

THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

INTRODUCTION

This is one of the least studied books in the Bible. The reason given by most Christians is that it is a very boring and dull book. Those who have read it say that it is too difficult to understand.

The book of Leviticus is one of the most wonderful books in the whole Bible. It is alluded to many times in the New Testament, especially in the book of Hebrews, for example, **Hebrews 7:11-12**, *"If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law."*

Understanding Leviticus will definitely help the believer better understand the atoning work of Christ. The legitimacy of Christ's priesthood depends on the biblical argument that the Levitical priesthood has a particular God-designed purpose which was never meant to be permanent but good enough for the OT believers as they looked forward to the First Coming of the Messiah. Therefore, there is a big difference between "Jesus Christ is my sacrifice", and "Jesus Christ is my sin offering, burnt offering, peace offering and thank offering". Understanding the book of Leviticus will enhance our entire perception of the length and breadth and height of the atoning work of Christ for the believer.

This verse in **Hebrews 10:1** summarizes well the purpose of Leviticus, *"For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect."* The Levitical system of worship was meant to be a shadow of the person and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was a temporal system of sacrifice which availed the people of God in OT times to approach God and be accepted by Him, so long as they did it by faith.

I. CONTEXT WITHIN THE PENTATEUCH

The Jews always understood the first five books of the Bible as one book. It is sometimes referred to as the Torah or the Law. In these five books, Leviticus stands in the middle after Genesis and Exodus. One of the main reasons for this is that there was a limit to the length of the papyrus scrolls. The length of each of these books would be about the maximum length for scrolls. The other main reason is, of course, the different themes found in each of these five books. To the Jews they were seen as five different chapters of one book instead of five separate and individual books. The collection of these five books is known as the Pentateuch.

From the chronological standpoint, most of it was probably given to Moses by dictation. Leviticus records for us the Levitical laws and significance of the many different types of

offerings, the responsibilities of the high priests and priests, clean and unclean persons, dietary laws, tithes, etc. Only three chapters of the entire 27 chapter book have chronological value in that they are to be understood as narrative literature.

After the completion and consecration of the Tabernacle in the last chapter of Exodus, the Lord focused His attention on the offerings - how all sinners can have their sins cleansed; who were the people who were allowed to do the offerings and how to do them properly.

After Leviticus, there was the numbering of the adult Israelites and the arrangements of the 12 tribes into an organized and orderly people of God. They were taught where to make camp and which tribe was to camp in which area in relation to the Tabernacle. When they marched to the Promised Land, they were to move in an orderly manner detailed by God, who was to dismantle the Tabernacle and how these items were to be carried. This takes us to Numbers Chapter 10. After the numbering and organization of the Israelites, the command was given by the LORD for His people to move to the Promised Land.

By the end of the book of Numbers, nearly 40 years would have lapsed because Israel sinned against God by their faithlessness with reference to their entrance into the Promised Land. From the time they left Mount Sinai to the Wilderness of Paran located south-west of the Dead Sea, they travelled a few more months. 12 spies were sent to survey the land and report that the land was truly full of milk and honey. But they came back reporting that the land was full of giants and the people were like grasshoppers. Out of these 12 spies, 10 of them refused to enter the Promised Land because they did not have the faith to trust God to bring them in. This affected all of Israel and there was a great cry of fear. This resulted in 40 years of wilderness wandering, one year for every day the 12 spies took to reconnoiter the Promised Land. They took 40 days, hence the 40 years of wandering till all the 603,550 men who were numbered, except for Caleb and Joshua, died in the wilderness.

Israel was in her 40th year and 1st month as Numbers 20:1 reveals. This means that Aaron and Miriam died in the 40th year of their wilderness wandering. Moses had served God faithfully for 39 long years but sinned against God on the 1st month of the 40th year of service. Deuteronomy 1:3 provides us with the date of 40th year and 11th month and the first day when the book of Deuteronomy was given by Moses.

Moses and the people of Israel arrived at the Transjordan side preparing to cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Aaron had died and was replaced by his son Eleazer. Aaron was 123 years old, three years older than Moses. Miriam had also died by then. Moses was the only leader left. And he knew he was going home too as he had sinned a great sin against the LORD in Numbers 20.

The book of Leviticus is like a bridge between the books of Genesis-Exodus and Numbers-Deuteronomy. Without the book of Leviticus many of the offerings mentioned in Numbers 17-19 would not make any sense. Leviticus is a very crucial book in understanding the sacrificial system of worship and the forgiveness and cleansing of our sins. It also gives us a glimpse of God's high standard of holiness that He expects of His people.

II. THE THEOLOGY OF LEVITICUS

- 1. The Presence of God**

- 2. Holiness**

- 3. The Role of Sacrifice**

- 4. The Suzerainty Covenant**

III. CONTEXT WITHIN LEVITICUS ITSELF

The outline of Leviticus is adapted and modified from the Master's Study Bible Outline of the book.

A. THE WAY OF ACCESS TO GOD: REDEMPTION – 1:1 - 16:34

- 1. The Propitiation of God's Wrath: Sacrifice – 1:1 - 7:38**

For Atonement of Sin: Burnt Offering – 1:1-17; 6:8-13

As A Thank Offering: Meat Offering --- 2:1-16; 6:14-23

As A Reconciled Communion: Peace Offering – 3:1-17; 7:11-34

As Purification Offering: Sin Offering – 4:1 - 5:13; 6:24-30

With Righteous Reparation: Trespass Offering – 5:14 - 6:7; 7:1-10

- 2. The Intercession by God's Minister: Priesthood – 8:1 - 10:20**

Consecrating the Ministers: Aaronic Ordination – 8:1-36
Inaugurating the Ministry: The First Offerings – 9:1-24
Death Against Sacrilege: Nadab and Abihu – 10:1-24

3. The Purification of God's People: Cleanness – 11:1 - 15:33

From the Dietary Laws: Animals, Birds, Fish and Creepers – 11:1-47
From Congenital Depravity: Birth --12:1-8
From Bodily Corruption: Leprosy – 13:1 - 14:57
From Sexual Pollution: Secretions – 15:1-33

4. The Accomplishment of Reconciliation: Day of Atonement – 16:1-34

B. THE WAY OF LIVING FOR GOD: HOLINESS – 17:1 - 27:34

1. The Ceremonial Standard: Reverence for the Blood – 17:1-16

2. The Moral Standard: Ethical Conduct – 18:1 - 22:33

Purity in the Family: Sexual Morals – 18:1-30
Conduct Pleasing to God: General Ethics – 19:1-37
Punishment for Violations: Sanctions – 20:1-27
Ministry Beyond Reproach: Priestly Standard – 21:1 - 22:33

3. The Devotional Standard: Regular Worship – 23:1 - 25:55

Disciplined Time for God: Feasts -- 23:1-44
Order in the Sanctuary: Tabernacle Worship – 24:1-9
Reverence for God's name: Blasphemy – 24:10-23
Extensions of the Sabbath: Sabbatical Years – 25:1-55

4. The Concluding Appeal: Exhortation – 26:1-46

5. Appendix on Voluntary Devotional Vows -- 27:1-34

Please try the QUIZ

1. List the four types of offerings mentioned in the first seven chapters of the book of Leviticus.

_____ , _____

_____ .

2. T/F When Moses consecrated Aaron and his sons, Moses himself did not offer any offerings for his own sins. He stood in the place of God. The two sons who died because they offered strange fire were Nadab and Eleazar.

3. Name two clean animals that the people of Israel were allowed to eat but which were not acceptable to the LORD for offerings.

_____ , _____ .

4. Name two clean animals and two clean birds that the LORD would accept for offerings.

_____ , _____

_____ .

5. When is the Day of Atonement? How many times do the Israelites keep this day every year?

_____ .

6. Was a priest of God allowed to marry a widow or a divorcee? Can a believer today marry a divorcee or a widow? Explain.

7. What is the year of the Jubilee? Explain its significance.

8. T/F Every devoted thing is holy unto the LORD. None devoted, which shall be devoted to men, shall be redeemed but shall surely be put to death.

9. What is the punishment for the sin of blasphemy?

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10. What is the Feast of the Pentecost?

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