

# The Message of the Old Testament

## A Book-by-Book Study

### LEVITICUS

#### Background

“LEVITICUS” can be traced back to the Greek translation (the Septuagint) meaning “things concerning Levites.” (This title may incorrectly suggest that the material of the book concerns only what priests do. As will become apparent, Leviticus is about much more than priestly duties.) ESV Study Bible.

The writer of Leviticus, again, for the most part, is Moses.

#### Contents of Leviticus

##### 1-7: Sacrifices of a Holy People

Burnt Offerings

Grain Offerings

Peace Offerings

Sin Offerings

Guilt Offerings

The Priests and the offerings

##### 8-10: Aaron: Priest of a Holy People

Aaron and His Sons Consecrated

Aaron's Offering Accepted

Nadab and Abihu Rejected

Eleazar and Ithamar Rebuked

##### 11-15: Purity of a Holy People

Clean and Unclean Animals

Purification After Childbirth

Laws About Leprosy and Lepers

Laws for Cleansing Houses

Laws About Bodily Discharges

##### 16: Atonement for a Holy People

Annual Entrance of the Holy Place

The High Priest Only

Offering for Priest and Family (Bull)

Offering for the People (2 Goats)

Separate burnt offerings for himself and the people

Once a year 10th day of 7th month

Atonement for the people for their sins

##### 17-27: Laws for a Holy People

All Sacrifices to be brought to the tent

Laws about eating blood

Unlawful Sexual Relations

Be holy as the Lord is Holy

Acceptable Offerings

Feasts and Laws

Blessing for Obedience and Punishment for Disobedience

Laws about Vows

## The Message of Leviticus

The central message of the book of Leviticus is twofold:

1. God is \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The \_\_\_\_\_ of God must be holy.

Leviticus 11:44-45 -- For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be \_\_\_\_\_, 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."

Leviticus 19:1-2 -- And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "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."

Leviticus 20:26 -- You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.

God is HOLY. This emphasis is present in Genesis and Exodus. In Leviticus the holiness of God is squarely set forth. He is set apart from the tainted and feeble human contrivances of what God is like. He transcends creation and He is pure without spot or blemish. Moreover, this God who is set apart requires that the people which He has set apart for Himself reflect \_\_\_\_\_. They are to be set apart from the \_\_\_\_\_ and set apart unto \_\_\_\_\_. Leviticus prescribes how God's people are to approach Him in worship and how they are to live as distinct from the world.

### Lessons to be Learned

1. Sinful people need \_\_\_\_\_.

God's people need sacrifices because they inevitably \_\_\_\_\_ to be holy. Inevitably, they \_\_\_\_\_.

The first 7 chapters of Leviticus provide instruction for offering sacrifices in the tabernacle. God commands the unclean, the sinful, and the grateful to bring their offering to the tabernacle courtyard around the Tent of Meeting. . . . Sometimes they would bring a food item, as in a grain offering. More significantly, however, they would bring the \_\_\_\_\_ animals that they owned, animals "without defect," as the book says over and over. The sacrifices were to be valuable in and of themselves and \_\_\_\_\_ to the one giving them. The sacrifice was a loss of goods but also a destruction of life. As God says in chapter 17, "For the life of the creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." (17:11) The sacrifices taught the Israelites that sin brings death, and that only shed blood brings atonement. (Dever, 123)

Once the sacrifice was brought into the courtyard, the individuals making the sacrifice would lay their hands on the \_\_\_\_\_ of the animal (1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; 8:14, 22) By doing this, they publicly identified themselves with the offering itself, as if to say, "What happens to this animal should happen to me because of my sins." And then they, not the priest, would "slaughter" the animal. After the animal was slaughtered, the priests would take the blood . . . and sprinkle it on the altar and around the base in whatever way was required for the particular sin or occasion. Not even the elders of the community were exempt from this exercise: [When the entire community was guilty of sin], the assembly must bring a young bull as a sin offering and present it before the Tent of Meeting. The elders of the community are to lay their hands on the bull's head before the Lord, and the bull shall be slaughtered before the Lord." (4:13-15)

What a clear picture of \_\_\_\_\_! The animal is portrayed as dying in the whole community's place. (Dever, 123)

Sacrifices prescribed by this book include those that were occasional (as called for by specific circumstances) denoted in chapters 1-7. They were also required on a regular basis as scheduled events—weekly, monthly, and annually. "Why?" we might ask. Dever replies, "Because the Lord knew the people would \_\_\_\_\_.

Behind the whole sacrificial system was the assumption that the people would keep sinning. No immediate end would come to this bloody procession of sin and sacrifice. That's why God tells the priests the fire on the altar must never \_\_\_\_\_ (6:12-13; 24:2-4). (Dever, 124)

2. Sinful People need sacrifices because sinful people need \_\_\_\_\_.  
Atonement is how estranged parties are brought together. The cause of the estrangement has to be dealt with. Sacrifices were the means of bringing God and sinners to terms of peace. Of particular emphasis was God's institution of The Day of Atonement.

#### Chapter 16 – The Day of Atonement

Annual day of feasting called "Yom Kippur"

Special sin offering made for \_\_\_\_\_

High Priest entered the presence of God in the Most Holy Place

He bore the blood of a bull and of a goat

The bull for himself and the goat for the people

It is a strange ceremony, when you think about it. He brings blood—first of a bull, then of a goat—into an always empty room. \_\_\_\_\_ is there; nobody is ever there. He is the only one who is there, and that only once a year. He then pours this blood on top of the mercy seat, which is atop the ark of the covenant. And who can see this blood? No one. No one but \_\_\_\_\_, against whom they have sinned.

On this same day, the high priest places his hands on a second goat and confesses the sins of Israel over it. This goat, the scapegoat, is then \_\_\_\_\_ into the desert in order to symbolize the total removal of sin by the penalty of alienation and estrangement. (Dever, 125)

"And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and \_\_\_\_\_ over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness." (16:20-22)

"The Day of Atonement, of course, was held not just once but annually and in perpetuity. Other religions have had their sacrifices—sometimes even human sacrifices. But those sacrifices are given only when things are not \_\_\_\_\_. God gave Israel, on the other hand, a regular calendar of sacrifices. He wanted them to know they lived in a \_\_\_\_\_. The people themselves were sinful. And there was no perfect sacrifice. Each year the sacrifice was made, and each year the Israelites continued to be separated from God by their sins."

"The insufficiency of the high priest's atonement should be obvious. It is shown by the way he made atonement for himself first, and then for his people. And it is shown by the fact that it had to be \_\_\_\_\_! Again and again. Again and again." (Dever, 125-126)

Read Hebrews 9

3. The Requirement for the Atonement of Sin and the severity of punishment required for unholiness teaches us to earnestly \_\_\_\_\_ a holy life.

Many of the laws God sets forth in Leviticus call for the \_\_\_\_\_ penalty if disobeyed. God does not want His people to be like the surrounding nations. It was more important for His people to be holy than to be \_\_\_\_\_. Do not simply pray, "God give me a long life"; pray instead, "God, give me a good life; a life that \_\_\_\_\_." (Dever, 119)

4. It matters MUCH to God how we \_\_\_\_\_ Him.

4.1 The beginning of the priestly ministry of Aaron displays the pleasure of God when we approach him as he \_\_\_\_\_.

In chapter 8, Aaron is set apart as a priest. In chapter 9 he performs his first sacrifices . . .

Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he came down from offering the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. 23 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. 24 And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces. (9:22-24)

4.2 The beginning of the priestly ministry of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu displays the holy \_\_\_\_\_ of God when we \_\_\_\_\_ to approach him as he commands.

10:1-3

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them. 2 And fire came out from before the Lord and \_\_\_\_\_ them, and they died before the Lord. 3 Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord has said: 'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.'" And Aaron held his peace.

4.3 God's explicit instructions are not suggestions. When you stand before people representing God, how you approach God is \_\_\_\_\_ serious.

This reality should impact the way we as a church gather for public worship. Remember what Peter wrote:

1 Peter 2:9-12

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

11 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

4.4 God intends for His whole \_\_\_\_\_ to be distinct. Chapter 24 tells of the swift judgment of God against a member of the tribe of Dan who does not give God proper respect.

24:10-23

Now an Israelite woman's son, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the people of Israel. And [he] and a man of Israel fought in the camp, 11 and the Israelite woman's son blasphemed the Name, and cursed. Then they brought him to Moses. His mother . . . was . . . of the tribe of Dan. 12 And they put him in custody, till the will of the Lord should be clear to them.

13 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 14 "Bring out of the camp the one who cursed, and let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him. 15 And speak to the people of Israel, saying, Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. 16 Whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death. . . .

22 You shall have the same rule for the sojourner and for the native, for I am the Lord your God." 23 So Moses spoke to the people of Israel, and they brought out of the camp the one who had cursed and stoned him with stones. Thus the people of Israel did as the Lord commanded Moses.

5. Clean and Unclean.

"You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean," (10:10; 11:47; 15:31; 18:3, 24-28, 30; 19:19; 20:23-26)

5.1 Some kinds of food were unclean. But the normal state of most things in life would be clean. Through

certain actions or associations these clean things could become “unclean.” Yet being unclean was generally not an irredeemable state. Most unclean things could be cleansed and brought back into a state of being clean. Uncleanness was not inherently wrongness. It is not necessarily a right vs. wrong or good vs. bad distinction, although committing sin would certainly make you unclean. Nevertheless, a perfectly acceptable activity could make you “unclean,” such as childbirth or preparing a body for burial.

What was bad and wrong was for the “unclean” to come into contact with the “holy.” Unclean people must not touch or eat that which is holy (7:20-21). Some things should never meet; for example wires attached to positive and negative battery terminals. When they do, sparks fly. Thus, unclean things were to be outside the camp because in the middle of the camp was the tabernacle of the Lord.” (Dever, 115-116)

5.2 The basic idea that everything is divided between clean and unclean as well as holy and common runs throughout the Law in Leviticus. Why did it work this way? Two observations:

5.2.1 It shows God is indifferent about \_\_\_\_\_. All of life matters to God. So everything in ancient Israel—absolutely everything—was either holy or common. In this, God taught the Israelites that life involves making distinctions, and they should never assume that something is morally neutral. Everyday matters have eternal importance.

5.2.2 It reiterated the care God has about how He is \_\_\_\_\_. He refused to allow His people to worship him in the way the surrounding nations worshiped their false gods. In the ancient near east, fertility rites, cult prostitution, and child sacrifice played a prominent role in worship. So as you read through Leviticus, you find that anything having to do with sexuality, birth, or human death makes a person unclean (e.g., 15:16-33; 22:4). And unclean people could not be touched. They had to remain separate.

6. Ignorance is no \_\_\_\_\_: unintentional sins matter.

“If anyone sins, doing any of the things that by the Lord’s commandments ought not to be done, though he did not know it, then realizes his guilt, he shall \_\_\_\_\_. 18 He shall bring to the priest a ram without blemish out of the flock, or its equivalent for a guilt offering, and the priest shall make atonement for him for the mistake that he made unintentionally, and he shall be forgiven. 19 It is a guilt offering; he has indeed incurred guilt before the Lord.” (5:17-19)

See also 4:2, 13-14, 22-23, 27-28; 5:2-4, 15, 17-18.

6.1 Many people simply assume that, by definition, there is no such thing as an unintentional sin. After all, sin is about the intentions of the heart, right? Well, it certainly is true that our intentions are crucial, and they can be sinful. You can appear righteous and not be righteous. But sin is more than just that.

6.2 This category of sin is important to recognize because it shows that sin is not fundamentally subjective. Sin is not, at root, something you do against \_\_\_\_\_ conscience, your own nature, or what you perceive to be right. Sin is fundamentally objective. It is something you do against God’s laws. Therefore, ignorance is no excuse.

6.3 This realization provides great motivation to get \_\_\_\_\_.

If it is true that God is holy and that we will one day give an account to this all-holy, all-knowing God, then we need to know how we have offended Him. We cannot lazily rely on a casual inspection of our own heart’s motives; instead, we must search \_\_\_\_\_ and know His will. (Dever, 118-119)