

LEVITICUS

Introduction

Author. See Introduction to Genesis and Exodus.

Date. Since Israel left Sinai, where the instructions for this book were delivered, only fourteen months after the exodus (Numbers 10:11) it seems that the book was probably written as soon as the events occurred.

Structure. The book seems to divide into two major sections: How Israel is to approach God (1-17) and How she is to walk before Him (18-27). The first half of the first section (1-10) comes to a dramatic end with the violent deaths of Aaron's sons but there is very little literary break evident between chapters ten and eleven. This seems to indicate that the theme of how to approach God continues and only reaches its climax in chapters sixteen and seventeen. A major literary break occurs then as Moses gives an extended introduction to the last section of the book in 18:1-5.

Message Statement. At the end of the book of Exodus God's presence had filled the Tabernacle, but no one, not even Moses could enter. God's purposes for filling the Tabernacle were yet unrealized until man could approach Him for fellowship and worship. Leviticus provides the answer to that dilemma. Leviticus teaches that *the demands for approaching and living before God are given to display this holiness and facilitate fellowship with man.*

Argument

- 1A THE APPROACH 1:1--17:16
The approach of man to God in the Old Testament was possible only through the necessary condition of the prescribed sacrifices and priesthood and ultimately the sufficient condition of substitutionary atonement. This truth, primary to approaching God, is taught in this, the first of two major sections. The first sub-section details the necessary conditions of God's prescribed ways of approach (1:1--10:20). The second sub-section (11:1--17:16) illustrates the actual distance between the holiness of God and the unholy nation. The only possible solution for the nation therefore was a national cleansing found in the day of atonement.

1B The Necessary Conditions 1:1--10:20

The conditions commanded for this dispensation for approaching God involved proper sacrifices and priesthood. These conditions were necessary because God commanded them. This did not mean, however, that they were inherently sufficient to establish communion with God. Much more was also necessary to span the gulf of fellowship between sinful man and holy God.

1C The Approach Through the Prescribed Sacrifices 1:1--7:38

In order for man to approach God successfully, God outlined strict procedures for both the person and the priest who was involved. Because of the need for a mediator, a man could not offer a sacrifice without a levitical priest. God first gives the procedures from the viewpoint of the offerer (1:1--6:7) and then of the priest involved (6:8--7:38).

1D For the person involved 1:1--6:7

God's design in dwelling among His people was to display His holiness and to have fellowship with the nation. He begins therefore with regulations for those in fellowship.

1E For those in fellowship 1:1--3:17

The first offerings mentioned is the burnt offering. The offering was voluntary and completely burned so that the only benefit for the worshipper was fellowship with God. It was the prescribed method for the grateful worshipper to express his appreciation, devotion, commitment and complete surrender to God. Three kinds of burnt offerings were available, corresponding to the fiscal ability of the person.

The second offering consisted of grain. Because grain or bread symbolized that which was necessary to sustain life, the offerer came to God as a needy creature expressing his dependence upon, and gratefulness to, God for each breath of life.

The final offering in this category was the fellowship offering. It served as an expression of thanksgiving to God and involved a communal meal as a further indication of fellowship with God.

2E For those whose fellowship is broken 4:1--6:7

While God desired fellowship with His people, He knew that sin would inevitably interrupt that fellowship, thus He provided the sacrifices of this category. The sins which are covered in this category are called "unintentional". This term seems to cover "all sins done not in a spirit of rebellion against the law or ordinance of YHWH--sins committed through human imperfection or human ignorance or human passion; sins done when the mind was directed to some end connected with human weakness or selfishness, but not formally opposed to the authority of the Lawgiver. The distinction was thus primarily a distinction in regard to the state of the mind of the transgressor."

A.B. Davidson. Old Testament Theology, p.315.

The sin offering seems to differ from the guilt offering in that the guilt offering covers sin which affects others as well as God. Restitution is, therefore, an additional requirement in the guilt offering.

The sacrifice of the sin offering is classified by the responsibility and influence of the individual involved. The order of mention begins with the High Priest, then the nation, her leaders and ends with the common person. Those whose sphere of influence is wider are required greater sacrifice.

- 2D Regulations for the Priests involved 6:8--7:38
This section covers much the same kind of material as the first five chapters, but from the perspective of the priest who assists in the sacrifice. The opening statement of this section is, "the LORD said to Moses; 'Give Aaron and his sons this command: "These are the regulations for the burnt offering..."'" Rather than allowing the people to police themselves, the priest was also particularly responsible to insure adherence to God's prescribed method of approach to Himself.

The order of the sacrifice is slightly different from the first listing. Here, the fellowship offering is listed last instead of third, presumably because fellowship is listed last instead of third, presumably because fellowship and peace were a major goal and result of these provisions of sacrifice.

- 2C The Approach through the Prescribed Priesthood 8:1--10:20
The prescribed approach to God not only involved proper sacrifice but also the proper mediator. In this dispensation the levitical priests filled that role. Their beginning is described herein. Moses records the ordination and initial acceptance of their ministry by God. Then in an abrupt change the mood of the proceedings God swiftly judges Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu for an apparent breach of priestly responsibility. The two experience immediate and ultimate judgment for their sin for which the whole nation mourns. The people are quickly reminded of the need for exacting obedience and of the frailty of their priesthood. They failed to display His holiness, so God did, through His judgment of them.

- 2B The Sufficient Condition 11:1--17:16
The only sufficient condition for communion with God is His grace as it is expressed in the substitutionary atonement of our LORD Jesus Christ. This atonement is best prefigured, albeit incompletely, in the ceremony of the Day of Atonement found in chapter sixteen of this book.

- 1C The problem: clean & unclean 11:1--15:33
The people were made painfully aware of the potential failure of their priesthood in the last section. In this one they would be made aware of their own unworthiness to approach God. God desired to have fellowship with His people but would not compromise His holiness to do so. This section delineates in a symbolic way, through the means of clean and unclean, sinful man's unholiness.

God first delineates which animals will render one unclean. Although one might conscientiously avoid the consumption of the forbidden animal, it would be nearly impossible to avoid incidental contamination and certainly impossible to be assured of one's current state.

Next God informed the people that childbirth rendered a woman unclean. In the fulfilling of the command to fill the earth (Genesis 1:28), the woman became unable to approach God.

Some kind of "surface" disorder which affected people and buildings also left persons unfit to worship. Finally, human discharges both abnormal and normal rendered both male and female unclean. In the normal activities of life, people were rendered ineligible to have fellowship with God. The only response of the conscientious Israelite would be despondency. He would recognize his total inadequacy and consequent need for cleansing. Thus, the natural flow of the book leads one to the necessity of the Day of Atonement in the next chapter. The repeated but impossible theme of this section has been, "I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt, to be your God; therefore be holy because I am holy" (11:45).

- 2C The Cleansing for Those who Approach 16:1--17:16
 This short but essential section, details the solution, albeit it temporary and ultimately insufficient, for the exasperated Israelite who desired fellowship with a God who is now recognized as absolutely holy. Their only hope, after the failure of the priesthood (recorded in chapter ten and recalled in 16:11) and their own inadequacy (chapters 11-15), was substitutionary atonement on their behalf.
- 1D The method of cleansing: the Day of Atonement 16:1-34
 The purpose for this special day was clear, "...This is to be a lasting ordinance for you....because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the LORD, you will be clean from all your sins." (16:29-30). The people would be cleansed by symbolically transferring their sins to the sacrificial animal, the scapegoat (16:20-22). Although temporary, and therefore insufficient, the ceremony did offer relief from the burden of sin and offer the hope of communion with God by the use of a substitute.
- 2D The basis of cleansing: the value of blood 17:1-16
 To clarify why the offerings were effective, God explained the significance of blood to the community. Because the life was in the blood, the blood signified the giving of the innocent life of an animal as a substitute for the guilty life of the person, which was required as payment for sin. In order to protect and preserve the uniqueness and power of this symbol, God gave careful restrictions concerning the treatment of blood both by Israelites and foreigners (17:8-16).
- 2A THE DEMANDS OF WALKING, LIVING WITH GOD 18:1--27:34
 Only after God had prescribed the way (1-11), and provided the means (12-17) for fellowship did He ask anything from His people. At this point He began to outline various regulations covering all areas of life, not to restrict the people, but to help protect their relationship with Him and thus enable Him to bless them.
- 1B The Regulations for the People 18:1--20:27
 The first three chapters concern the people. God first warns them against sexual sins and then branches out into every area of life. His desire is for the people to reflect the holiness of their God. This section closes with fair warning of judgment if these rules are neglected.
- 2B Regulations for the Priests 21:1--22:33
 God's regulations for the priests are extreme because of their important role as His representatives, over which not men but God alone has control, all the High Priest to be made according to God's selection. The phrase *I am the LORD who makes them Holy* occurs repetitively in this section (21:8,15,23; 22:2,9,16,32).

3B Regulations Concerning the Feasts and Service of the Tabernacle 23:1--24:23

Important in Israel's walk with God was her constant reminder of God's goodness. This was accomplished through the weekly sabbath and the annual feasts. The first two feasts, Passover and Unleavened Bread, remembered God's goodness of redemption and separation from Egypt. The Passover celebrated God's judgment passing over the firstborn of Israel based upon the blood of the lamb. Since, by its very nature, leaven is a means of continuity and is dependent upon previous supply, its absence serves well as a symbol of separation from the past.

The next two feasts, Firstfruits and Pentecost, celebrated God's goodness in the harvest of the land. Firstfruits was the first feast that looked forward to entering the land. It concerned the first part of the harvest and looked in anticipation to the provision to come. The feast of Pentecost celebrated the end of the harvest. In distinction to Firstfruits, Pentecost was cause for praise for the reality of God's provision.

The last three feasts, Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles, looked to the future. Trumpets broke the four month silence since the last feast to prepare people for the only sorrowful feast, the Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement was, of course, a time of national judgment in which the nation repented and was purged of sin for another year. Tabernacles was celebrated in appreciation of the completed harvest in the land to which God brought them after living in tents in the wilderness.

In these seven feasts God had traced the history of the nation, which was to be a kingdom of priests or mediators of God's blessings to the world. In accord with this emphasis God next places special emphasis upon all the nation providing oil for the lampstand in the tabernacle. If they are to carry out this goal however they must remain separate from the peoples of the land. An incident of blasphemy committed by the son of a mixed marriage serves to warn Israel not to forfeit her mission by inter-marriage, a stumbling block to the nation throughout her history.

4B Regulations for the Lands 25:1-55

In a theocratic economy where the land was a major part of God's promise to Abraham and the nation it was important that the people treat God's land with respect. God promised blessing in fertility for observing the sabbath and jubilee years but also exacting punishment for neglect. Jeremiah probably used this passage to ascertain the length of the exile (Jeremiah 25).

5B The Revelation of Divine Dealing 26:1-46

God then told the people what kind of consequences they could expect for their actions. Obedience brought blessing in the land while disobedience brought cursing and ultimately exile from the land. The land would serve as a spiritual barometer of the nation's relationship to God.

God was gracious, however, and promised restoration to the land if there was repentance, a promise which will finally be exercised in tribulational times.

6B The Regulations for the Grateful Worshipper 27:1-34

God finally closed His revelation to Moses here with individual vows. These vows were completely voluntary but allowed the grateful worshipper who desired even greater expression of appreciation to God several avenues whereby he could offer all that he had to the LORD. Total dedication was to be the result of contemplation of all that God had done and yet promised to do in the future.

Thus in the book of Leviticus, God revealed His holiness and how sinful man could enjoy fellowship with a holy God. God showed that this promise was only for the "clean" and then provided cleansing on the Day of Atonement. God then outlined how Israel could walk in order to preserve and celebrate their relationship to Him. He then disclosed how he would deal with Israel based on her behavior. Finally, He closed with regulations for total surrender. This was to be the natural result of one who had been redeemed, blessed and promised an eternal future.

Outline

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