices only two weeks out of the year (Rowland, 18). The rest of the time was devoted to teaching.

Clean and Unclean Foods

Jewish kosher laws are based on this.

Q: Was the reason that God prohibited the eating of certain foods for health purposes? Some say yes. There may be some hygienic value, but it doesn't seem to be the real purpose. The dietary laws were simply a means to set

God's people apart. The unclean animals which were prohibited were typically associated with pagan worship.

The bottom line was that God was using a child-like means to teach His people the importance of obedience.

What is the message of the book in one sentence?

Leviticus teaches that God is holy and expects His people to be holy.

What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?

There are many similarities between Leviticus and Ezekiel. Furthermore, the Lord used the symbols in Leviticus as preparation for His fuller revelation in Christ (Heb 1:1). As L.H.B. put it (161-2), "The symbols have been replaced by a reality...One cannot fully understand the New Testament concepts of sin and salvation apart from the Old Testament, which prepares for the new revelation." The book of Hebrews shows how the themes of the Tabernacle and offerings are fulfilled in Christ.

1. God is holy, and He expects His people to be holy.

See: Matt 5:48; 1 Peter 1:15-16

2. We come to God on His terms, not ours.

See: Jn 4:23-24

3. Sin is costly. An atonement is required.

The OT people knew that sacrifice was vital, that they couldn't do works to obtain God's forgiveness, that sacrifice was necessary.

They also knew that forgiveness was based on the grace of God, not inherently on the animal. They knew that animals didn't deal with sin. The grace of God did. Repentance was necessary. The OT sacrifices covered sins temporarily, but as Hebrews tells us, the sacrifice of Christ took care of sin legally (those before the cross as well as after).

e.g.--like buying food on a credit card. Is the food yours immediately? Practically, it is, and you may eat it. Legally it's not. You must pay the bill within 30 days.

See: John 1:29b "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." Also, 2 Cor 5:21, "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us..."

See: Heb 10:1--animal sacrifices were merely a shadow of the good things to come, with no power to take away sins (10:4).

4. The Tabernacle is a type of Christ.

Think about it (LaSor, 160-1): "Basically a symbol is a means of representing an abstract idea...When a symbol is later replaced by the reality it symbolizes, it is called a type, and the reality can be called an antitype. The Old Testament tabernacle is an excellent example of a type. As a symbol, it represents visually the presence of the invisible Yahweh, clearly implied in the account of the coming of his glory upon the tabernacle (Exod. 40:34, 38). When 'the word became flesh and tabernacled among us' (John 1:14), the symbol was replaced by a reality. Thus, the tabernacle is a type of Christ."

Caution (LaSor, 161): "This in no way suggests that every detail of the tabernacle is a type of some corresponding detail in the person or ministry of Christ."