

Leviticus

- The portrait of Jesus Christ

1. Introduction of the Book of Leviticus

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Leviticus – When you hear it, what kind of words come to your mind? Most likely, ‘boring’, ‘repetitive’, ‘irrelevant’ and so on. There is not many people jump at their feet to study the Book of Leviticus. When I was a baby Christian, I was one of those who didn’t care to read this great Book.

Why did we come up with such a conclusion? The answer is simple. We were ignorant about this Book. Without this Book, we really can not understand the job description of the Messiah Jesus Christ and His person. Without this Book, we cannot figure out the reason for all the sacrifices that God told the Israelites to do during their wilderness time and as a nation. Without this Book, we really cannot comprehend the Book of Hebrews in the NT.

Like no other Old Testament book, it is filled with pictures of the Lord Jesus Christ. Without exception, every offering and every feast provides another vivid portrait of Jesus, God’s sacrificial Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. So I call the Book of Leviticus, “the Portrait of Jesus Christ”.

A. AUTHOR AND TIMELINE

The Book of Leviticus was written by Moses around 1440 B.C. It is a part of the Pentateuch, the first five Books of the Bible.

B. PURPOSE

When God recorded and preserved the book of Leviticus, He did not have in mind twenty first-century folks living in our culture who worshiped in permanent buildings, who drove cars and trucks and did not raise sheep. God wrote it to Israelites who worshiped in a portable tabernacle and who could not come to God without a sacrificial offering of a lamb, goat, bird or some other animal.

But because Jesus Christ has come, we no longer need animal sacrifices like the OT Israelites. Jesus was, once for all, offered up on our behalf because of our sins. When Jesus came, the Book of Leviticus lost much of its relevance and impact as an instruction manual. It was designed to be that way.

This brings up a second thought about Leviticus: Its significance was designed to become obsolete. That’s not heresy. That’s good, solid truth. I suppose we could say that God designed the Book of Leviticus to go out of date. Once Jesus came and said, “it is finished,” at least part of what He meant was finished was the whole Levitical system, including the need for priests to be the mediators between God and humanity. All of that Old Testament ritual was fulfilled. It is now set aside, and the believer-priest can come, through Jesus, directly to God. We have an inside channel. We have direct access. So, Leviticus was designed to become obsolete.

However, I should clarify that Leviticus is not obsolete in its application. None of Scripture is obsolete in its application.

C. THE ORIGINAL TARGET AUDIENCE

When you write a book, you have to define your target audience – children, grown-ups, females, males, Christian believers, or non-believers, etc. If you don't know whom you are writing for, your book become vague and purposeless.

In the case of the Book of Leviticus, the original target audience is Levites who were priests during the OT period.

Let's start with the meaning of the name "Leviticus." We don't need to be a Bible scholar to see the root word in 'Leviticus.' Obviously, it is "Levite." The name means "pertaining to the Levites.'

Who were the Levites? Think of them as the ancient ministers. They were the priests, the mediators between God and the Israelites. Every time we read the word "priest" in our OT, substitute the word "mediator," and we'll have its basic meaning.

D. THE THEME OF THE BOOK

If I have to summarize the Book of Leviticus with one word, it would be 'holiness'.

Contrary to what you may hear today in some sermons and popular Christian songs, the emphasis in the Bible is on the holiness of God and not on the love of God. Love is central in God, but holiness is the center of His love. Because God's love is a holy love.

Love without holiness is a monster that can destroy God's perfect law, while holiness without love would leave no hope for the lost sinner. Both are perfectly balanced in the divine nature and works of God.

God's holiness isn't simply the absence of defilement, a negative thing. The holiness of God is positive and active. It's God's perfect nature at work in accomplishing God's perfect will.

The Hebrew word for "holy" that Moses used in Leviticus means "that which is set apart and marked off, that which is different." The Sabbath was holy because God set it apart for His people. The priests were holy because they were set apart to minister to the Lord. Jesus commanded us to be holy as He is holy. That means that we ought to be set apart from the world and its influences.

1 John 2:16-17 For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

Our English word "holy" comes from the Old English word 'halig' which means "to be whole, to be healthy." What health is to the body, holiness is to the inner person. The related word "sanctify" comes from the Latin 'sanctus' which means "consecrated, sacred, blameless." We use the word "sanctification" to describe the process of growing to become more like Christ, and "holy" to describe the result of that process.

Leviticus teaches that the way to God is by sacrifice. The word atonement occurs 45 times in this Book. Atonement means to "cover up." The blood of bulls and goats

did not actually take away sin. It covered over sin until Christ came to take away all sins. This is what Paul is referring to in Romans 3:25:

Romans 3:25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,

God never accepted the blood of bulls and goats as the final payment for sin, but He required that blood be shed. It was an atonement to cover over the sins until Christ came. In other words, God saved "on credit" in the Old Testament. When Christ came, as the hymn accurately states it, "Jesus paid it all." This is true of all the sins of the past, present and future.

One of the key verses in Leviticus, dealing with atonement, is found in Leviticus 17:11:

Leviticus 17:11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.'

The way to God is by sacrifice and without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins.

Leviticus also teaches that the walk with God is by sanctification. The word 'holiness' occurs 87 times in this Book.

God gave strict laws governing the diet, social life, and daily details involving every physical aspect of the lives of His people in the OT. Even though we don't have to follow these laws, but they have a greater spiritual application to His people today. That is the reason I think we ought to study Leviticus. Access to God is secured for the sinner today through the shed blood of Christ.

E. THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Leviticus falls neatly into two parts:

The first 17 chapters teach us about the way to God. The way to approach God was by blood sacrifice. That was God's design. He deliberately planned it that way. If we, the sinner, wanted to come to God, the Holy One, the only way was through that God-honored cover – the blood of sacrificed animals. It covered up their sins. God honored it. And so for 17 chapters, the Lord spells out how sinners could reach God, how they could find cleansing from sin and be right with Him.

In the first five chapters there are five offerings presented – and they're all different. Interestingly, each one portrays Jesus Christ from a different perspective. We are going to study them next Thursday.

Chapters 6 and 7 give specific instructions regarding the details of offering up the sacrifices. From chapters 8-10 we gain information about the priests – vital information to those mediators of that day.

In chapters 11-17 we read of laws for cleansing. Here we find information on diet and foods that were considered clean and unclean by God. Issues of hygiene are addressed, including how to take care of a mother at the time of birth and shortly after the time of her delivery. Subsequent chapters talk about the treatment of diseases. Throughout this section the priests were given divine insight and warnings and wisdom so that the Hebrews might stay healthy and be preserved.

In the last section of this Book, chapters 18-27, we have directions for the walk with God. This portion of Leviticus teaches how sinners can stay in touch with a holy God. Chapters 18-22 contain truth about holy living. Chapters 23-26 describe sacred celebrations in which the Hebrew calendar was designed around the number seven.

These celebrations were a vital part of the Israelite lifestyle. Here is a list of the Old Testament feasts:

- Sabbath
- Sabbath Year
- Year of Jubilee
- Passover
- Firstfruits
- Weeks (Pentecost)
- Trumpets
- Day of Atonement
- Tabernacles (Booths)

Leviticus ends with holy vows in chapter 27.

F. LEVITICUS – THE BOOK OF WORSHIP

In Genesis we see man ruined.

In Exodus we see man redeemed.

In Leviticus we see man worshiping God.

We can also make a comparison and contrast between Exodus and Leviticus. In the Book of Exodus we see the offer of pardon; Leviticus offers purity. In Exodus we have God's approach to man; in Leviticus it is man's approach to God. In Exodus, Christ is the Savior; in Leviticus, He is the Sanctifier. In Exodus man's guilt is prominent; in Leviticus man's defilement is prominent. In Exodus, God speaks out of the mount; in Leviticus, He speaks out of the tabernacle.