

LEVITICUS

INTRODUCTION:

1. AUTHOR – Moses – It is the third Book of Moses
2. DATE WRITTEN – Approximately 1400 B.C.
3. DATES COVERED – Leviticus begins and ends at Mount Sinai. The Lord gave these laws to Moses for Israel after bringing them out of Egypt.
4. NAME – The name is taken from the fact that the majority of the book is made up of instructions given to the Levites on their duties in worship. Remember though that the book is not just a series of laws. It is given in the context of the narrative of the Lord's deliverance.
5. KEY PHRASES – "when a person sins" and "then he shall be clean (forgiven)," "(an aroma) pleasing to the Lord." "I am the Lord (your God)" and "I am holy." See Ch 18-19, "Before the Lord." See Ch 8, "Atonement."

OUTLINE:

Note: As you read these instructions and regulations, keep reminding yourself that there is a truth pictured by these facts that God wants us to know. It may be about himself (that he is holy), or about us (that we are not holy), or about his method of providing forgiveness and cleansing for us. This forgiveness and cleansing ultimately come through Jesus Christ. In some way then, the pictures of Leviticus picture Jesus. Try to think of each chapter then in the light of who Jesus is and what he has done.

1. LAWS AND REGULATIONS ON THE TASKS OF SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS. CH 1-7

- A. For the people. Ch 1:1-6:7
Burnt Offering (Ch 1), Cereal (Ch 2), Fellowship or Peace (Ch 3), Sin or Purification (Ch 4:1-5:13), Guilt (Ch 5:14-6:7)
- B. For the priests. Ch 6:8-7:38
The same offerings are explained from the priest's viewpoint.

2. THE PRIESTS BEGIN THEIR TASKS. CH 8-10

- A. Aaron and his sons are ordained. Ch 8
- B. Aaron offers his first sacrifices. Ch 9
- C. Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, are killed for disobeying God in offering sacrifices. Ch 10

3. HOW TO TREAT UNCLEANNESS. CH 11-16

Note: Uncleanness is not the same as sin. Uncleanness is a defect usually through the loss of something physical that makes us incomplete as God intended in creation. Uncleanness makes us disqualified to come before God or be in his presence. It reminds us that God intends no imperfections in our physical being yet we each find some that would exclude us from the presence or service of our holy and perfect God. God also makes provision for cleansing from this uncleanness. These truths continually remind us that any imperfection separates us from God. If physical imperfection separates us, how much more does spiritual and moral! It is only by the grace of God that we can approach God in worship. The remedy for uncleanness is usually washing and waiting. Sometimes it also involves ceremonial cleansing with blood.

- A. Unclean and clean animals for food (Ch 11); Purification after childbirth (Ch 12)
- B. Recognizing unclean diseases and cleansing (Ch 13-14)
- C. Identifying unclean discharges and regulations for cleansing (Ch 15)
- D. Purifying the Tabernacle on the Day of Atonement (Ch 16)

4. LAWS FOR PRACTICAL HOLINESS. CH 17-27

Note: These laws remind us that holiness impacts every area of our lives. We must not think that it is only how we appear or act on Sunday or in church that matters to God. All we do in every area of our lives is to be understood from the perspective of dedicating it to God for his glory.

In Food (Ch 17), Sex (Ch 18), Neighbors (Ch 19), Serious Crime (Ch 20), Priests (Ch 21-24:9), Blasphemy (Ch 24:10-23), Special Cases (Ch 25-27)

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEVITICUS:

Note: Many people feel that Leviticus is one of the most difficult books of the Bible to read. We need to remind ourselves that as sinners, we deserve no way to come to God. It is only because of God's grace that he provides any way at all for sinful humans to approach him. The strictness of the rules reminds us that it is God who sets the terms for our relationship with him. We cannot. The way he sets is through Jesus and this book shows us pictures of that way. Look for Jesus in every chapter.

1. God's holiness is seen to affect every part of our lives.
2. The laws are given to those who are already redeemed. See 19:36, 22:33. At the same time, some of the laws are given only for the nation of Israel to remind them that they are God's chosen people.
3. The principles of the laws are valid today but the applications of those laws may be different. For example, see Leviticus 23:22, and Deuteronomy 22:8
4. The importance of dealing with sin both specifically (Ch 19) and generally (Ch 16) is seen.
5. Leviticus helps us understand the significance of Christ's death and shed blood. The New Testament book to study with Leviticus is the Book of Hebrews.
6. Blood is seen as a symbol of life or if it is shed, of death, especially the death of a sacrifice. It is that blood that cleanses sin and purifies uncleanness.
7. Some people see the order of feasts in Leviticus 23 as prophetic of events in the life of Christ, both for his first coming and for his second.

LEVITICUS

1 – These are the instructions for the burnt offerings that Israel was to make. There are several pictures of Jesus in this chapter. The offering is in place of the sinner to “make atonement” for his sins. Jesus died in our place for our sins. The offering is to be a male without blemish. This describes Jesus exactly. It is the blood that atones for sins. This represents that the death is total, as does the fact that the offering is to be burnt completely on the altar. The fact that there are three levels only provides for differing economic situations that are fulfilled by Jesus, as he is available for everyone to be saved who believes. The sacrifice had to be brought to the door of the Tabernacle since there is only one place to come for sins forgiven and that is Jesus. The sins needed to be pictured as transferred to the sacrifice as God placed our sins on Jesus. When we confess our sins, God transfers them to Jesus who died in our place. V3 “If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting that he may be accepted before the Lord.”

2 – The grain offering is split between a portion to the Lord and the rest to Aaron and his sons, the priests. This would be one of the ways that they would be provided for in their job, since they were not to own land. There are several phrases that stand out. Everything is done “before the Lord” or “in front of the Tent of Meeting.” These are just as clearly instructions from the Lord as the commands about the pattern of the Tent of Meeting were. The key is that what takes place must be “acceptable to the Lord” or “an aroma pleasing to the Lord” or it is useless. As in the construction of the Tabernacle, it appears that the Lord’s purpose is to let the people know that they are able to have relation with him. He is holy and they are sinners even if they are not aware of their sin. He does outline a way and will provide a way for people to approach him or they (we) would not be able to do that. This fulfills his announced goal to live among his people and be their God. When grain was used for food for people, leaven, honey and salt would be used. When grain was brought as an offering, salt was required while honey and leaven were prohibited. V9-10 “And the priest shall take from the grain offering its memorial portion and burn this on the altar, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the Lord. But the rest of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the Lord’s food offerings.”

3 – This chapter provides instructions for the peace offering. Here God shares a meal with the worshiper over the animal that is sacrificed. After the worshiper gives the best part to God, he is to eat the meat and any leftover is to be burned to the Lord. V16b-17 “All fat is the Lord’s. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, in all your dwelling places that you eat neither fat nor blood.” Jesus tells us that his followers must not only have Jesus’ sacrifice for us but we must also feast on Christ to be fully satisfied (John 6:52-59).

4 – Sin offerings may be made for those who sin unintentionally. Some make this in contrast to those who sin “with a high hand” as in Numbers 15:30-31 and say that there is no offering for those who sin deliberately. The issue here is that sin is sin even if we do not know it is sin. The contrast is between objective and subjective sin. Whenever the person who sins unintentionally becomes aware that they have committed sin, they are to bring these offerings and they will be forgiven. Even unintentional sin is serious and requires death and the shedding of blood that is spread on the curtain and altar of the tabernacle. There is also a graded system for those who are leaders or wealthy. Their offering must be more costly than those who are poor. They still must bring an offering that costs but it is proportionate. Jesus is our complete sacrifice, covering sins we know about and those we do not know about. His death is available for all, rich and poor and through it we are forgiven of our sins. The best news is that the sentence is repeated after each section, “And the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven.”

5 – This chapter continues the same theme but defines some instances when a person might sin and not realize it. They might hesitate to be a witness to a crime and not tell their story. That is wrong. Appropriate offerings must be made. If a person accidentally touches a dead animal or anything else that is unclean, they must offer a sacrifice. Jesus is our sacrifice for all our sins. “When he realizes he has

sinned," that is when he is to offer his sacrifice. He is still guilty even when he has not realized he has sinned. The same promise of forgiveness is made, V6, 10, 13, 16, and 18.

6-7 – If someone does something wrong against a neighbor, he must not only make restitution but must also add a fifth to it and then offer an offering. In addition to Jesus' death, to be restored to our neighbor, we need to make restitution plus. In all these offerings, Jesus is our complete and final, once for all sacrifice. The instructions are given for each kind of offering. It seems that these are regulations to be observed by the priest in administering these offerings. It seems that the sinner had the obligation to bring the offering and the priest had the obligation to perform it in a correct way so that the sinner would be forgiven. Jesus is not only our complete sacrifice. He is also our perfect High Priest and we can count on him to have offered his offering in the correct way. Praise him!

8 – This chapter records the ordination of Aaron and his sons as priests. What an elaborate celebration and ceremony! V3 "And Moses said to the congregation, 'This is the thing that the Lord has commanded to be done.'" Because God said it, they did it. It appears that the main feature is the atonement that needs to be made for all the people, their garments and the implements of the Tabernacle for it to be used for this purpose. Jesus also was set aside for his Father's purposes but not any of it was due to his sin. The elements of the heavenly sanctuary also do not need cleansing.

9 – The ordination service continued with the offering of the various sacrifices. The conclusion is so powerful. V23 "And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people." Again these are a shadow of the real sacrifice that Christ offers in the real sanctuary that is located in heaven.

10 – The saga of human failure continues with the sin of Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron. Their sin was that they offered, "unauthorized (strange) fire before the Lord." They died for their sin. The explanation of what happened appears to be in V3, and 8-11. There may have been drunkenness involved. It may be that they went at a wrong time. Or they may have blended and not distinguished "the holy and the common." Only Jesus is the perfect priest. How often does our sin stand in sharp contrast to his perfection!

11 – These are the laws of uncleanness that comes from food eaten. The choice of meat to eat was a reminder to Israel that God made a choice of them out of all the nations of the earth and they were to be his people. V44-45 "For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground. For I am the Lord who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy." It is pretty clear that this uncleanness is not sin. A washing and a wait for some period of time restores the person to cleanness. There is not much talk of atonement or forgiveness in these chapters. This clean and unclean is very important as in some way it reflects a standard of holiness that ties us into our relationship with God. Everything we do reflects on our relationship with God. Jesus is such a complete sacrifice for us that he impacts every part of our lives and makes us clean and pure even in areas of which we are unaware.

12 – The birth of a child makes a woman unclean ritually. V2 "If a woman conceives and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days." It takes time and process for cleanness to be restored. The uncleanness for the mother is twice as long if it is a female child. No explanation is given for this. All this cleansing is accomplished through the death of Jesus. By him we are clean before our Lord even in all those ways that we do not know about.

13 – These are laws that have to do with unclean skin. The "leprous" may refer to any of several different kinds of skin diseases. It is the job of the priest to evaluate whether or not someone is infected by this disease or is clean. It seems that humans are unclean before God because of our sin and also because of our humanity, especially in any way in which it is flawed. It is a reminder that we are not

perfect like God is. We are created beings and he is the Creator. Only Jesus was perfect. Jesus makes us perfect before God, fully acceptable to him.

14 – The cleansing process is very detailed and complicated. Note that not only do humans become unclean, but buildings and articles of clothing and cooking utensils may also become unclean and require either cleansing or destruction. What turned something from unclean to clean involved “atonement” being made, usually by some kind of sacrifice. All of this is again done “before the Lord.” All of these instructions are covered by, “The Lord spoke to Moses and said...” 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable...” Sometimes it is hard for us to see the profit in these chapters but God tells us that they are. We need to study them more to understand in what areas the profit lies. Are there symbols of Christ in every aspect or is it just complicated to show that God sets the process and any process is by his grace? Christ has done it all for us in our sin and in our disease.

15 – It seems that any bodily discharge, not only the infectious disease ones but the normal healthy ones of semen or menstrual cycle cause a ritual uncleanness that must not only be acknowledged but atoned for at least by washing and waiting. V31 “Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst.” It seems that the pollution of uncleanness is able to infect even God’s place of dwelling, the Tabernacle. How defiled we are and how gracious God is in Jesus to provide for all we need to stand before God in right relationship.

16 – This may be another insight into the sin of Aaron’s sons. V2 “And the Lord said to Moses: ‘Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.’” God then gave instructions for the Day of Atonement. It was the one day each year that the Most Holy place could be entered. The Day of Atonement presents many pictures that help us understand Jesus and what he did for us. Even the high priest, the most holy of all the people is not allowed into the presence of God except once a year and must first bring a sacrifice, a bull, for his own sins and those of his family. Even then he is to cause smoke from the incense altar to cover the mercy seat where God dwells. So even under these very rare circumstances, he is not permitted a clear view of the place where God is. Jesus is the perfect high priest who has no sins of his own to atone for first. Not only is he the high priest, but he is the perfect sacrifice that settles issues once for all by one perfect sacrifice and did not need to be repeated year after year as an annual reminder of the sins of the people. He is also pictured in the goat that is released as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). They are not only atoned for but they are also removed, never to be returned. Even the mercy seat is polluted and needs cleansing. The work had to be done by the high priest alone as Jesus did his work alone. The priest laid aside his ornate robe and took simple garments as Christ became human and then returned to glory in the ascension. The two goats consist of one offering and present the two aspects of Christ’s work on the cross.

17 – The sacrifices were only to be offered in one place, at the altar. So Jesus’ death is the one place where God atones for our sins. The key issue is the blood. The blood is the life. V11 “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.” When the blood is spilled, the life is given up and the sin is atoned for. Yet in Jesus, the blood is returned as Jesus instructs his disciples to drink the cup of his blood. Life is returned to those who believe in Jesus.

18 – Sexual relations are to only be with our wife in marriage and not with anyone else. There is an especially strong warning that it is not to be with those others who would be closest to us. So do not attempt to share the relation we have with Jesus with anyone else, no matter how close they are. We do share the message but not the relationship. Even family and close friends must be sacrificed if it conflicts with our relation with Christ.

19 – This chapter is full of rules. They are all God’s ways because he desires that we be holy, as he is holy. V2 “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.’” They also reflect that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves (V18). There are many ways that we fall short of obeying all these rules. We need the death of Christ to bring us God’s grace so that we will bring that grace to others.

20 – Israel was commanded to not put any of their children to death by sacrificing them to Molech, a foreign god. The issue here is that they should feel free to come to God with any request. God’s grace, ultimately seen in Jesus opens the way for us to come. It is the same with the concept of seeking guidance through mediums and wizards. It is not that they do not work. It is that they are a substitute for the true God and will give guidance away from him. The issue in V10-21 while dealing with sex with people who are close relatives seems to have more to do with stealing what does not belong to us rather than sexual issues. The punishments are severe, death or cut off from their people. A thing is wrong just because God says it is. It cannot later become right because we think we have learned more truth than the people of that generation have. Truth is absolute and is absolutely in Jesus. The issue again is that since God is holy and we are his people, we are to be holy. V26 “You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy and have separated you from the people, that you should be mine.” That high standard, while impossible for us, is attainable through Jesus and his death for us. It should impress us with how much Jesus has done for us. Note that verses 24-25 link the choice of clean and unclean animals for food to the truth that God has separated them out from “the peoples.”

21 – There are special instructions for priests that set a higher standard of holiness set for them. Why should this standard not apply to all of us? Here the command is to only marry a virgin, and not to marry one who is divorced or even widowed. They were to be holy. Is this not another reminder of the standard of holiness that is unattainable by us but is as we stand in Jesus? No defect, physical or moral, is permitted. No contact with the dead is permitted.

22 – This chapter contains more regulations that relate to holiness. Nothing that is imperfect may approach the Lord either in person or in offering. The sentence is repeated three times, “I am the Lord who sanctifies them (you).” The idea is summed in verses 31-33. “So you shall keep my commandments and do them: I am the Lord. And you shall not profane my holy name that I may be sanctified among the people of Israel. I am the Lord who sanctifies you, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the Lord.” This incredibly high standard on sanctification and holiness is ours in Jesus. We dare not diminish any of the impact or seriousness of these instructions. All of them are from the Lord, and the phrase repeated most often in this section is, “I am the Lord.” He is God and we are not. Therefore do things his way and obey them. Let him be in charge of everything.

23 – This chapter contains a list and instructions especially on the timing of the major feasts and “holy convocations” of the people of Israel. One phrase that is repeated with almost every festival is, “You shall not do any ordinary work.” It is interesting that the order of these feasts as they are explained follows the order of the celebrations of Christians. The Passover is the death of Jesus. The “Firstfruits” is the resurrection. The Feast of Weeks is Pentecost. Does then the Feast of Trumpets represent the return of Jesus? Is the Day of Atonement a picture of our ultimate atonement in salvation when we stand before God in judgment? Is the Feast of Booths our eternal rest in heaven? Don’t you wonder if the people of Israel ever found a joy in these feasts instead of an obligation as we sometimes do in coming to church? Was it possible without the Spirit of God indwelling them as we have him? Did they ever approach these as a chore or find them boring? How did the Spirit work in the OT to do this? There seems to be a major change after Jesus in the work of the Spirit within to not only write these on our hearts but also create the desire to do them.

24 – The oil for the lamp is made. The purpose of the lamp was to provide the only light within the Tabernacle for the priest to see what he was doing. Jesus is the light of the world, and we as his followers are also called on to be the light of the world. The bread represents Jesus in that he is all we

need for spiritual food in our lives to sustain us. It must then also represent the word of God that is the "more than" the bread alone that we need to live by. The name of God is to be treated with reverence and any blasphemy of it is punishable by death. So the name of Jesus should be held just as high. Justice is to be carried out an "eye for an eye". So apart from Jesus all our sin would be meted out with the justice of God. How great is his grace to us! How undeserving we are! How we owe him our lives!

25 – The key truth in this chapter is that everything belongs to the Lord. V23 "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me." V42 "For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves." V55 "For it is to me that the people of Israel are servants. They are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God." The Sabbath Rest points to Jesus both in that doing things God's way is the best and that he is Lord of the Sabbath that was created for our benefit (Matthew 12:1-8). There are more rules about the Year of Jubilee, redeeming property, kindness for the poor, and redeeming the poor. While these rules feel like rules, they are actually for the benefit of all God's people. Even though Jesus is the only way to God, it is a way of grace because any way to God is more than we deserve. No matter how difficult the way is, it is an expression of God's grace.

26 – This feels like a preview of Deuteronomy blessing and cursing. V3 "If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them..." V14 "But if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments..." There is the way of obedience that brings blessing in every area of life and the way of disobedience to God's commands that bring cursing in every area of life. God explains the pattern of his response so they can recognize and turn back to his ways. See verses 21, 23 and 27. "But if in spite of this, you will not listen to me but walk contrary to me, then I will walk contrary to you..." There always remains the way of change that comes by confession of sins that can change the cursing into blessing. V40, 43 "But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me...then I will remember my covenant with Jacob..." 1 John 1:9 encourages us. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This is only through the blood of Jesus.

There were three economic principles that governed the nation. 1) God owned the land and retains the right to control it. 2) God owned the people by virtue of redeeming them from Egypt. 3) The Jews were a family and should care for each other. He also points out that the Kinsman Redeemer is a picture of Christ who became a near relative by becoming human and then willingly redeemed us by his death on the cross.

27 – This chapter contains laws about vows and redeeming those vows. Our word must be valid or the entire society collapses. Jesus is the truth, the only one who always spoke the truth. This standard is again too lofty for us to reach. We are sinners, totally and completely, to the core of who we are. It is only by the grace of God that we will stand before him, through Jesus.