

Leviticus-The Book of Holiness

Title

The book title "Leviticus" can be traced to the Septuagint (LXX) which designates the book with the Greek word *leyitikon* which means "things concerning Levites." The Hebrew title is "And He Called" and is the opening of the book of Leviticus which is from the first line of the book, "And he called Moses and spoke to him..."

Authorship, Date & Setting

Over thirty times in Leviticus the text describes the Lord as speaking to Moses. Further, Leviticus' authorship is directly related to it being in the Pentateuch which was authored by Moses. In Mark 12:26, the Pentateuch is called "the Law of the Book of Moses." Both Rabbinic tradition and the Scriptures designate Moses as the author of the Pentateuch (Deuteronomy 31:9, 21; Lev. 1:1; Mark 7:10). He authored it while Israel was in the Wilderness. It is called "the book of Moses" (Neh. 13:1; 2 Chr. 25:4), "the book of the Law of Moses" (Neh. 8:1), "the Law of the Lord" (1 Chr. 16:40; Ezra 7:10) and "the book of the Law of God" (Neh. 8:18).

The date of the Pentateuch's authorship by Moses is somewhere between 1446-1200 B.C. As to dating the Pentateuch, there are various positions as to the exact date of the Exodus. The two dominant positions are 1446 B.C. and 1260 B.C. Whatever the exact date, Moses was 80 years old when he began to lead Israel out of Egypt. He was "learned in all wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22). The setting of the entire book of Leviticus is at the foot of Mount Sinai after Israel received the Law from God.

Purpose

The purpose of Leviticus is to describe the stipulations of living in covenant relationship between God and man. How can an unholy people approach a holy God? Leviticus concerns itself with the conduct of God's people as their lives are lived out before him. The laws and regulations of Leviticus are divinely designed to guide people in these pursuits as worship protocol is established.

Leviticus & the Pentateuch

While Exodus marks the introduction of God's law (Exod. 19-24), Leviticus will trace the holiness code and how the unholy can again be holy through faith by approaching God on his terms. Thus, idols and polytheism must be avoided at all costs to preserve the covenant as the people remain set apart to God. As a sequel to Exodus, the entire content of Leviticus is given within a month's time (Exod. 40:1; 34-35; Lev. 1:1; Num. 1:1). While Exodus covers the construction of the Tabernacle (Exod. 25-40), Leviticus elaborates on the protocols surrounding the Tabernacle.

Structure of Leviticus

Leviticus is easily divided into six sections. First, the five offerings are defined in both content and conduct (Lev. 1:1-7:38). Second, the priesthood is installed with stipulations by God (Lev. 8:1-10:20). Third, cleanliness and uncleanness are defined (Lev. 11:1-15:33). Fourth, the Day of Atonement is detailed as well as the significance of the blood (Lev. 16:1-17:16). Fifth, the holiness code is applied to pagan practices, priests and offerings (Lev. 18:1-22:33). Lastly, holy festivals are designated with warnings against disobedience, blessings for obedience with vows, and dedications (Lev. 23:1-27:34).

Major Themes

Holiness-Both ritual and moral holiness is at the heart of Leviticus. This pursuit of holiness did not make the people right with God but rather proved they were a people of faith in God. Holiness concerns the people, priests and even the objects that assist in worship. The holiness of the people is essential to them consecrating themselves for worship (Lev. 19:1-37). The holiness of the priests is essential in leading the people in worship (21:1-24). Failure to be holy inevitably carries great punishment (20:1-27). Just as God is holy, his people must also be holy (11:45). It is God's design that his people mirror his image. Cleanliness was meant to demonstrate ritual holiness as the people of God. Further, it set them apart from the polytheistic neighbors and their pagan rituals.

Atonement-The Day of Atonement remains the annual day of which the nation stops to remember the Lord's provision of blood sacrifice as their sins are taken away to be remembered no more (Lev. 16:1-34). At the heart of the concept of atonement is the blood of a spotless sacrifice covering the transgressions of the people (17:1-16; Heb. 9:22). Sin makes atonement necessary. Atonement is paramount to the future of God's people. This theme of atonement prepares the way for the substitutionary atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ under the New Covenant (Isa. 53:4-6; 1 Jn. 2:2).

God's Character-God is holy, meaning he is set apart, a cut above. Because of who he is, he must be approached differently. While he is holy, he stresses that he is with his people, especially in worship. God is intimate as he desires to dwell with his people (26:12). This holiness is a reminder that he is elevated above the false gods of the nations (18:1-30). Even God's wrath is detailed against Nadab and Abihu as they brought strange fire to the altar (10:1-20).

The Tabernacle-The ceremonial regulations surrounding the Tabernacle are a vivid reminder to the people that God is holy and they must approach him in the way he requires (Exod. 25-31; 35-40). The Tabernacle and its associated regulations remind people of God's holiness. If God's people will approach him as he designates, then he promises to tabernacle with his people (Exod. 29:43-46; 40:34-38). As to the priests, Aaron and his sons are the leaders of the priests (Lev. 8:1-36). The priests intercede for the people as their mediators. They were taken from the tribe of Levi and they alone were allowed to minister in the Tabernacle.

Offerings- Sacrifices were given under the worshipful acts of offerings. The burnt offering is the most costly offering which was to be burned due to repentance, petition, prayer, praise, etc. (1:1-17; 6:8-13).

Its greatest symbolism was in the blood aspect of the sacrifice. Bulls, livestock or even birds could be offered. The grain offering is brought either cooked or uncooked, and it consisted of flour, oil, frankincense, and salt (2:1-16; 6:14-23). This offering was offered with a burnt offering. The peace offering was offered for a variety of reasons, yet they were meant to symbolize peace between the worshipper and God himself (3:1-17; 7:11-36). Thus, they were an affirmation of the covenant relationship. The sin offering is an offering given when one violated the law of God or failed to positively follow through with a requirement (4:1-5:13; 6:24-30). This offering involved the sprinkling of blood and was meant to purify the offerer (4:6, 17). The guilt offering was given for more serious infractions of God's Word and involved a more costly sacrifice (5:14- 7:1-10). It too was meant to repair the relationship between God and his people. While the pagans believed such offerings were food for the gods, the Israelites offerings were given because they delighted God as the worshipper approached God as he dictated (3:11,16). Further, these offerings were symbolic of the worshipper's gratitude for forgiveness.

Holy Times & Feasts-At the heart of holiness is the setting apart of special times of worship and remembrance. This begins with the weekly sabbath which is to be a time of cessation of work as the people of God like their Creator rest and reflect on the Lord in worship (Lev. 23:1-3). God's people are to be reflective upon the past and remember from where the Lord has brought them. The Passover reminds the people of God when he passed over their homes sparing their firstborn (Lev.23:4-8). The other feasts are: Firstfruits (Lev. 23:9-14), Weeks (Lev. 23:15-22), Trumpets (Lev. 23:23-25), Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:26-32), and Booths (Lev. 23:33-36)

Christ & Salvation-The Lord Jesus Christ is on every page of Leviticus. Leviticus is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus who is the sacrifice that made animal sacrifices obsolete. Christ is now our sacrificial lamb and High Priest (Heb. 9:1-10:39). The New Covenant brought about through the blood of Christ did away with the Old Covenant regulations and its stipulations as well as the priesthood (Acts 10:1-16; Col. 2:16,17; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev.1:6). Christ is now our sin offering (Rms. 8:3; Heb. 5:3; 13:11; 1 Pet. 3:18). Jesus is the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world as his blood makes cleansing atonement from sin (1 Jn. 1:7, 29). Thus, he fulfills the Abrahamic Covenant through the New Covenant as salvation blessings will be extended to all nations. Ultimately, Christ's kingdom will extend over all the earth, as he will reign with his people over the nations (Mk. 7:14-23).