

Continued notes on Leviticus from Rev Ian Macnair

INTRODUCTORY NOTES FROM THE NKJV STUDY BIBLE

The Third Book of Moses Called Leviticus

God's concern for His people and His desire for fellowship with them becomes more and more clear to anyone who reads carefully through the Book of Leviticus. Every detailed regulation recorded in Leviticus is a revelation *from God through Moses for His people*. With these laws, God personally instructed the Israelites how to live before Him.

Christian readers sometimes get lost in all the regulations governing various types of sacrifices, what was clean or unclean, who was eligible to be a priest, and so on. However, when these details are placed within the context of God's desire to have fellowship with the Israelites and live with them, the seemingly "dead" Law takes on a new life.

Name

The name of the book is derived from the name of the tribe of Levi, the tribe that supplied the priests for Israel. Leviticus addresses many of the activities of the priests. It gives extensive instructions for the sacrificial system that atoned for both ceremonial and moral impurity. Yet Leviticus is not merely a manual for priests. It was intended for the entire Israelite community, with at least two purposes: (1) that people would know and value their privileges and responsibilities before God; and (2) that priests could not gain oppressive power over the people with any monopoly on the knowledge of how to approach God.

Author and Date

Jewish and Christian tradition has regarded Moses as the author of Leviticus. After delivering Israel out of Egypt, God revealed His covenant to Moses at Mount Sinai. When God entered into a covenant with the Israelites, He transformed them from a band of refugee slaves into a nation. Leviticus records a large part of that covenant.

If Moses or a scribe acting as his secretary wrote down the revelation as God gave it, Leviticus was composed shortly after 1440 B.C. or shortly after 1290 B.C., depending on the date assigned to the Exodus.

Critical biblical scholarship of the late nineteenth century challenged the traditional dating and authorship of Leviticus. According to that scholarship, which is still influential today, Leviticus was written much later, during the postexilic period. This would be a date after 530 B.C. During the past century, however, our understanding of the history, languages, cultures, and religions of the ancient Middle East including Israel has advanced greatly. Many of the premises on which the late dating of Leviticus was based have been shown to be unreliable.

Although Leviticus does not itself claim to be written by Moses, twenty of the twenty-seven chapters begin, “And the Lord spoke to Moses,” or a variation of that statement. The phrase occurs 14 other places in the book as well. The intent is that this is the word of God given through Moses at Mount Sinai. As with the rest of the Pentateuch, later editorial activity may have occurred. The material could have been arranged by someone other than Moses, though Moses certainly was as capable of its arrangement as anyone. The important point is that Leviticus is what it says it is, a series of revelations from God about how God’s people may approach Him through sacrifice and honour Him in holy living.

c. 1730 B.C.	The Israelites are enslaved in Egypt
c. 1527 B.C.	Moses is born
c. 1446 B.C.	The Israelites escape from Egypt
c. 1445 B.C.	God gives the laws of Leviticus
c. 1406 B.C.	40 years of wilderness wandering end
c. 1405 B.C.	The conquest of Canaan begins

Purpose

The purpose of Leviticus was to show the Israelites how they could live in ritual and moral purity. When they maintained their purity, God could live among them and they could approach Him in worship. Many of the required sacrifices described in Leviticus were for the atonement of sins. On the other hand, the voluntary sacrifices brought the people to fellowship and feast with God, their family, and others.

The instructions in Leviticus were not given to the Israelites in order to help them achieve their own salvation. Salvation can never be earned. It is always a gift of God’s grace appropriated by faith. These instructions were given to a redeemed nation so that its members would know how to maintain their fellowship with God.

The distinctions between clean and unclean and the various laws for holy living promoted the Israelites’ own welfare and marked them out as a people separated to God. Israel’s witness to God’s holiness and their visible well-being as a result of holy living before Him would vividly demonstrate to their neighbours God’s power and His care for His people. The directive found first in 11:44 and many times afterward clearly expresses this purpose for the laws: “You shall be holy; for I am holy.”

Modern Christians can learn much from Leviticus. The holiness of God, the necessity of holy living, the great cost of atonement and forgiveness, the privilege and responsibility of presenting only our best to God, the generosity of God that enables His people to be generous—these are only some of the lessons. Leviticus reveals the holiness of God and His love for His people in ways found nowhere else in the Bible. Ultimately, Leviticus calls God’s people of all ages to the great adventure of patterning life after God’s holy purposes.

Christ in the Scriptures

Leviticus is replete with types and allusions to the person and work of Jesus Christ. The five offerings described in chapters 1–7 all point to Christ. The burnt offering typifies Christ's total offering in submission to His Father's will. The grain offering typifies Christ's sinless service. The peace offering alludes to the fellowship that believers have with God through the work of the Cross. The sin offering typifies Christ as our guilt-bearer. The trespass offering pictures Christ's payment for the damage of sin.

Leviticus points vividly to Jesus. He alone is the spotless Lamb who can make an eternal and final payment for sin. He alone is the perfect High Priest who can represent human rebels before the holy Judge of the universe.

Leviticus Outline

1. The system of sacrifices 1:1–7:38

- A. The burnt offering 1:1–17
- B. The grain offering 2:1–16
- C. The peace offering 3:1–17
- D. The sin offering 4:1–5:13
- E. The trespass or reparation offering 5:14–6:7
- F. Instructions about offerings 6:8–7:38

2. Ordination of priests 8:1–10:20

- A. Ordination of Aaron as high priest and his sons as priests 8:1–36
- B. First sacrifices of the newly ordained priests 9:1–24
- C. The sin of Nadab and Abihu and consequent regulations for the priests 10:1–20

3. Laws concerning what is clean or unclean 11:1–15:33

- A. Clean and unclean animals 11:1–47
- B. Purification following childbirth 12:1–8
- C. Uncleaness from skin diseases and uncleaness in garments 13:1–59
- D. Purification following skin diseases and purification of dwellings 14:1–57

E. Uncleanliness from bodily discharges 15:1–33

4. The Day of Atonement: purification from moral uncleanness 16:1–34

5. The Holiness Code: laws for holy living 17:1–26:46

A. Killing animals for food 17:1–16

B. Purity in sexual relations and various life situations 18:1–19:37

C. Penalties for violations 20:1–27

D. Purity and wholeness in the lives of the priests and in sacrificial animals 21:1–22:33

E. The seven holy convocations 23:1–44

F. Pure oil and holy bread 24:1–9

G. Punishment for blasphemy 24:10–23

H. The Sabbath year, the Year of Jubilee, and redemption 25:1–55

I. Blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience 26:1–46

6. Appendix: The redemption of gifts and tithes 27:1–34