

Law of liberty, legitimate fire or, Are we only consumers, or wholly consumed?

... what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God.

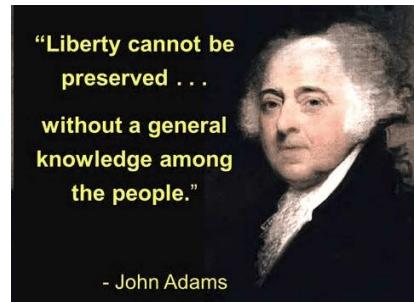
— I CORINTHIANS 10:20

Overview

Leviticus begins with a nation formerly enslaved to Pharaoh brought into covenant dependence upon their new King. A King who has the Creator's right to rule, and the Redeemer's right to the gratitude and loyalty of the redeemed. Leviticus begins, therefore, with a nation saved & set apart to serve. A *nation of priests and a holy nation* must first learn the laws of their new Master. Leviticus is the central book of the Pentateuch, the constitution, as it were, of the only nation ever founded by God -- the God who serves. Leviticus is the 'declaration of dependence' of a truly free people, a people for special possession, set apart to bless every family on earth.

Structure

Leviticus 1-7	Laws pertaining to offerings, sacrifices
Leviticus 8-10	Priestly service and worship
Leviticus 11-15	Purity in everyday life; the principle of contagion – the peril of pollution – in worship & walk
Leviticus 16-17	The day of atonement & legitimate worship, in space & time
Leviticus 18-20	Love of God & love of neighbour in the beauty of holiness



Leviticus 21-25	The special holiness of the priestly service & the holy feasts, culminating in the great Jubilee
Leviticus 26	The blessings of obedience, the curses for disobedience.
Leviticus 27	Epilogue: The seriousness of vows

Theme

Salvation, for Israel and so for us, is not about our getting into the promised land. It is about God getting into us. It is about living in freedom in the realm of our new King – *for the land is mine ... you must be holy because I am holy*. Not, we note, because you must be holy to be saved. Christ's holiness saves believers. We must be holy because HE is holy. We are created to image Him. If that will not move us, then no threat of hell, no promise of heaven, will.

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Introduction

Why is Leviticus so difficult – even boring – for Christians?

Leviticus used to be the first book that Jewish children studied in the synagogue. In the modern church it tends to be the last part of the Bible that anyone looks at seriously. ... Leviticus is largely concerned with subjects that seem incomprehensible and irrelevant to contemporary man. Rituals for sacrifice and regulations concerning uncleanness appear to have nothing to say to men living in the closing years of the 20th century. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18) is the only memorable maxim in what is to many an otherwise dull book. In practice then, though not of course in theory, Leviticus is treated as though it does not really belong to the canon of sacred Scripture. [Gordon J. Wenham *The Book of Leviticus* vii]

Perhaps no book in the Bible presents to the ordinary reader so many and peculiar difficulties as the book of Leviticus. Even of those who devoutly believe, as they were taught in their childhood, that, like all the other books contained in the Holy Scriptures, it is to be received throughout with unquestioning faith as the very Word of God, a large number will frankly own in a discouraged way that this is with them merely a matter of belief, which their personal experience in reading the book has for the most part failed to sustain; and that for them so to see through symbol and ritual as to get much spiritual profit from such reading has been quite impossible. [Samuel H. Kellogg *Leviticus* 3]



ANDREW BONAR

'No book ... contains more of the very words of God'

to-day, undiminished in strength, and immeasurably higher than all earthly knowledge. Even if in many Biblical questions I have to oppose the traditional opinion, certainly my opposition rests on this side of the gulf, on the side of the theology of the Cross, of grace, of miracles! ... By this banner let us stand; folding ourselves in it, let us die!" To which truly noble words every true Christian may well say, Amen! We then stand without fear with Jesus Christ in our view of the origin and authority of the book of Leviticus. [Kellogg 17; Delitzsch ref. from *The Expositor*, Jan. 1889, pp 54-55]

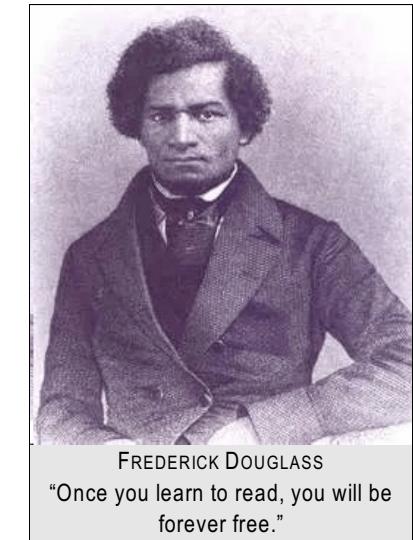
There is no book, in the whole compass of that inspired Volume which the Holy Ghost has given us, that contains more of the very words of God than Leviticus. It is

God that is the direct speaker in almost every page; his gracious words are recorded in the form wherein they were uttered. This consideration cannot fail to send us to the study of it with singular interest and attention. [Andrew Bonar *Leviticus* 1]

If it be asked why a typical mode of shewing forth truth was adopted to such an extent in those early days, it may be difficult to give a precise answer. It is plain, such a method of instruction may answer many purposes. It may not only meet the end of simplifying the truth, it may also open the mind to comprehend more, while it deepens present impressions of things known. The existence of a type does not always argue that the thing typified is obscurely seen, or imperfectly known. On the contrary, there was a type in the garden of Eden – the tree of life – while life, in all its meaning, was fully comprehended by Adam. In all probability, there will be typical objects in the millennial age; for there is to be a river which shall flow from Jerusalem to water the valley of Shittim (Joel iii. 18), the same of which Ezekiel (xlvi. 1) and Zechariah (xiv. 8) speak. [Bonar 3]

The Types are, in fact, a set of pictures or emblems, directly from the hand of God, by which He would teach His children things otherwise all but incomprehensible.

In the Types, if I may be allowed the expression, God takes His Son to pieces. By them does He bring within the range of our capacity definite views of the details of Christ's work, which perhaps but for these pictures we should never fully, or at least so fully, apprehend. [Andrew Jukes *The Law of the Offerings* 5]



FREDERICK DOUGLASS

"Once you learn to read, you will be forever free."

The original purpose of Leviticus

The Hebrew name for the book, as usual, corresponds to its first Hebrew word, vajikra, meaning he called. [Alfred Edersheim *Bible History* ii 138]

What now was the purpose of Leviticus? In general, as regards Israel, it was given to direct them how they might live as a holy nation in fellowship with God. The key-note of the book is "Holiness to Jehovah." More particularly, the object of the book was to furnish for the theocracy set up in Israel a code of law which should secure their physical, moral, and spiritual well-being. But the establishment of the theocracy in Israel was itself only a means to an end; namely, to make Israel a blessing to all nations, in mediating to the Gentiles the redemption of God. Hence, the Levitical laws were all intended and adapted to train and prepare the nation for this special historic mission to which God had chosen them. To this end, it was absolutely necessary, first of all, that Israel should be kept separate from the heathen nations. To effect and maintain this separation, these laws of Leviticus were admirably adapted. They are of such a character, that obedience to them, even in a very

imperfect way, has made the nation to this day to be, in a manner and degree perfectly unique, isolated and separate from all the peoples in the midst of whom they dwell. [Kellogg 20]

But as the nation of Israel was separated from God, the Holy One, by the sin and unholiness of its nature, the only way in which God could render access to His gracious presence possible, was by institutions and legal regulations, which served on the one hand to sharpen the consciousness of sin in the hearts of the people, and thereby to awaken the desire for mercy and for reconciliation with the holy God, and on the other hand furnished them with the means of expiating their sins and sanctifying their walk before God according to the standard of His holy commandments. All the laws and regulations of

Leviticus have this for their object, inasmuch as they, each and all, aim quite as much at the restoration of an inward fellowship on the part of the nation as a whole and the individual members with Jehovah their God, through the expiation or forgiveness of sin and the removal of all natural uncleanness, as at the strengthening and deepening of this fellowship by the sanctification of every relation of life. [C. F. Keil *The Third Book of Moses* ii 262]

Israel's liberty could be known and enjoyed only in fellowship with God, and Leviticus reveals the ground, the condition, and the product of this fellowship. Spiritually this is one of the richest books in all the Bible, and to know it mentally and experimentally is a liberal education in divinity. [W. Graham Scroggie *The Unfolding Drama of Redemption* i 175]

But why should Jews & Christians today care about Leviticus?

For Judaism the destruction of the temple which brought to an end the worship of the second temple was understood as a punishment of God. The cultic imperatives of sacrifice have been fulfilled in the study of Torah ... but the hope of the restoration of the original cult continues to constitute the future hope of Judaism ... [Brevard S. Childs *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* 188]

The scene of Leviticus and Numbers 1-10 is Mount Sinai, and the content of these opening chapters is as daunting as their setting. Yet their unremitting thoroughness gives its own witness to the complete seriousness with which God takes His covenant with His people: it is no casual or arm's-length relationship, but one which must shape and colour every inch and minute of life, to train up a people whose forms of worship, structures of society and minutest details of behaviour will reflect the holiness of God. Without these chapters we should have had little if any idea of the many facets of sacrifice to the NT makes reference; the high and fearful demands of the priesthood; the meaning of the rent veil of the Temple and the bearing away of sin



BREVARD CHILDS

Christians may spiritualize Leviticus, but Jews hope for "restoration of the original cult"

which the great Day of Atonement expounded in advance; nor should we have heard the 2nd of the great commandments, '... love your neighbour as yourself', nor understood the meaning of Jubilee ... [Derek Kidner *Leviticus DBC* i 106]

Witsius (*De Mysterio Tab.*) has remarked, that God took only six days to creation, but spent forty days with Moses in directing him to make the tabernacle – because the work of grace is more glorious than the work of creation. And so we find the law from Sinai occupying three days at most, while these rules that exhibited the love and grace of God are spread over many weeks. [Bonar 9]

In considering the Jewish sacrificial system, it is important to distinguish the symbolical from the typical value of the sacrifices. The former could scarcely be quite unnoticed by the offerers; but the latter was only gradually made plain, was probably never very generally seen, and is a great deal clearer to us, in the light of Christ, the Antitype, than it could ever have been before His coming. As symbols, the sacrifices expressed great eternal truths as to spiritual worship and communion, its hindrances, requisites, manner, and blessings. They were God's picture-book for these children in religious development. As types, they shadowed the work of Jesus Christ and its results. The value of the sacrifices in either aspect is independent of modern questions as to their Mosaic origin; for at whatever period the Priest's Code was promulgated, it equally bears witness to the ruling ideas of the offerings, and, in any case, it was long before Christ came, and therefore its prophecy of Him is as supernatural, whether Moses or Ezra were its author. I make this remark, not as implying that the new theory is not revolutionary, but simply as absolving a student of the religious significance of the sacrificial system from entering here on questions of date. [Alexander Maclaren *Expositions* ii 233-234]

Sin is unlikeness to God. That is taught in Leviticus by all the economy of worship, which insists first of all upon the fact that God may only be thought of as distanced from man. While we have already declared that the supreme teaching of Leviticus is that of God's determination to bring man near to Himself, it is perfectly evident that such determination is in itself an evidence of existing distance. The ceremony which commenced with the erection of the tabernacle, and continued through all the ritual, is one that emphasizes the fact that God is unlike man. God is thought of as within the holy of holies, protected from the approach of man by veils, and by laws so stringent, that any violation of them has the death penalty attached to it. Man is thus excluded from God, because of the dissimilarity in character between them. Man made in the image and the likeness of God is a being on whom the image is defaced, and in whom the likeness is unrecognizable. [G. Campbell Morgan *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible* 57]

The soul brought into fellowship with God can maintain the continuance of that fellowship only by means of regular approach to God, and this fact gives Leviticus its vital importance in the plan of Redemption. The keynote of the book is "Holiness", in its primary meaning of Separation, which includes separation from evil and separation to God. [W. H. Griffith Thomas *Through the Pentateuch Chapter by Chapter* 108]

The real secret of the neglect of the Types, I cannot but think may in part be traced to this – that they require more spiritual intelligence than many Christians can bring to them. To apprehend them requires a certain measure of spiritual capacity and habitual exercise in the things of God, which all do not possess, for want of abiding

fellowship with Jesus. The mere superficial glance upon the Word in these parts brings no corresponding idea to the mind of the reader. The types are, indeed, pictures, but to understand the picture it is necessary we should know something of the reality. [Jukes 6]

The severity of many of the laws is also instructive in this connection. The trend of public opinion in many communities is against capital punishment, as barbarous and inhuman. We are startled to observe the place which this has in the Levitical law; which exhibits a severity far removed indeed from the unrighteous and undiscriminating severity of the earlier English law, but no less so from the more undiscriminating leniency which has taken its place, especially as regards those crimes in which large numbers of people are inclined to indulge. No less instructive to modern law-makers and political economists is the bearing of the Levitical legislation on the social question, the relations of rich and poor, of employer and employed. It is a legislation which, with admirable impartiality, keeps the poor man and the rich man equally in view; a body of law which, if strictly carried out, would have made in Israel either a plutocracy or a proletariat alike impossible. All these things will be illustrated in the course of exposition. Enough has been said to show that those among us who are sorely perplexed as to what government should do, at what it should aim in these matters, may gain help by studying the mind of Divine wisdom concerning these questions, as set forth in the theocratic law of Leviticus. [Kellogg 25-27]

Analysis

A. (1:1-17; 6:8-13) 7 chapters, 5 offerings – why would the (whole) burnt offering be the first of the five?

... first note the setting, a characteristic OT blend of grace and judgement. Israel, liberated and brought into covenant, is encamped at Sinai, and the glory of the Lord has sealed a great enterprise of erecting the 'tent of meeting' ... where God will have fellowship with man. Yet this very glory has kept Moses at a distance (Ex 40:35), and Leviticus will constantly bear witness to God's overwhelming holiness. [Kidner 108] R.K. Harrison sees the ritual of Leviticus as a necessary tool to regulate and unify the religious life as well as the community of Israel. *Be holy as I am holy*, Harrison suggests, became the "motto of Israel's national life". [See Harrison 30-31]

Edersheim points out that the consecration of Israel is the converse, or opposite, of the setting apart of Israel by God. In other words, the appropriate human response to God's action of separation is our commitment to sanctification. [see Edersheim *Bible History* Vol 2 138]

In Hebrew, *olah*, "that which goes up"; LXX, "holocaust". [Victor Hamilton *Handbook on the Pentateuch* 247]

By its name (lit., 'that which ascends') and by its ritual the burnt offering showed its Godward emphasis. It was the only sacrifice, among the 5 types in chs. 1-5, which provided no food for either priest or worshipper. So the crown rights of God and the joy of giving away were established at the outset, while the gradation of values, from the bull down to a pair of pigeons, allowed everyone the opportunity to bring some gift. Each was of equal fragrance (9,13,17), when offered from the heart (Ps. 51:17,19); each on any other terms was an affront (Ps. 51:16; 50:9ff). [Kidner 108]

The Burnt-offering, which comes first, was wholly consumed on the altar, and this suggests entire consecration. The offering implying consecration is put first, instead of that which meant expiation, because the offerings were for Israel as God's people, already in covenant with Him on the basis of the redemption sacrifice of the Passover. [W. H. Griffith Thomas *Through the Pentateuch Chapter by Chapter* 111]

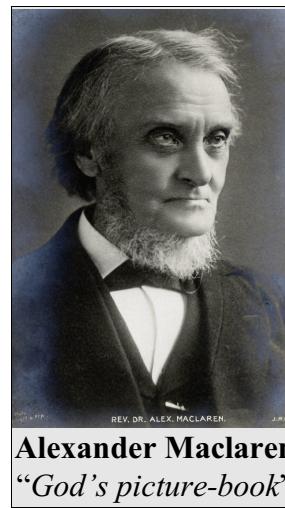
The burnt offering stands first in Leviticus for several reasons. It was derived from patriarchal times; it was offered twice daily, besides frequently on other occasions; and in its significance it expressed the complete consecration which should be the habitual state of the true worshipper. Its name literally means that which ascends,¹ and refers, no doubt, to the ascent of the transformed substance of the sacrifice in fire and smoke, as to God. The central idea of this sacrifice, then, as gathered from its name and confirmed by its manner, is that of the yielding of the whole being in self-surrender, and borne up by the flame of intense consecration to God. Very beautiful is the variety of material which was permitted. The poor man's pair of pigeons went up with as sweet an odour as the rich man's young bull. God delights in the consecration to Him of ourselves and our powers, no matter whether they be great or small, if only the consecration be thorough, and the whole being be wrapped in the transforming blaze. [Maclaren ii 234]

(v 3) What is the sinner's part in the burnt offering, and what is the priest's?

It is interesting to notice here, that Outram, Witsius, and, others, seem to have proved that, in patriarchal ages, every man might offer his own sacrifice. Heads of families, and heads of a tribe or nation, often acted for those under them; but the idea that the first-born were the only priests is without foundation. The patriarchal age was taught that every man must take Christ for himself personally. In the Mosaic economy, however, this is altered. [Bonar 15]

It was not enough that an Israelite should have the prescribed victim; it is not enough that we present the Christ of God in faith, or what we think to be faith. But we must make no terms or conditions as to the mode or condition of the presentation, other than God appoints. And the command was also a command of publicity. The Israelite was therein commanded to confess publicly, and thus attest, his faith in Jehovah, even as God will now have us all make our confession of Christ a public thing. [Kellogg 40]

In the overfed West we can easily fail to realize what was involved in offering an unblemished animal in sacrifice. Meat was a rare luxury in OT times for all but the very rich (cf. Nathan's parable, 2 Sam. 12:1-6). Yet even we might blanch if we saw a whole lamb or bull go up in smoke as a burnt offering. How much greater pangs must a poor Israelite have felt. [Wenham 51]



[1:5] Yet sacrifice was harsh and violent, and the offerer was to know it, his own hand pressed on the creature's head (v 4 ...), his own act doing it to death. And his part in the proceedings, while it emphasized his personal responsibility, could not be construed as achieving his acceptance. True, the victim was his gift, but its atoning value (4) was God's gift (see 17:11), while his own role was mere butchery (5,6; to kill, flay and cut up). It was the priest's part to give it the form of a sacrifice, bringing it to God. [Kidner 108]

He did not wish to make them go in pursuit of beasts for offering, for salvation is brought to our hand by our God. [Bonar 12]

The first two [vital features] were the work of the offerer, the third that of the priest, and the fourth that of the fire, representing the action of God. [Thomas 111]

(v 10) How does the burnt offering differ from other offerings and sacrifices?

Harrison [43] suggests that while the insistence on a male animal may reflect the superiority of the male in patriarchal society, it may also reflect the plain and pragmatic reality that the male was more expendable in an agricultural milieu.

The first law, which applies to bloody offerings in general, was this: that the victim shall be "of the cattle, even of the herd and of the flock" (ver. 2); to which is added, in the latter part of the chapter (ver. 14), the turtle-dove or young pigeon. The carnivora are all excluded; for these, which live by the death of others, could never typify Him who should come to give life. And among others, only clean beasts could be taken. Israel must not offer as "the food of God" that which they might not eat for their own food; nor could that which was held unclean be taken as a type of the Holy Victim of the future. And, even among clean animals, a further selection is made. Only domestic animals were allowed; not even a clean animal was permitted, if it were taken in hunting. For it was fitting that one should offer to God that which had become endeared to the owner as having cost the most of care and labour in its bringing up. For this, also, we can easily see another reason in the Antitype. Nothing was to mark Him more than this: that He should be subject and obey, and that not of constraint, as the unwilling captive of the chase, but freely and unresistingly. [Kellogg 37]

[1:15] But this arrangement is the better fitted to exhibit another feature in the death of Jesus, viz. the awful violence done to one so pure, so tender, and so lovely. We shrink back from the terrible harshness of the act, whether it be plunging the knife into the neck of the innocent lamb, or wringing off the head of the tender dove. But, on this very account, the circumstances are the better figure of the death of Jesus. "He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth; yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him." [Bonar 27]

It is worthwhile to try to realise the strange and to our eyes repulsive spectacle of the burnt offering, which is veiled from us by its sacred associations. The worshipper leads up his animal by some rude halter, and possibly resisting, to the front of the Tabernacle, the courts of which he dared not tread, but which was to him the dwelling-place of God. There by the altar he stands, and, first pressing his hand with force on the victim's head, he then, with one swift cut, kills it, and as the warm blood spouts from the mangled throat, the attendant priest catches it in a basin, and,

standing at the two diagonally opposite corners of the altar in turn, dashes, with one dexterous twist, half of the contents against each, so as to wet two sides of the altar with one throw, and the other two with the other. The offerer then flays the reeking carcase, tossing the gory hide to the priest as his perquisite, and cuts up the sacrifice according to a fixed method. His part of the work is done, and he stands by with bloody hands while the priests arrange the pieces on the pile on the altar; and soon the odour of burning flesh and the thick smoke hanging over the altar tell that the rite is complete. What a scene it must have been when, as on some great occasions, hundreds of burnt offerings were offered in succession! The place and the attendants would look to us like shambles and butchers than God's house and worshippers. Now, if we inquire into the significance of the offering, it turns on two points – expiation and burning. The former it has in common with other bloody sacrifices, though it presents features of its own, even in regard to expiation. But the latter is peculiar to it, and must therefore be taken to be its special teaching. The stages in the whole process are five: the presentation, laying on of hands, slaughter, sprinkling of blood, and burning of the whole carcase. The first three are alike in this and other sacrifices, the fourth is modified here, and the last is found here only. Each has its lesson. The offerer has himself to bring the animal to the door of the Tabernacle, that he may show his willing surrender of a valuable thing. As he stands there with his offering, his thoughts would pass into the inner shrine, where God dwelt; and he would, if he were a true worshipper, feel that while God, on His part, already dwelt in the midst of the people, he, on the other hand, can only enter into the enjoyment of His presence by sacrifice. The offering was to be a male without blemish; for bodily defect symbolising moral flaw could not be tolerated in the offerings to a holy God, who requires purity, and will not be put off with less than a man's best, be it ox or pigeon. 'The torn and the lame and the sick,' which Malachi charged his generation with bringing, are neither worthy of God to receive nor of us to offer. When he pressed his hand on the head of the sacrifice, what was the worshipper meant to think? In all other instances where hands are laid on, some transference or communication of gifts or qualities is implied; and it is natural to suppose that the same meaning attaches to the act here, with such modifications as the case requires. We find that it was done in other bloody sacrifices, accompanied with confession. Nothing is said of confession here; but we cannot dismiss the idea that the offerer laid his sins on the victim by that striking act, especially as the very next clause says 'it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.' The atonement was made, as we shall see, by the application of the blood to the altar; but the possibility of the victim's blood atoning for the offerer depended on his having laid his hands on its head. We may perhaps go farther than 'transference of sins.' Might we not widen the expression, and say 'identification,' or, to use a word which has become so worn by religious controversy that it slips through our fingers unnoticed, 'substitution'? Did not the offerer say in effect, by that act, 'This is I? This animal life shall die, as I ought to die. It shall go up as a sweet savour to Jehovah, as my being should.' [Maclareni 234-237]