

LEVITICUS

Author

More than thirty times in the book we read “The Lord spoke to Moses” and that, together with evidence of early Jewish testimony points to Moses being the author. It was written sometime in the 15 century BC probably after the tabernacle was completed.

The book can be divided into two sections.

1. Chapters 1-17 The way to God through sacrifice. God clarified how people were designed to live and how they could atone for their sins
2. Chapters 18-27 A walk with God through sanctification the process by which we live holy or set apart for Gods purposes. In a word we should be *different*

You could say the book of Leviticus had a planned obsolescence, that is it was not made to last. Certainly the principles of sacrifice, sanctification and holiness still hold essential but because of the blood of Jesus Christ we no longer are involved in ritualistic sacrifice

Sacrifice is to be for us voluntary and not forced. Though the Law of Moses involved mandatory sacrifices, people could still offer sacrifices out of their own free will and a grateful response to what God had done for them.

Much of the law deals with the human body, dietary restrictions, how to treat illness and how to avoid contamination. God expects us to take care of our bodies as well as our souls.

In Genesis we saw condemnation for sin, in Exodus we saw Gods redemption for sin as He delivered Israel from slavery. Now in Leviticus God shows the people how to live separate from sin.

The way to God through sacrifice (Chapters 1-7)

Israel’s first encounter with God in Exodus filled them with dread and fear (Exodus 19:16) but God wanted a relationship with them. How could they draw near to Him in

His terrifying holiness? God's answer was through the blood of an animal sacrifice where the animal would take the place of the person offering it.

Leviticus begins with five offerings which are prescribed by God

The Burnt offering (Chapter 1)

Picture the scene, it's crowded and busy and we are standing within the court of the tabernacle. Many worshipers bring many offerings but all with one motive and that to honour God. Each offering is full of gospel truth and Christ is the key to every part.

This burnt offering is mentioned first in chapter 1 and was viewed as a personal private offering. People brought livestock-bulls, rams, goats, lambs and birds. The offering must be an unblemished male. Jesus is here in type in every aspect of beauty and purity. In a world of sin He shone in perfect purity indeed unblemished. This is a voluntary offering with no compulsion. There is to be no reluctance but a willing offering. This is to be our approach to God without self-righteousness or merit but by faith

The offer puts his hand upon the victim's head (verse 4). This is a graphic picture of a transfer of our sin to Jesus. All our guilt and sin is placed on the head of Jesus. He offers to us to be our burden bearer and His love constrains us. The Father has given His own son to suffer the fury of His wrath. All the sin, the woe, the guilt, the penalty has been heaped on Jesus that none may remain for those who love Him

The Grain offering (Chapter 2)

Flour here is the main material and one God alone suggests. Think of how it is made. Grain is beaten to separate it from the husks then it's ground/milled into powder. How suggestive of this in the life of Jesus, beaten and crushed by those He had created and come to save. His wounds have saved us, by His stripes we are healed.

The flour must be **fine** nothing impure in it and again we are reminded of our sinless Jesus. **Oil** is added emblems of the Holy Spirit. He was anointed with The Spirit at the river Jordan, led by the Spirit when tempted (Luke 4). On the cross the Spirit upheld Him (Hebrews 9:14). This grain offering was rich in oil and Jesus was filled with the Spirit of grace indeed the Spirit's home

Incense is sprinkled on the grain (Frankincense) and fragrance is present all around just as Jesus was a fragrance a delight in heaven and on earth. He is our perfume His name is “**as perfume poured out**” (Song of Solomon 1:13, 14). He has removed our sins, taken away our curse, and stilled our fears and consciences.

Some of the grain offering is burnt, and the rest belongs to Aeron and his sons as God provided his people with bread. Jesus has indeed given Himself as our food

The Peace offering (Chapter 3)

As I'm writing these notes we are coming up to Christmas when we are reminded of the angel's song “**on earth peace**”. Jesus is the Prince of peace, in Him resides peace which He offers to all who will come to Him and share His life.

This time the offering and animal may be male or female and taken from larger cattle or from sheep or goats (see verses 1, 6, 12). Both the rich and the poor may find peace with God without any distinction. Again the animal must be without defect.

God next directs the person who offers to “**lay his hand on the head of his offering**” again the transfer of all guilt. The heavy load is lifted and replaced by peace.

The animal is killed and the animal divided into three parts.

1. The first part was the best part of the animal and was placed on the altar. God claims this part best which is reduced to dust. Jesus had met the fierceness of the wrath of God. Heaven is at peace as the perfect sacrifice has been made
2. The second part was given to the Priests the servants of God in the tabernacle that they may receive peace
3. The third part was for the offeror as they receive the peace of God

The sin offering (Chapter 4)

Sin has ruined everything. It has driven men from God, it has been responsible for war, disease, death, sorrow, and misery. We could go on much more with its devastating effects and its eternal consequences for those who fail to put their trust in Jesus. The offender's hands must be laid on the victim's head where sin passes from him to the victim. Here God is instructing the sinner to lay his/her burden on the Lord. The bull is slain and the blood brought to the tabernacle of meeting. In front of the veil the blood is sprinkled seven times. This is the veil that hung in front of the mercy seat

and was the entrance to the Holiest place. Some of the blood was put on the horns of the altar, the place where incense rose to God, a picture of rising prayer. The brazen altar was where the remaining blood was poured. The remnant of the victim, vile and condemned is taken outside the camp and burned. Here is a picture of Christ having been made a curse for us.

The Trespass offering (Chapter 5:14-19; 7:1-7 and 14:12-18)

This offering also known as a **guilt offering** was required when a person unintentionally violated some of Gods "Holy Things", normally things dedicated to The Lord. It could be the sanctuary itself, or the portion of the offerings normally reserved for the priests. The trespass offering was also brought when a person had committed a violation against another person in which case the offender had to repay damages plus 20% in addition to making the animal sacrifice.

The trespass offering, the ram or male lamb was slaughtered, the blood splashed on the altar and some of the blood was applied to the right ear lobe, right thumb and right big toe of the one making the offering. Then oil was applied to the same places, and the head of the one making the offering was anointed.

The offering was primarily about making reparations and it demonstrated the seriousness of violations against God and fellow men, even though accidental. An atoning sacrifice had to be made before God and restitution made to the person in question.

Consecration of Aeron and his sons (Chapters 8-9)

Chapter 8 sees Aeron, Moses brother and his sons being consecrated as priests. Those who follow Jesus Christ have also been made priests (Revelation 1:6) that is each and all of us. This is not the so called priesthood given to particular individuals in some Christian traditions giving the special privileges in religious service, but the priest hood given to every Christian. The Bible is clear that every priest has the privileges of drawing near to God and offering gifts and sacrifices (Hebrews 5:1, 8:3, 10:11)

Every priest needed to be consecrated set apart and these chapters show how that was done. It involved key elements which we can apply today to our Christians lives

1. First they were washed with water (vs 6). This is for cleansing. See Ephesians 5:25-26 **Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word**
2. Secondly they were given special clothes (Vs 7-13) and we are told to put on new clothes. Colossians 3:12-14 **“² Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. ¹⁴ But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection**
3. Thirdly Aeron had anointing oil poured on his head (vs 12). We too have an anointing **”But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things have anointing from the Holy Spirit and by it we know the truth.**(1John 2:20) We are exhorted to be filled constantly with the Holy Spirit so we might fulfil our duties as priests (Ephesians 5:18)
4. Fourthly Aeron and his sons were to make sacrifices to seal their consecration (vs 14-29). These were the slaughtering of animals. Thankfully we are no longer required to do this for Jesus, the final and perfect sacrifice has come. Our sacrifice is to present our bodies so Christ can live his life through them. Also as we read in Hebrews 13:15-16 **“Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name. ¹⁶ But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased”**
5. Fifthly Aeron and His sons were smeared with blood (vs 23-24) on the lobes of their right ears (to hear God clearly), on the thumbs of their right hands (covering their actions), and on the big toes of their right feet (covering their movements). We too are sprinkled with the blood of Christ which cleanses our consciences so we might serve the living God. 1 Peter 1:2 **“elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ”** and Hebrews 9:14 **“how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal**

Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

6. Finally Aeron and his sons were to stay close to the Tent of Meeting day and night for seven days. Here is a lesson for us that we need sometimes to retreat and spend time with God set apart from the rigours of this world

At the end of chapter 9 after the consecration had taken place, Moses and Aeron came out and blessed the people and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. May our lives be those through whom the glory of the Lord may be a blessing to others?

Profane fire (chapter 10)

Things very soon began to go wrong when Aaron's sons Nabad and Abihu "**offered profane fire before the Lord**" in return for which God killed them. No one really knows what the "profane fire" was. It could have been fire from the outer court, instead of prescribed fire from the altar. Some scholars think Aarons sons may have been drunk, or offered a sacrifice which was not clean, or came with impure hearts. We simply don't know but one thing is clear that is only the worship God prescribes is the worship He accepts.

How to stay clean (Chapters 10-15)

This next group of laws had to do with staying clean, and involved a variety of laws covering how to be ritually cleansed from defilement, sometimes physically but in a way which caused spiritual separation. These were issues of **diet, hygiene and disease especially leprosy**

God begins by laying out what types of animals were all right to eat. Of course God knew which animals were healthy and which were not. Some were more likely to carry disease. So in order to protect His people God gave specific instructions on these matters (Chapter 11:46-47)

There were laws regarding childbirth. When a baby was born a mother had to wait for ritual cleansing (Chapter 11). Then she must bring a burnt offering and a sin offering. Cleansing was needed so soon in a child's life, as a child was tainted by the nature of sin, as if everyone who comes into the world.

Disease has come about because of sin and God gives special instructions (Chapters 13-15) on dealing with leprosy and running sores. Part of the function of the priest was to act like a doctor, and if necessary isolating people, quarantining them and examining a sore or a scab to see if and how it had developed.

The Day of Atonement (chapter 16)

There were two special days in the Hebrew calendar, The Passover, celebrated at the beginning of the sacred cycle of festivals, and The Day of Atonement which took place towards the end. We have already considered in previous studies the Passover and will now look at the Day of Atonement described in Chapter 16:1-34 and Numbers 29:7-11. On this day a final great purification offering was made for all the sins of the nation over the preceding year. The sacrifice consisted of a pair of goats.

The first goat was killed, and the High priest brought its blood (together with an offering of a bull offered as a sin offering for himself) right into The Most Holy Place (See Hebrews 9:7). This was the only time in the whole year when blood was brought into God's presence. Blood was also sprinkled in The Holy Place and on the altar of burnt offering. The High Priest then placed both hands on the head of the other goat (called "the scapegoat") and confessed the sins of the whole nation over it. By this the sins of the nation were transferred to the goat. It was then led eastward into the uninhabited wilderness and released. Two pictures here

1. The scapegoat does not suffer physical death but the death of absolute isolation. Death is more than just physical, it severs relationships. When Adam and Eve sinned their relationship with God was severed. The scapegoat, loaded as it were with the nation's sins, is banished to a remote uninhabited wilderness, so far from God's presence and far from His people. The fate of that hapless goat shows what death really is in a way God's people could see and understand
2. The goat never returned to camp a symbol the complete removal of sins from God's people **"as far as the east is from the west so far has He removed our transgressions from us"** (Psalm 103:12)

Chapter 17 Eating blood

The key verse in this chapter is verses 10-12 “**And whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people.** 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.’** ¹² **Therefore I said to the children of Israel, ‘No one among you shall eat blood, nor shall any stranger who dwells among you eat blood.’**

Back then people in some of the pagan countries actually did eat blood. They would drink animals blood thinking they would take one its characteristics, strong as an ox, ferocious as a lion etc. God forbade Israel to act like those around them. Blood was the basis of their relationship with God and used exclusively in worship to portray and enable atonement and holiness to be possible.

Sanctification/Holiness (Chapters 18-20)

Many people would like to emphasise the love of God or the mercy of God, yet the Bible speaks most of His holiness, and God wants His people to “**be holy for I am holy**” (Chapter 11:45). The first step is repentance involving two elements, turning from sin and turning to God. By applying the Ten Commandments to everyday life the conduct of the people must be changed and be different from other nations.

Morally speaking Chapters 18-20 contain a list of sins revolving around the misuse of sex: incest, homosexuality and bestiality, all of which were practiced by various Egyptians and Canaanites.

Ministry Standards for the priesthood (Chapters 20 and 22)

The standards were high, both for the ordinary priests and the high priest. The word “defile” is used a lot as the priests must be very careful not to make themselves unclean, ceremonially, sexually or morally. That included regulations about touching dead people, going unshaven, who they could marry, and which Levites could make offerings. There were also instructions for how priests were to be ceremonially cleansed if they became defiled. The reason behind all these requirements is once again, holiness. Chapter 21:6 “**They shall be holy to their God and not profane the**

name of their God, for they offer the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and the bread of their God; therefore they shall be holy”

Holy days and festivals (Chapter 23)

Several times during the year Gods people met together to meet with God for special times of worship. These are set out in verses 4-44. Collectively they are called “feasts” which is a “religious festival” or “sacred assembly”. Three of these feasts were mandatory **unleavened bread (which included Passover and First fruits) Pentecost and Feast of Tabernacles**. God commanded all His people, represented by all the men, to celebrate these three festivals year by year. We will divide all the feasts into three parts as follows

Celebrating the past

1. **The Passover and the feast of unleavened bread** which looked back to the events of Exodus and reminded them of how they ate the Passover meal hastily preparing their bread without time to leaven it ready to leave Egypt at a moment's notice
2. **The Feast of Passover** when God people were to remember that they were once slaves in Egypt (Deuteronomy 16:12) and now they were free
3. **The Feast of Tabernacles**. During this feast people were to construct shelters or booths. The people lived in these for the first seven days of the feasts, reminding them of the wilderness wandering during which God was with them and provided for them en route to the Promised Land

Rejoicing in the present

These three festal seasons coincided with harvest which God promised if they were obedient

1. **The Feast of first fruits**. This occurred at the beginning of the cereal harvest when the first fruits of the barley harvest were offered to God

2. **The Feast of Pentecost.** This was also called “the feast of harvest” or “The day of the first fruits”. Here the primary focus was gratitude to God for the harvest. The first fruits of the harvest of wheat were offered in the form of two loaves

Looking forward to the future

1. Jesus fulfilled the **Feast of Passover**. He was the Passover lamb. Before the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** God's people removed the old leaven. They then ate unleavened bread for the duration of the feast. Removing the old leavened dough broke the chain of contamination from one batch to another. This pictures what Jesus's death accomplished. By His death He broke the chain of sins contamination that began with Adam. During this feast the Jews offered the **First fruits** of the cereal harvest. Jesus fulfilled this first-fruits offering. He rose on the day after the Sabbath during the feast of unleavened bread, in other words He rose on *the very day* that Jews offered their first fruits. Jesus is the first fruits and the rest of the harvest will follow “**But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.** ²¹ For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. ²³ But each one in his own order: Christ the first fruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming (1 Corinthians 15:20-22)
2. Fifty days after First fruits, the **Feast of Pentecost** was celebrated. Accordingly 50 days after His resurrection Jesus fulfilled the Feast of Pentecost when on that day He poured out the Holy Spirit on his waiting disciples (Acts 2:33 and Acts 2:16-18 citing Joel 2:28-29) and God began to live in human hearts (John 14:17). Pentecost was a harvest festival when the ingathering of grain harvest was celebrated. On that great Day of Pentecost God reaped a harvest of around 3000 souls. Pentecost was a forerunner of the completion of the harvest at the end of the agricultural year. The Day of Pentecost began a gospel harvest that continues to this day

Finally the autumn feasts had a great element of looking forward, briefly as follows

1. **Feast of Trumpets** which signalled the climax of the year and speaks of the end of the age “ **For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.** (1 Thessalonians 4:16-7)
2. After the Feast of Trumpets came **The Day of Atonement** and as we have covered Jesus fulfilled all that took place on that day entering the most Holy Place with His own blood, (Hebrews 9:7-8, 11-12, 24-26) He is also our scapegoat, God laying on Him the sin of the world (Isaiah 53:6)
3. After the Day of Atonement came the **Feasts of Tabernacles**. The ultimate fulfilment of this final feast will be at the end of the age. Then Gods end time harvest (Matthew 13:39) will be gathered in and all His people will enjoy perfect rest and joy in a New Heaven and a New Earth. Zechariah 14:16 alludes to this. People will go up to worship God and keep The Feast of Tabernacles. John describes this vividly in Revelation 21:1-4 “**Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. ² Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and* be their God. ⁴ And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”**

The Sabbath (chapter 25)

God had rescued His people from slavery in Egypt. God lived with them, blessed them and gave His law. One day they would inherit the Promised Land, a new paradise. God had begun to lift the curse and restore the life of blessing that mankind had known before the fall

The Sabbath Day

Sin brought toil and sweat and the Sabbath reversed this as no work was done on this day. It was Gods appointed day of relief, another step and taster of paradise. Now Gods people could meet with God and meet with their families and friends and enjoy God's creation. It was a prophecy of "things to come" (Colossians 2:16)

The Sabbath Year

Every seven years there was also a Sabbath year when the land was not ploughed or sown. The land produced a yield without work, a reversal of the curse of the ground. People lived off its natural produce and had leisure during that year. People were released from debt too (Deuteronomy 15:1-11) either from making any repayment s due that year or from the total remaining debts (It's not certain which)

The Year of Jubilee

At every 50th year the greatest Sabbath of all occurred, the year of Jubilee. As well as being a Sabbath year all Hebrew slaves were released and allowed to go home. Land and property (with an exception in Leviticus 25:29-30) was sold to release capital and was returned to those it originally belonged to. For those deprived of land or liberty, because of poverty, the slate was wiped clean and they could begin again.

On a practical note the Jubilee year preserved the community. It put a brake on social oppression, and prevented to some extent, the distinction between rich and poor. It put a limit on how much land a person could accumulate, or how much debt people could accrue. Again it was a partial release of the curse, and foreshadowed what God had in mind for His people in the future

Jesus brings us Jubilee

The year of Jubilee was to be announced on the Day of Atonement. On that day Gods sanctuary was purified and His people were cleansed from sin and forgiven. Only

when sin had been dealt with was it time for Jubilee to begin. Jesus bore our sin and provided cleansing and forgiveness, and in doing so inaugurated our Year of Jubilee. We are released from bondage and for us the Year of Jubilee has begun. When Jesus comes again there will be a complete fulfilment of what was pictured in the Old Testament. 2 Peter 3:13 **“Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells”** and Romans 8:19-21 **“For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; ²¹ because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God”**

Promise of Blessing and Retribution (Chapter 26-27)

In making clear the importance of keeping His commands, God made a conditional promise based on obedience. **If you do this then I will do this. He begins by saying “if you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments and perform them I will.....**and He goes on to elaborate all the ways He would bless them, (26:3-13) rain in season, harvest with produce that lasted from reaping till the next sowing, full stomachs, peace in the land, and victory over their enemies.

Leviticus concludes with God speaking about voluntary vows as opposed to obligatory worship. These were not required as were the festivals of the trespass or sin offerings mentioned earlier in our study. Rather these were vows you made to God because you wanted to. The heart of true worship is voluntary rather than compulsory. It does not, nor indeed should it be coerced. If it's not in our hearts we cannot manufacture it. It begins each day with presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice and saying to Him “God here I am body soul and spirit. What do you have for me today, show me what You want me to do” Chapter 28 sums up Gods response to such worship **“Every devoted offering is most holy to The LORD”**