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Lesson 1

Survey of Leviticus

Many of God's people avoid studying certain books of the Bible just as children turn down certain foods (e.g., the proverbial spinach) because they have not developed their tastes or appreciated the nourishing values of the victuals. Leviticus is one of the neglected books of the Bible for several reasons: (1) it appears dull because of its lack of action and plot (chap. 10 is a notable exception); (2) it appears heavy with hundreds of rules, regulations, and much repetition; and (3) many of its symbols appear difficult to interpret and apply.

But Leviticus is a most important book and should be studied. As a part of God's inspired Scriptures, it is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17, *New American Standard Bible*). What does Leviticus say that makes it profitable to man today?

1. It teaches basic truths about God and man.
2. It emphasizes the exceeding sinfulness of man and his estrangement from God.
3. By prefiguring the redemptive ministry of Christ it shows how man may be restored to God's fellowship.
4. Through the universal, timeless principles derived from its laws, the Christian may learn how to please God in his daily living.

For many reasons Leviticus is often considered the "gospel" of the Old Testament; it can be profitably studied in that light. After you have completed your study of this third book of the Scriptures you will agree that it holds a unique and important position in God's Word.

Our procedure of study in this lesson is first to acquaint ourselves with the background of the writing of Leviticus and then to get a view of the book as a whole.

I. THE BACKGROUND OF LEVITICUS

A. Name

It was the custom of the Jews to call each book of the Pentateuch by the first word of the Hebrew text. For Leviticus this was *wayyiqra*, meaning “and he called.” The Greek Septuagint version, which was the first translation of the Old Testament, assigned the title *Leuitikon*, meaning “that which pertains to the Levites.” The reason for such a title is obvious: much of the book concerns the ministry of the Levites or the priests, an important segment of the tribe of Levi (cf. Heb. 7:11). The Greek title was carried over into the Latin Vulgate as *Leviticus* and then adopted by the English Bible.

B. Author

The traditional view is that Moses was the author of this third part of the Pentateuch as well as the remainder of the Pentateuch. The internal and external evidence supporting this argument is overwhelmingly conclusive.

Christ explicitly ascribes the Pentateuch to Moses in Luke 24:44. In this passage Christ speaks of the three parts into which the Jews divided the Old Testament: “the law,” “the prophets,” and “the psalms,” and clearly states that the law was of *Moses*. See also how Christ referred to Moses as the writer of Leviticus by comparing Matthew 8:2-4 with Leviticus 14:1-4. Fifty-six times in Leviticus it is explicitly stated that the Lord gave the laws to His people through Moses. That Moses wrote the instructions in a book is stated in Ezra 6:18.

C. Date

The passages in Exodus 40:17; Leviticus 1:1 and Numbers 1:1 are the basis for the following time setting of Leviticus.

God spoke the words of Leviticus during the first month of the second year after the Exodus. Just when Moses wrote down the words we cannot be sure, but he may have done so before the wilderness journey of Numbers began, around the middle of the fifteenth century B.C. (based on the 1445 B.C. date for the exodus from Egypt).

EXODUS FROM EGYPT	COMMANDMENTS GIVEN at SINAI	TABERNACLE (portable) CONSTRUCTED	LEVITICAL LAWS GIVEN	PREPARATION for WILDERNESS JOURNEY
Exodus 12:41	Exodus 19:1	Exodus 40:17	———	Numbers 1:1
Beginning of the new calendar	First year; Third month	Second year; First month; First day	Second year; First month	Second year; Second month; First day

D. Theme

The theme of Leviticus becomes clearer on comparing its contribution to the Pentateuch with that of the other four books. Notice the following comparisons:

GENESIS	EXODUS	LEVITICUS	NUMBERS	DEUTERONOMY
ORIGINS of the nation	DELIVERANCE of the nation	LIFE of the nation	TEST of the nation	REMINDERS to the nation
THEOCRACY BORN	THEOCRACY ESTABLISHED		THEOCRACY TESTED AND PREPARED FOR THE NEW HOME	
	<p><u>COVENANT</u> IS AMPLIFIED "Keep my covenant" to be a "peculiar treasure" "kingdom of priests" "holy nation" (Ex. 19:5-6)</p>			
	<p><u>LAWS</u> ARE PRESCRIBED "which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the Lord" (Lev. 18:5)</p>			

Leviticus has a twofold theme, the way of God and the walk He demands. In the sense in which worship is both communion and dynamic living, Leviticus may thus be called the "Book of Worship."

II. A SURVEY OF LEVITICUS

A. The Structure of Leviticus

Before we look at the smaller sections of Leviticus, it is desirable to get a “skyscraper view” of the book. The following suggestions will guide you in such a study.

1. First scan the entire book, not lingering on details. As you read, jot down on a piece of paper a word or phrase that suggests the main contents of each chapter. Treat each chapter as a unit with these exceptions: let a new segment begin at 5:14 instead of at 5:1, and at 6:8 instead of at 6:1, and overlook the division at 7:1. Record these chapter titles on a horizontal chart like this:

A horizontal chart for recording chapter titles, consisting of a parallelogram divided into 27 diagonal slots. The slots are numbered 1 through 27 along the bottom edge. The numbers are: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5:14, 6:8, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27.

2. What were some of your impressions from this reading?

3. List key words and phrases and truths emphasized.

4. Did you observe any groupings of chapters with similar subject matter? For example, you probably noticed that the first seven chapters contain laws of the five offerings, set off from the next

section by 7:37-38. Indicate your own groupings on the chart you have already begun (above).

5. If Leviticus were divided into two main sections, where would the division be made? Indicate this on your chart.

6. Observe how many chapters begin with "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying":

What do you learn from this?

7. Do any chapters in Leviticus seem to stand by themselves?

Which chapter would you choose as a key chapter?

Why does the subject matter of chapters 26 and 27 cause this portion to be placed at the end of Leviticus?

8. What is the prominent phrase of chapter 19?

9. From your general study of Leviticus, what items do you recall that are meant to be holy, or "clean"?

10. What do you think were some major lessons that God was teaching the Israelites through the laws and regulations of Leviticus?

LEVITICUS "YE SHALL BE HOLY"

CONSECRATION	1	BURNT	LAWS OF OFFERINGS	LAWS OF CONSECRATION OF PRIESTS	LAWS OF PURITY	ATONEMENT	HOLY PEOPLE	HOLY PRIESTS	HOLY TIMES	JUST RECOMPENSE	HOLY VOWS	THE WAY TO GOD	THE WALK WITH GOD	HOLINESS
	2	MEAL												
	3	PEACE												
	4	SIN												
	5-14	TRESPASS												
	6-8	LAWS OF OFFERINGS												
	9	AARON AND SONS ANOINTED												
	10	AARON'S OFFERINGS												
	11	STRANGE FIRE												
	12	EAT . . . TOUCH												
	13	WOMAN CONCEIVE												
	14	TEST OF LEPROSY												
	15	CLEANSING OF LEPROSY												
	16	UNCLEAN ISSUES												
	17	ATONEMENT DAY												
	18	BLOOD SLAUGHTER												
	19	UNCOVERING NAKEDNESS												
	20	"I AM THE LORD"												
	21	MOLECH												
	22	PRIEST RULES												
	23	PROFANE NOT												
	24	HOLY CONVOCATIONS												
	25	CONTINUALLY												
	26	SABBATICAL YEAR AND JUBILEE												
	27	CONSEQUENCES												
		VOWS												
		CONSECRATION												

11. After you have answered the above questions on your own, study the accompanying outline chart of Leviticus.

Note the following:

(a) Leviticus may be divided into two main sections, the division being made at 18:1. Chapters 16 (day of atonement) and 17 (blood of sacrifice) serve as a climax to the first half of the book, showing *the way to God*. Read 18:1-5 and notice how these words introduce a new theme, that of doing and living, or *the walk with God*.
(b) The word “holy” is the key word of Leviticus (Strong’s concordance shows its appearance in 90 places), and this truth is emphasized especially in the last half of the book. Note the outline: holy people, holy priests, holy times, just recompense, holy vows. Study these key verses on holiness: 11:44-45; 19:2 (we may consider this to be a key verse for Leviticus); and 20:7, 26. Compare the truths about holiness taught in Psalms 15:1-2; 24:3-4; Matthew 5:8; 1 John 1:6-7.

c. Observe that Leviticus opens with the exhortation to consecration (freewill offering) and closes on that same note (freewill vows).

B. Underlying Principles and Truths of Leviticus

Throughout your study of the hosts of *details* in Leviticus you will want to identify the underlying root truths in order to make present-day applications. The following list suggest some of the more important principles and root truths:

1. The laws of Leviticus were given because of the immediate need of Israel to know how to worship God and how to live lives acceptable to Him from day to day. The symbols were picture lessons of spiritual truths.

2. Leviticus also had a prophetic purpose, by way of types, speaking of the Person and ministry of Christ. This is the major Christian aspect of the book. When Leviticus was written, what was *type* for future generations was *symbol* for its contemporaries.

3. All the laws and regulations designed by God and delivered from the Tabernacle (1:1) are purposeful.

4. Sinful man is estranged from the holy God.
5. The just penalty for sin is death through the shedding of blood, in which resides the life of the flesh.
6. God in His grace allows death of an *acceptable substitute* as payment for sin's penalty.
7. When man comes into fellowship with the holy God, he must live in the light of this new experience.
8. Offerings to God must be made willingly, in the spirit of obedience to His instructions.
9. God uses His ministers (in Leviticus, the priests) to bring men to Himself.
10. God is interested in the perennial cycle of man's living, illustrated by the divine calendar designed for Israel.

C. Relation of Leviticus to the New Testament

The sacrifices of Leviticus point to the supreme sacrifice of all history, Christ, the Lamb of God. The priests of Leviticus point to the Great High Priest, Jesus. The worshipers in Leviticus foreshadow the Christians of the New Testament. The symbols, types, and shadows found throughout this third book of the Bible find their objects in the New Testament. And of all the New Testament books, the epistle to the Hebrews is the most explanatory. (It would be well to read Hebrews before proceeding any further in the study of Leviticus.)

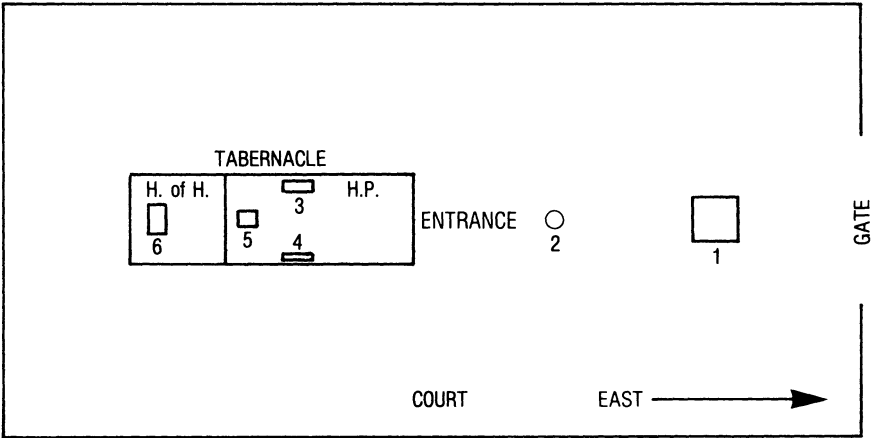
D. The Tabernacle: Scene of the Offerings

Study the layout of the Tabernacle areas shown on pages 11 and 12. It will be a great help if you can visualize the movements of the priests in the Tabernacle area as they performed their functions during the Levitical sacrifices. (For further light on this subject, consult a book on the Tabernacle.)

III. SUMMARY

Leviticus is the record of God's instructions to Israel as to how His people might have access to Him in worship and walk with Him in fellowship. The book has a vital message for today because the *blood*, the prominent truth of chapters 1-17, explains *why Christ was crucified*; and *holiness*, the prominent truth of chapters 18-27, tells us *why we are crucified with Christ*.

PLAN OF THE JEWISH TABERNACLE



DIMENSIONS (one cubit equals approximately 1½ feet)
 COURT—100 BY 50 CUBITS
 GATE—20 CUBITS
 TABERNACLE—30 BY 10 BY 10 CUBITS
 H.P. = HOLY PLACE—20 BY 10 BY 10 CUBITS
 H. of H. = HOLY OF HOLIES—10 BY 10 BY 10 CUBITS

- FURNITURE
1. BRAZEN ALTAR
 2. LAVER
 3. TABLE OF SHOWBREAD
 4. GOLDEN CANDLESTICK
 5. ALTAR OF INCENSE
 6. ARK OF THE COVENANT

THE TABERNACLE OF THE WILDERNESS

