

NAME

In Hebrew the title comes from the first words of the book: וַיִּקְרָא "vay-yiq-ra" meaning "And He called" from קרא (kara) meaning "screamed." Assumption here is the "He" is the Lord - which comes later in the verse. The people now have a Tabernacle, but how is it to be used? God addresses (calls to) the people from the Tabernacle (Leviticus 1:1) rather than Mount Sinai. Hence rather than giving commands, the emphasis is now upon how men approach God.

In Greek (LXX) the title is ΛΕΥΙΤΙΚΟΝ "levitikon" - meaning: "pertaining to the Levites (priests)." Leviticus is a handbook for priests as it gives instructions/regulations for worship.

AUTHOR

Conservative scholarship has maintained Mosaic authorship. However, as with the rest of the canon, recent higher criticism has questioned Mosaic authorship. For a discussion on the argument of higher criticism (Documentary Hypothesis) see the discussion on authorship from Notes on Genesis (JEP).

DATE

The book is central to the Pentateuch. It covers a period of one month when the people don't really go anywhere. Its dating is tied to the events Moses personally witness and wrote concerning during the period of the Exodus. For notes on the dating of the Exodus see Notes on Exodus.

"The view taken of the date and authorship of Leviticus depends largely on one's view of the Pentateuch. This, in turn, will usually be greatly influenced by one's view of the rest of the Old Testament." (Expositors Bible Commentary - Volume 2, Introduction to Leviticus)

THEME

Type of Literature: Law, History.

Halley (page 43): The Laws of the Hebrew Nation

Kartozian: The approach of sinful man to a holy God.

Mitchell: The Worship of a Redeemed People.

This book is to teach Israel how to worship a Holy God and live a holy life. A key word in the book is holiness (and/or sanctify) which occurs 130 times in the book. The words "holy" and "sanctify" come from the same Hebrew root word which literally means, "to set apart." The basic idea is separation. By way of an extreme example, the Hebrew term for prostitute is from the same root because a prostitute is a women "set apart" from the rest of women for a particular function.

The word "holy/sanctify" is applied to God because He is separated from all imperfections and limitations. The word is applied at times to objects, times, and places in the sense that these have been separated from common use and dedicated exclusively to God. Because of this the Sabbath was a holy day, and certain vessels of the tabernacle are called holy. At other times the word "holy" is applied to men. It refers to a person separated from the rest of humanity and dedicated to God.

In Leviticus it is possible for men to be considered holy in two senses: Ceremonial and Moral. To be ceremonially holy means that a person has obeyed the ritual requirements which qualify a person to worship. To be morally holy means that a person manifest such purity of life as should

characterize one who is wholly dedicated to God.

Note also words like “purity,” “clean,” and “unclean” are used in this book approximately 200 times. This shows that holiness and purity go together. A holy person will be a pure person.

Thus this book is built around laws which God gave His people to maintain communion and fellowship with Him. It stresses the importance of having both a holy body and holy soul. Holiness is to be maintained by living a separated life, and by offering proper sacrifices when sin does occur. Believers today need an emphasis upon holy living. Holiness is almost out of style among evangelicals. We are often very articulate in doctrine, but shabby in our living.

Regarding God's Holiness:

Holiness is a communicable attributes of God in that it is comprehensible by mankind as there is found within them a correlation to the experience of mankind. That God is holy means that God's attributes separate Him from everything else. Relationally, He is separate according to His moral excellence. (Exodus 15:11; 1 Peter 1:14-16) God is without impurity or the tarnish of sin. God's is separated from, transcending over, all His creation. The holiness of God is considered a communicable attribute in that we are called to holiness. We are called to withdraw from what is common or unclean while living in consecration to what is divine, sacred, and pure. Baker's Dictionary of Theology states the principle this way, *“The moral quality of the character and actions of those who, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, share Christ's nature and consent to be ruled by it.”*

In Genesis man is ruined. In Exodus man is redeemed. In Leviticus we see how man is to worship.

Key word (Nelson's): “holy” - this word occurs 89 times in the book. “Holy” & “sanctify” are used 130 times

Key Verses (Nelson's):

“For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy... 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 11:44,45)

Key Chapters (Nelson's): Chapter 16: The Law of the Day of Atonement (see Halley page 152). Chapters 17-26 are known as the “Holiness Code,” but the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy also contain many related regulations.

Outline:

I. The Way To God chapters 1-10 (Access To God)

1. The way to God is through sacrifices and offerings chapters 1-7
See Halley pages 150 & 1019.

God's provision for man's need of salvation is fully unfolded. Three things are essentially needed: 1) A sacrifice; 2) A priest; and 3) A place of worship. Nothing was left to be supplied by man's imagination of his arrangement (Leviticus 8:36; 9:6,7). Without the word of the Lord neither priest nor people could take a single step in the right direction. All spiritual light is shed by the word of God (Psalm 119:105).

Sacrifice is the basis of worship. Acceptable worship to God must be based on a sacrifice

acceptable to Him. Man is himself guilty and unclean; God is holy. Therefore man must approach Him in His own way and according to what He is. The Lord alone could give directions as to how the people were to draw near to Him. It is on the same ground of offered and accepted sacrifice that believers in Jesus are constituted the worshipping people of God now - but the sacrifice, the priest, and the place of worship are of a much higher order (Hebrews 7:19,23-28; 9:6-14,25-28; 10:1-3,11,12).

See Halley page 151: "The Divine Origin of the Sacrificial System"

2. The Way To God Is Through Priestly Meditation chapters 8-10

Chapters 8-10 explain the mediation of Aaron's sons and the laws governing them. In contrast we have Hebrews 8:1,2 in the New Testament. His work of sacrifices having been fully completed, He sat down. Aaron is always represented as being in a standing position. His work was never finished (Hebrews 10:11,12). Christ is both our sacrifice and our Priest. In the New Testament we only read of two orders of priests - Christ, the Great High Priest and the common priesthood of all believers on the earth (1 Peter 2:5; Revelation 1:5,6). There is no mention of any peculiar class or order of Christians who hold the office of "priest" as distinct from other Christians. Christ is the Great High Priest over all the house of God and all His people are, in virtue of their connection with Him, priests and privileged to enter the holiest of all as once-purged worshippers. As the Great High Priest:

He represents us in the sanctuary above (Hebrews 9:24). When Aaron appeared before the Lord in his garments of glory and beauty he represented the children of Israel. Their names were engraved on precious stones in the breastplate. Christ appears in the presence of God for us continually - not annually as Aaron did. The name of every believer is kept continually before God. He is there for us and as us.

As our Great High Priest He presents to God the gifts and sacrifices of His worshipping people. Under the law the worshipper brought his offering to the priest and by him it was presented to the Lord on His own altar. In the same way our prayers, praises, and thanksgiving all pass through His hands before they reach the throne of God (Hebrews 13:15 "by Him"). Hence the importance of the exhortation, "*And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him*" (Colossians 3:17).

II. The Way To Fellowship With God chapters 11-27 (Maintain Relationship With The Holy God.)

1. The Law of Purity chapters 11-22

- The Annual Day of Atonement - chapter 16

From Halley, page 152: "*The annual Day of Atonement (still celebrated in Judaism today in modified form and now by its Hebrew name, Yom Kippur) fell on the 10th day of the seventh month (the month of Tishri). It was the most solemn day of the year. Each time, the removal of sin was only for one year (Hebrews 10:3), but it pointed forward to its eternal removal (Zechariah 3:4,8,9; 13:1; Hebrews 10:14). After the sacrificial goat had been offered, the high priest laid his hands on the head of the scapegoat, confessing over him the sins of the people. The goat was then sent away into the wilderness, bearing away with it the sins of the people. This ceremony was one of God's historical foreshadowings of the coming atonement for human sin by the death of Christ.*"

2. The Law of Feasts chapters 23,24

- God instructed Israel to set aside certain periods each year as feast days. He did this for two reasons:
 - a. To keep God in the people's thoughts
 - b. To promote national unity. In fact, at three of these feasts all adult males were required to attend: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

3. The Law of the Soil and Soul chapters 25,26

4. The Law of the Voluntary Vow chapter 27

RECIPIENTS

God's people - specifically the Hebrews...and us.

CONTRIBUTION TO CANON

The purpose of Leviticus for Israel

1. To train and prepare Israel for its world mission (Genesis 12:2,3) by:
 - a. Keeping them separate from other people (Leviticus 20:24,26)
 - b. Revealing to Israel the real character of God ("holy")
2. To prepare Israel's mind to receive their Messiah of whom these laws and ceremonies are but a shadow.

The Purpose of Leviticus for us

1. It reveals to us the character of God
2. It is a revelation of the person and work of Christ
3. It reveals that "*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins*" (Hebrews 9:22)
4. It gives us prophecies concerning Christ's future kingdom

What could Leviticus contribute to our lives?

This book is essentially a book of worship - the worship of a redeemed people. The message of this book needs to be sounded today. We need instruction in worship. The book teaches that one can't come to God unless he has a rightful consideration of the sacrifice. Also, we learn from this book not to worship God unless our daily lives are clean and pure.

RESOURCES

Gromacki, Robert C. *New Testament Survey*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1978

Halley, Henry H. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Publishing House

Horton, David, General Editor. *The Portable Seminary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Bethany House Publishers, 2006

Nelson's Quick Reference - Bible Maps And Charts, Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1994

As general resources I've relied on my class notes from various professors at Biola University (especially those of Dr. Curtis Mitchell), Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, and Talbot Seminary as well as notes shared with me by Annie Kartoizian.

Additional reference material has come from the study Bibles of the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, and The New Living Translation.

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