

LEVITICUS

INTRODUCTION

The book of Leviticus is concerned largely with the ministry of the priests in the tabernacle.

Leviticus teaches the sinfulness of sin and is part of that law which was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.

The subject of Leviticus is the way by which a sinful man may approach God and continue in fellowship with Him.

The means of approach are:

1. The burnt offering
2. The meal offering
3. The peace offering
4. The sin offering
5. The trespass offering

CHAPTER 1

Verse 3

The burnt offering means "that which goes up." It is distinguished from other offerings in that all of the flesh is consumed on the altar. The most costly burnt offering was that which came from the herd of cattle. It must be a male, without blemish, as symbolic of the perfection that God demands.

Verse 10

A burnt offering of lesser value would be a sheep or a goat that is of less financial value than cattle. For those unable to present the more costly offerings, provision was made for offering the turtle dove or pigeons. No one needs to allow poverty to keep them from making their offering to the Lord.

One would bring his offering to the door of the tabernacle since he could not enter, but was allowed to come as far as the brazen altar, just inside the door of the tabernacle court. There one acknowledged his sin and his trust in the Divinely appointed means of receiving forgiveness. Then one was directed to lay his hands on the head of the sacrificial victim. The animal or bird is then slain by the one presenting the sacrifice. After this the ministry of the priest begins. He sprinkles the blood on the altar indicating that the sacrifice is made to God for the purpose of forgiveness. After all preliminaries were attended to the priest burned the entire sacrifice. The sacrifice is offered because sin has brought a separation between God and the offerer. Man has sinned but God has provided a remedy in an atoning sacrifice. The atonement is a “covering.” The sinner is sheltered from the penalty that is due as a sinner.

God looks from heaven and sees not the sinner in his sin, but the covering—the atonement that He provided in Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 2

Verses 1-16

God presents the “grain offering” (meal offering, meat offering.) This offering is a gift to God for the daily food of the people. It appears to have been offered at the same time as the bloody sacrifice.

Verses 4-15

God reveals what is to be mixed with the fine flour and what is not to be mixed with the fine flour. A handful of the grain offering was burnt on the altar as a memorial in which the offerer is remembered before the throne of grace. The remainder of the offering was presented to the priests as a reminder of God’s care for those whose lives are devoted to His service.

CHAPTER 3

Verses 1-17

Peace offerings are applied to those sacrifices that are concluded with a sacrificial meal. In the peace offering, the worshiper as well as the priest has the privilege of participating in the sacrificial meal. The peace offering is

sometimes called the thank offering. In all the offerings there is a recognition and consciousness of sin and the need of atonement.

The peace offering could either be a male or female animal without blemish. No mention of an offering of turtledoves or pigeons is mentioned probably due to the nature of the offering. The offerer presented the animal to the priest, laying his hand on the head of the sacrifice, and then killing the sacrifice. Life comes from the death.

The victim must die before he can feed anyone. So Christ, crucified, is the bread for needy mankind. The fat portion of the peace offering is placed on the already burning burnt offering. The fat was esteemed the richest and best part of the animal. As such it was offered to God.

Verse 16-17

The rest of the sacrifice belonged to the offerer. He could invite friends and the Levites to share the feast with him.

CHAPTER 4

Verses 1-35

The sin offering (trespass offering) was named for the purpose of receiving forgiveness for the guilt of sin and the trespasses against God and man.

The sin offering applies to those who sin unintentionally or through ignorance. God has only one standard of morality. Responsibility differs in proportion to the privileges and position entrusted to the individual. The man with ten talents has a responsibility beyond that of a man entrusted with one. The Hebrew word *hata* may be translated “sin” and conveys the idea of “missing the mark.” The sin offering for the priest is the largest of the sacrificial animals, a young bull, without blemish. The sin offering of a ruler was second to that of the priest. He was directed to bring a male goat for his sin offering.

The sin offering for an individual member of the Israelite community was a female goat or lamb.

CHAPTER 5

Verses 1-19

These verses cover the sin of false testimony or refusing to give testimony at a public investigation of a crime. False utterances were regarded as sinful and in need of an atonement sacrifice. A female sheep or goat was to be offered as the guilt or sin offering. The offering was to follow confession. One who unintentionally or acts unfaithfully against the things recognized by the Israelites as holy things of God, must offer a guilt or trespass offering. The sin might involve neglect or forgetfulness in the matter of first fruits, tithes, or other prescribed offerings. The guilt or trespass offering is limited to one sacrificial animal, a ram without defect. Israel must learn that transgression is costly.

CHAPTER 6

Verses 1-7

The sacrifice necessary when one deceives his companion in regard to a deposit or a security entrusted to him is to be handled the same as the guilt or trespass offering of chapter 5.

Verses 8-13

These verses tell how the priest was to dress for the sacrifice of the daily sacrifices that consisted of two lambs, one offered at sunrise and the other at evening. After the sacrifice, the priest was to assume his ordinary clothes and carry out the ashes. The fire was to be kept burning perpetually on the altar of burnt offering with wood supplied at the expense of the congregation.

Verses 14-23

Instructions are given concerning the priests eating of the portion of the grain offerings that belonged to them.

Verses 24-30

These verses contain instructions concerning the priests' handling of the guilt or sin offering. All that touched the guilt offering must be regarded as

holy because of the sanctity of the offering. Unglazed earthenware vessels that would absorb some of the juices of the flesh boiled in them were broken.

CHAPTER 7

Verses 1-38

This chapter covers the trespass offering and indicates what is the Lord's portion in this sacrifice and what is to be eaten by the offerer and his family.

CHAPTER 8

Verses 1-36

This chapter begins the commandment to appoint Aaron and his sons to the priesthood.

The entire congregation was ordered to gather at the door of the tabernacle for the solemn occasion of the anointing of Aaron and his sons. Oil was poured on Aaron's head as a token of his position as high priest, while oil was smeared with a finger on the forehead of the sons, the ordinary priests.

Verses 14-17

Moses, as mediator of the covenant, offered the first sin offering.

Verses 31-32

The newly appointed priests were instructed to boil the flesh of the ram of consecration at the door of the tabernacle and to eat it there with the bread from the basket of consecration offering. In this meal the intimacy of the priests with the Lord as ministers in His house is stressed. As servants of God, they were fed at His altar.

CHAPTER 9

Verses 1-24

The law of the offering and the establishment of the priesthood were necessary before the tabernacle could be established as the meeting-place between God and man.

The offerings are presented in their logical order.

1. Sin offering—Although washed, clothed, and anointed for service, Aaron had need for that cleansing and atonement typified in the sin offering.
2. Burnt offering—The burnt offering was a symbol of perfect consecration in that the entire sacrifice was consumed in smoke.
3. Grain offering—In the burnt offering the dedication of one's self may be typified. The grain offering adds the dedication of one's toil.
4. Peace offering—In this offering is the symbolism of joyous fellowship with God and His people. The peace offering comes last in the order.

After the blessing, God indicates His acceptance by a flash of fire that suddenly consumed the sacrifices on the altar in the sight of all the people.

CHAPTER 10

Verses 1-20

The sins of Nadab and Abihu were that their incense was not lighted from the altar. They offered “strange fire” which was contrary to God's command. (Leviticus 16:2)

It also appears that they offered incense at a time not prescribed in the Divinely appointed order of service.

Their offering of fire “before the Lord” seems to imply that they pressed “within the veil” into the Holy of Holies where the Shekinah glory of God dwelt. None but the high priest and he only once a year, could enter the Holy of Holies.

As their punishment, they were instantly killed. Fire from “before the Lord” devoured them.

Verses 8-11

God warns the priesthood against the use of intoxicating beverages in connection with the tabernacle ministry. Some have assumed from this instruction that Nadab and Abihu were under the influence of alcohol when they committed their acts of sacrilege.

CHAPTER 11

Verses 1-47

We may not understand why the prohibitions on certain foods, but some were doubtless associated with idolatry. Earlier we learned that boiling a kid in its mother's milk is related to a Canaanite practice. We are told that horseflesh was deemed sacred to the Germanic god, Odin. It was therefore forbidden to the Saxons who became Christians, for fear of a temptation to compromise with older pagan ideals.

The diet of the Israelite was largely restricted to animals used in sacrifice. Only those with the divided hoof and chew the cud was allowed.

Verse 22

Only the seafood that has fins and scales was permitted as food. Birds of prey were unclean. Doves, pigeons, quails, and sparrows were acceptable in the diet of the Israelites. Most insects were forbidden, except for four insects of the locust family.

CHAPTER 12

Verses 1-8

These verses cover the laws of purification after childbirth. The Canaanites, in contrast to Israel, glorified sex by making it the dominant theme of Baal worship.

The detailed instructions given to Israel concerning sexual matters were to serve as a means of instruction in the necessity for separation from Canaanite attitudes and practices. After the birth of a son, a woman was regarded as unclean for seven days. Following that time normal activities of life might be resumed, except she was not permitted to enter the sanctuary for a period of forty days. After the time of the birth of a daughter the time was doubled in each case. At the close of the period of ceremonial uncleanness the law prescribed a lamb for a burnt offering, and a turtledove or a pigeon for a sin offering.

CHAPTER 13

Verses 1-59

This chapter deals with the laws concerning leprosy. Leprosy as described in the Bible differs from the scourge of medieval Europe. Skin blemishes and sores that are now termed psoriasis are included in the Hebrew term for leprosy *tsara'ah*. Conditions of rot in clothing and buildings are described by the same word.

CHAPTER 14

Verses 1-57

This chapter gives instructions concerning the cleansing and restoration of a leper. The law of leprosy was given in order that men might discriminate between the unclean and the clean.

CHAPTER 15

Verses 1-18

These verses give the procedures for purifying a man who has a natural bodily issue. He must be cleansed by bathing and is unclean until evening. If the issue continues he is unclean and on the eighth day after the issue stops there must be a burnt offering and a sin offering of two turtledoves or two pigeons for the afflicted person.

Verse 19-30

The same instructions are given for a woman afflicted with a discharge as the instructions given for a man.

CHAPTER 16

Verses 1-34

The Day of Atonement was the most solemn occasion in the Jewish year. Individual sins had been dealt with previously. Now “all the sins of the children of Israel” are ceremonially atoned for in one solemn act. This is the only day the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies.

The Day of Atonement was a day of humiliation. Aaron offered a burnt offering and a sin offering for himself and his family because they were sinners and stood in need of atonement. Aaron cast lots for the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other for the scapegoat. The scapegoat was the live goat of the sin offering. The priest placed his hands on the head of the goat confessing the sins of the people. Ceremonially those sins are transferred to the goat that is released to flee into the wilderness. The name of the scapegoat in Hebrew is *azazel*, “to remove.” The scapegoat depicts the removal of the sins of God’s people. The goat that is killed in the offering, depicts the atoning blood that saves from sin. Both goats form one sin offering, on the Day of Atonement.

CHAPTER 17

Verses 1-16

The institution of the Day of Atonement is then followed by regulations concerning the affairs of the daily life of the people in order to foster the holiness that the God of Israel demands of His people. To use an animal for food the Israelites must first bring the animal to the door of the tabernacle and there offer it as a peace offering. The Israelites were forbidden to eat the blood as a part of the sacrificial offering because it was a carrier of life. The blood was to be presented to the Lord because it was sacred.

CHAPTER 18

Verses 1-30

This chapter deals with marriage relationships.

A warning is given against accepting the customs of Egypt, or adopting the custom of the Canaanites. Marriage to near of kin is forbidden. Among the Egyptians it was common for brothers and sisters to marry.

Verse 21

Infant sacrifices were classed as a sexual crime because of its association with Canaanite worship. Sacred prostitution and infant sacrifices were the two most degrading aspects of the Canaanite culture.

Verses 22-23

Admonitions are given against homosexuality and bestiality. The violation of the standard of morality set forth resulted in the humiliation of nations that were guilty of such crimes. God was about to give the land of Canaan to Israel as a possession. The sin of the Canaanites had reached the point where the land was about to “vomit” them out. Israel received the solemn warning that her sin would bring about swift recompense. The captivities came as the consequence of Israel’s failure to heed this solemn warning.

CHAPTER 19

Verse 3

The first unit of society is the family. Through mother and father the child should first come to the knowledge of God. The Sabbath day recognizes God’s right to our time. Sabbath breaking was looked upon as rebellion against God. Idolatry is a denial of the God of Israel. Much of the Mosaic Law was designed to preserve Israel from the snares of idolatry.

The peace offering must be eaten on the day it was offered and the next day, but what remained on the third day had to be burned. This avoided the temptation of taking more than his allotted portion. It helped to prevent selfishness.

Verses 9-18

Moses deals now with the right relationships to the members of the human society. The poor and the stranger were to gather the gleanings of the harvest in the corners of the field and they were to gather the fallen fruit.

The oath forbidden is a specific sin invoking the name of God as witness to that which is falsehood, or calling upon God to bear witness to the truthfulness of that which is a lie. Paying wages without delay prohibits the employer from taking unfair advantage of the employee, so wages were to be paid daily. Slander, gossip, and false witness are sins against love and demonstrate an attitude of hostility to God and man.

Verse 28

Charms, enchantments, and divination from omens are prohibited. Cutting of the flesh and tattoo marks were forbidden.

Verse 29

The Israelites were forbidden to dedicate their daughters to become temple prostitutes.

Verse 31

Communication with the dead and to tell fortunes is associated with heathenism.

Verse 37

“You shall thus observe all My statutes and all My ordinances, and do them: I am the Lord.”

CHAPTER 20

Verses 1-27

Molech worship involved the sacrifice of children to a Canaanite god. Molech worship was encouraged by Solomon (1 Kings 11:7), Manasseh (2 Kings 21:6) and kings in the last days of Judah (Jeremiah 32:35).

Prohibited in the Levitical law, Molech worship was denounced by Amos, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The penalty for causing children to “pass through the fire” to Molech, is death.

God was exhorting the Israelites to faithfulness because He was about to dispossess the Canaanites, whose cup of sin was full.

CHAPTER 21

Verses 1-24

As God’s representatives, the priests are to be careful to avoid that which is sinful and that which is ceremonially defiling. Priests were not to touch a dead body except in cases where there is no other relative to perform burial rites. Priests could marry, but not marry a woman of questionable character. The

high priest could not marry a widow. The priest must “rule well his own household.” For the daughter of a priest to become a harlot was a heinous offense.

CHAPTER 22

Verses 1-33

Deals with ceremonially unclean members of the priesthood.

CHAPTER 23

Verses 1-44

Chapter 23 deals with the sacred seasons of the Hebrew calendar. The feasts of the Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles are so designated, and every able-bodied male Israelite was to appear before the Lord at the sanctuary for their observances.

The first and most basic of the appointed season was the weekly Sabbath. Its observance marked Israel as God’s people and served as a reminder of the “rest” into which God desired to bring them. The Feast of Passover celebrated the deliverance from Egypt that marked the beginning of the “national” life of Israel. The Feast of Unleavened Bread celebrated the harvest. The Feast of Pentecost as an agricultural feast celebrated at the completion of the wheat harvest. The Feast of Trumpets became the Jewish New Year.

The “religious” year began in the spring; the “civil” year began in the fall. The seventh month was the most sacred in the Hebrew year. The Day of Atonement came on the tenth of the month.

The Feast of Tabernacles was observed on the fifteenth of the month. The first day of the month was observed as the Feast of Trumpets. The Day of Atonement concerned the forgiveness of the sins of Israel as a nation. The Feast of Tabernacles is similar to our Thanksgiving Day. It marked the end of the agricultural year. The harvest of grain, the produce of the vine, and the fruit tree had all been harvested.

CHAPTER 24

Verses 1-9

These verses deal with Aaron's responsibilities in the Holy of Holies.

Verses 10-23

Moses next relates the punishment of a blasphemer. Moses declared that the penalty for blaspheming was death and that it applied to non-Israelites as well. The laws of murder, killing a neighbor's beast, and injuring a neighbor also applied to the non-Israelite.

CHAPTER 25

Verses 1-55

The land was to rest for one year every seven years; this was called the "sabbatical year." This served as a reminder that the fields ultimately belonged to God. After seven cycles of Sabbatical years, the fiftieth year was celebrated as a "Year of Jubilee."

Also in the Jubilee Year provision was made for a return of the slaves and their possessions to their original condition. Property reverted to the original owner. Land could not be permanently alienated from its original owner no matter how impoverished the original owner might have become.

CHAPTER 26

Verses 3-4

The book of Leviticus closes with a number of promises and warnings. God delights in blessing His people, but the blessings are conditional.

Verses 5-46

God is a God of holiness, and the violator of His law has judgment resting upon him.

CHAPTER 27

Verses 1-34

Vows are voluntary, but once made they are binding. A godly Israelite might want to dedicate himself or his children to the Lord's service. He could discharge the vow by paying into the sanctuary treasury the value of the service covered by the vow.

The vow of an animal to be used for sacrifice was brought to the tabernacle, but an unclean animal was sold and the proceeds given to the tabernacle.

When an Israelite wished to present his house for the Lord's service, a priest was asked to estimate its value. The man might continue to live in the house, but apparently he paid rent on the basis of the priest's evaluation. Firstlings belonged to the Lord, but they could be redeemed and the value given to the tabernacle.

The "tithe" belonged to the Lord. The tithe was not limited to ten percent of the money. Flocks and herds were tithed. Each tenth animal was to be given to the Lord.