

LEVITICUS

I. Background

A. Authorship

1. The accepted critical view is that Leviticus was finalized around 550-450 b.c. According to the critics who hold to an evolution of Israel's religion, it is the "P" product of the JEDP editors.
2. "Leviticus has a larger percentage of material attributed to God as the speaker than any other book in the Bible." (Samuel Schultz, *Leviticus*). It is replete with the phrase (38X), "God said" or "God commanded," with Moses usually being the object of His address.
3. Jesus acknowledges authorship of Moses in Mt. 8:4 (referencing Lev. 14:4)

Matthew 8:4 And Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

B. Place in the Pentateuch

1. The Jewish Mishnah refers to this book as "The Priests' Law" or "The Priests' Book," titles closely akin to the LXX, *Levitikon*.
2. The longest narrative section (8-10) addresses the institution of the priesthood. This section is parallel in time to the events of Exodus 40 (inaugurating the tabernacle), and serves as a bridge between the narratives of Exodus and Numbers.
3. Exodus addresses where God ought to be worshiped; Leviticus addresses how God ought to be worshiped.

4. Compare the relation of Exodus-Leviticus (Redemption-Holiness) to Paul's theological scheme in Romans where he develops justification and then the sanctification that grows out of it (Rom. 3-5, 6-8)

II. THEME: Sanctification of the Nation

A. Laws of holiness for the people in their daily lives and in their service before a holy God.

1. Key verse = 19:2 "**Be Holy.**" To be holy required that God's sinful people be forgiven. God makes provision for atonement.
2. Guidebook for a nation of slaves to become a kingdom of priests

B. Sanctification = Theological teaching which grows out of the **tabernacle motif**

1. It was not uncommon for the nations to have a portable shrine for their deity, especially when they went off to war. What was unique about God tabernacling among His people was that there was no plethora of temples for Him throughout the nation as there had been for the gods in Egypt, et. al. There was only one God and He would dwell in one place in their midst as a King among His people.
2. Bound to obedience to God in covenant relation, the people were to pursue the holiness of their God (19:2) in His worship and in their every day lives. "Holiness" and its forms occur more often in Leviticus than any other book of the Bible (80+ times).
3. "The solemn statement, 'I AM Yahweh' occurs 46X throughout Leviticus, identifying Israel's God as the ever living, ever present One. Every aspect of daily life was affected by the reality of the presence of God. *** Nothing in life, no matter how insignificant, could be considered beyond God's presence with His people." —Schultz, pp. 30,31
 - a. Hence the commands on hygiene/cleanliness as well as on the religious approach of God. (Harris, *EBC*, 526ff.)
 - b. Offerings were prescribed to **maintain** a right relationship to God in their midst.

- c. If the relationship were breached by sin, it could be **restored** through the proper sacrifice.
 - d. Observance of the seasonal feasts **reminded** them that God had made them His people by intervening in their history.
- C. The **priests** served as mediators of the covenant to preserve the unique divine-human relationship and to remind His people of His ideal for them to be a “holy nation” among the nations and to serve as priests to the nations, Ex. 19:5,6 & Lev. 26:45.

III. Outline (per Samuel Schultz)

- A. Instructions and laws on sacrifice, 1-7
- B. Institution of the priesthood, 8-10
- C. Treatment of uncleanness, 11-15
- D. The Day of Atonement, 16
- E. Instructions for holy living, 17-27

IV. “The Way of the Holy One” — 1-10

A. Five sacrificial offerings — 1-7

1. Listed

- a. Burnt offering
- b. Meal offering
- c. Peace offering
- d. Sin offering
- e. Trespass/guilt offering

“The narrative assumes that several types of offerings were already well known and practiced by the Israelites (Ex. 18:12)” —Sailhamer, *PaN*, 324.

- 2. For the interrelation of these sacrifices, see Hamilton (250,51); there is a rationale behind the differing internal order of the three times they are catalogued in Leviticus.

3. Offering from Hebrew *qorban* / *qarab*, “to bring near” (Mk. 7:11); distance from God is implied
4. Blood offerings: the irrevocable giving of a life for a life
 - a. Must be “clean animals” (chpt. 11); a major reason for select animals was to avoid resemblance to pagan sacrifices
 - (1) Big animals
 - (2) Marine animals
 - (3) Grasshoppers ok, but no reptiles & amphibians
 - (4) Birds - 11:13-19
 - b. Must be domesticated
 - c. Eight+ days old, but not past the prime of life
5. Three voluntary offerings for fellowship with God or to renew dedication to Him. These are voluntary/spontaneous.
 - a. Burnt offering, 1:3
 - (1) LXX translates as *holocaust*; cf. Rom. 12:1 = entire consecration
 - (2) Twice daily for the people
 - b. Meal offering, 2
 - (1) = thank offering (vv. 11,13); the salt of v. 13 may be alluded to in Paul’s thought in Col. 4:6; cf. parallel passages in Eph. 4:29 (&5:4)
 - (2) Roasted grain / flour / unleavened bread; perhaps the first offerings in the garden of Eden as a eucharist (before sin changed things)
 - c. Peace offering, 3
 - (1) = acknowledgment of peace with God
 - (2) A feast shared by the family and the priests and any poor
6. Two required expiatory offerings

- a. Sin offering, 4:3 = to be offered by all for inadvertent sins of commission and omission in order to maintain/restore a right relationship with God
 - (1) Offered on Day of Atonement (chpt. 16)
 - (a) bull for high priest, possible reflection from Aaron's involvement with the golden calf
 - (b) kid for nation
 - (2) Randomly offered by Israelites: either a lamb or a goat; the poor could offer a dove, and the poorest offered grain. Ex. 23:15 prescribes that the worshiper should not come empty-handed.
- b. Trespass offering, 5:6
 - (1) = atonement for presumptuous sins
 - (2) Deliberate sins can be forgiven; irrepentance is not: Num. 5:6-8 cf. Lev. 5:14ff.
 - (3) "As part of the instructions, the high priest is told to keep the skin (*ur*) of the sacrificed animal (7:8). Though the value this would have for the high priest and his family is obvious, the author may also want to call to mind the narrative of Genesis 3:21, where the Lord gave animal skins (*ur*) to Adam and Eve" —*PaN* 328

7. Teaching of bloody sacrifice

- a. Recognition of necessity of sinner to approach God with a gift of His choosing that must freely come from our heart
- b. Substitutionary: the innocent life for the guilty

"The life is in the blood [of the sacrifice to cover your soul]" – 17:11
 "Without the shedding of the blood there is no forgiveness of sins" – Heb. 9:22

Compare "souls under the altar" of Rev. 6. Also Is. 53 where the servant "pours out His life [blood]"

- c. As Dumbrell carefully notes, the sacrifices were not just didactic nor simply typical, but were necessary for regular maintenance of the covenant relationship (see *The Faith of Israel*, 41)

B. The service of the Priesthood — 8-10

1. Consecration (“filling,” *millu'im*) of the high priest (e.g., 8:33)
 - a. Anointing, 8:12; cf. Ps. 133:2
 - 1) *Meshi-ach, Chris-tus*
 - 2) Christ’s High Priestly anointing (Acts 10:37,38; 4:27; also Num. 4:3 cf. Mt. 3:15; Is. 61:1)
 - b. Sacrifice for the priest, 8:30, 9:7; ctr. Heb. 7:27

—Hamilton (269) notes a calf for his sin offering (cf. golden calf for previous ref.) and a ram for a burnt offering (cf. obedience of Gen. 22)
 - c. God’s confirmation of the sacrifices before the people: heavenly fire, 9:23,24
2. Defiance of Nadab and Abihu, disregard for holy obedience in God’s presence, ch. 10
 - a. Form of worship not prescribed by using strange fire, 10:1 cf. 6:12,13; compare to Cain’s attitude in sacrifice
 - b. Possibly drunk: note warning in 10:8-11, as well as the narrative parallel to the judgment on Noah’s two sons after Noah the priest was drunk in his tent (Gen. 9:21-25).

Sailhamer makes some cogent observations connecting the Levitical ceremonies of washing and cleansing to the earlier Flood narrative where the land was cleansed of “all flesh” that had “corrupted its way” (Gen. 6:12). —*PaN*, 338,9
 - c. Charge to Aaron; 10:8-11; cf. I Timothy 3:5
3. The priest as celebrant and instructor, 10:10,11 cf. Mal. 2:7ff. Contrast Aaron’s recent bad example of leading the people into apostasy with the golden calf.

V. “The Way of Holiness” — 11-27

A. Sanitation laws: purity of body — 11-15

1. Clean animals (see IV.A.3.a.)

a. All fruits and vegetables are kosher, Gen. 1:29

b. Man apparently was created a vegetarian. After the flood, God allows man to satiate his lust for flesh with the stipulation that the life-blood not be consumed, but be restored to its Creator.

Jacob Milgrom (*Biblical Review*, Dec. 92, pp. 5,10) argues that like the universal decree of Gen. 9, the particular kosher laws of the Mosaic code further "...inculcate a reverence for life by restricting access to animal life as a source of food." This teaches that "...bringing death to living things is a concession of God's grace and not a privilege of human whim." The method of slaughter was also regulated to make it humane and as painless as possible.

Lev. 17:10–19:8 inculcate the four stipulations of the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15.

c. Part of the motivation for the clean animal guidelines has to do with health and hygiene (Ex. 15:26, "none of these diseases"). For example, scavenger fish without fins or scales (e.g., lobster or carp) or carnivores eating carrion that might carry parasites are forbidden. Living so closely, the nation could have been decimated by one major disease.

Just the same, the main intent of the dietary laws is ceremonial, emphasizing in daily life the idea of personal separation in an effort "to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean" (v. 47).

"If God rejects the animal which lacks the crucial and distinguishing characteristics of its species, how much more will He reject one who tries to live in two worlds, the anomalous believer" —Hamilton, p. 276.

2. Personal and household cleanliness — 12-15

a. After childbirth (12)

(1) Reproduction and childbirth were not considered sinful. After all, God made humans with sexual differences, commanded them to reproduce, and gave the promised deliverance through the seed of the woman.

Still, as a sharp contrast to the erotic religions of the pagans with their cultic prostitutes (cf. I Sam. 2:22), God taught that sexual activity, current or recent, had no place at His holy tabernacle. It involved uncleanness, not sinfulness, and separated the individual, not from the community, but from the community's worship of God.

Holiness involves: a) absence of sin

- b) high regard for God's purity
- c) separation from the profane

(2) The uncleanness was in the natural blood flow. Restoration of fellowship was via a sin offering of a dove, and a burnt offering of a lamb, or dove (cf. Lk. 2:22-24).

(3) Note I Tim. 2:15 exhortation for the woman to remain in "holiness" as emphasized by Leviticus, and by Leviticus' purification connection to the blessing and cursing introduced in Gen. 3:15,16 (*PaN* 335-6).

Sailhamer (*PaN*, 335) notes the unusual language in this text (12:2) for pregnancy: literally, it is "she produces seed."

(a) This language hearkens back to the "plants bearing seed" in Gen. 1. There God was distinguishing and dividing in his works of creation (He saw that what He had done was "good"), even as here in this Levitical section there is a distinguishing between clean (normal) and unclean.

(b) Secondly, the language and the topic of childbirth hearken back to the next watershed passage on the seed in Gen.

3:15,16. "There can be no doubt that the author has focused our attention on the central role of childbirth in fulfilling God's plan of blessing since the beginning chapters of Genesis. *** Throughout the patriarchal narratives the promised 'seed' lies at the center of the hope of blessing (e.g., Gen. 12:1-3) —*PaN* 335.

b. Skin Diseases — 13,14

(1) Tests (13)

This chapter describes many types of skin disease, not all of which correspond to modern leprosy, or Hansen's Disease (e.g., chicken pox, measles, scarlet fever). Herein are the earliest records of public quarantine, vv. 45,46.

(2) Treatment: quarantine (cf. banishment of man and woman outside the gate once there was determined that they had a "skin problem," Gen. 3:7)

(3) Restoration (14) through sacrifice for humans (but not for the houses that were polluted)

c. Bodily discharges (15)

Harris suggests diarrhea might be included

3. Conclusion on uncleanness and restoration through sacrifice

“Consistently, then, the OT’s emphasis on moral cleansing takes its vocabulary directly from ritual language. . . . [Vos] says, in explaining the parallels, ‘God teaches people to feel about sin as they are accustomed to feel about an ignominious and uncomfortable exclusion from the ritual service.’” Hamilton, p. 281. An example is the plea of Psalm 51:7,10.

B. Day of Atonement: cleansing the nation of guilt — 16

1. Literally, “Day of Atonements,” for the high priest, the sanctuary, and the nation.

2. Scapegoat, or Azazel? 16:8,10,26

a. Identity of Azazel: most take as prince of demons

(1) I Enoch 6:2; 8:1 says that the name of the leader of the voluptuous angels in Gen. 6 was “Azazel”

(2) Rabbinic tradition

b. One goat for Jehovah, one for Azazel, v. 8

(1) Contrary to Origen, not as a ransom/gift paid to appease Satan; ctr. 17:7 (literally, “goats”)

(2) Rather, a sending away of sin and the curse to place where it belongs; cf. Zech. 5:5-11 where Babylon is depicted as a wilderness. Sin cannot abide in the company of the redeemed.

c. Into the wilderness, a “place cut off,” v. 22

(1) Symbolism of emptiness, Mt. 12:43, Is. 13:21; 14:22,23; 34:14 (see marginal note for “night demon” on this last passage)

(2) Carrying sin away

(a) Away to where it belongs (Zech. 5; I Cor. 5:5)

(b) Supreme sin Carrier, Is. 53:4,12; John 1

C. Sanctification demands: purity of heart — 17-27

This section is sometimes called the “Holiness Code.” It pertained not to the priests, as if they were more holy, but to the average person to show God’s demands of daily holiness. The result of obedience would be “life” (18:5); cf. God’s relation to Adam.

1. Sexual sins — 18

The pagan nations (v. 3) had no marriage laws which safe-guarded the sanctity of the family and marriage union. Sexual appetites were unchecked, and the pagans acted as brute beasts according to their unrestrained passions. It is not surprising that God implies that they would be cut down in judgment as depraved brutes (v. 25).

2. The heart of God’s law — 19

- a. Expressed in 21 commandments here (= 3 X 7), sounding quite similar to the Book of the Covenant (Ex. 20-24). The 10 commandments are encompassed here
- b. “Thou Shalt...” vs. “Thou shalt not...”
- c. Golden Rule, vv. 18,34 alluded to 9X in the NT; cf. corollary in Prov. 24:29

Leviticus 19:18,34 ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD. ³⁴ You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. Proverbs 24:29 ²⁹ Do not say, "I will do to him as he has done to me; I will pay the man back for what he has done."

3. Sins against creation order and penalties — 20

—note 20:13

4. Teaching of the appointed feasts (23)
(See *Israel, My Glory Magazine*, 50:2; April/May 92)

TYPE OF

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| a. Passover: deliverance | death of Christ |
| b. Unleavened bread | sanctification |
| c. First fruits | R's resurrection |
| d. Pentecost | Initial ingathering |
| e. Trumpets | Future Re-gathering |
| f. Day of Atonement | Sacrifice by Christ |
| g. Tabernacles | Eternal rest & joy |

5. Septenary festal structure, 23

- a. Based on God's creation pattern

Note that the feasts, and the laws in this section are generally collected into groups of seven (*PaN* charts, pp. 351-359)

- b. For the sake of stewardship and family accountability before God, 25:23
- c. For the sake of the poor, Ex. 23:10,11; moratorium on debt payments in the sabbath year, Dt. 15:1-3, except that foreigners who were not under God's redemptive covenant would not enjoy the grace of periodic debt relief. (See Beisner, *Prosperity and Poverty*, p. 39)
- d. To distinguish them from the surrounding pagan culture in their regular devotion to the true God (Ezk.20)

6. Profanity, vv. 24:10-23

- a. blasphemy of "the Name," (24:16, apparently "Yaweh") led to the Jewish superstition of not vocalizing the Name of the Lord
- b. Cursing of God was tantamount to treason under the suzerain-vassal covenant

7. Year of Jubilee, 25

- a. Etymology: *yabal*, for sounding of trumpet
- b. Commenced when Trumpet sounded on day of atonement in the 50th year: vertical reconciliation before horizontal restoration
- c. Guarantee of permanent and generally widespread middle class

(1) Land returned to original stewards

- anti-socialism
- anti-unchecked capitalism

“The maximum *term* of permissible debt was the number of years remaining until the next year of jubilee, a maximum of fifty years.... These limits were designed to protect believers from financially ruining themselves and, and even more important, their families and descendants. God expected His people to leave inheritances for their children and grandchildren (Prov. 13:22a, [etc. loc. cit.])” — Calvin Beisner, *Prosperity and Poverty*, p.38.

- (2) Emancipation of indentured Israelites; note Liberty Bell text, 25:10, cast for 50th anniversary of Penn’s colony and heretofore unknown religious liberty
- (3) 70 year captivity based on Sabbath years and jubilees missed, II Chron. 36:21; Jer. 29:10; Lev. 26:34-5.
- (4) Eschatological implications: future year of Jubilee Is. 61:1ff.; NT references to the last trump

EXCURSUS on the YEAR OF JUBILEE (excerpts from G. Muthangya’s Investigation, Fall 1992, and from Michael Hudson’s “The Economic Roots of the Jubilee” as found in the *Bible Review*, Feb. 99, pp. 26ff.)

DEFINITION

Jubilee (“joyful shout, sound of the trumpet)

God apparently established the Jubilee year to prevent the nation from oppressing and cheating one another (Lev. 25:17). This law prevented a permanent system of classes from developing; it gave everyone the opportunity to start over, economically and socially. It reminds us of God’s concern for human liberty. God wants people to be free (Lk. 14:18,19), calling into question any social practice that leads to permanent bondage and loss of economic opportunity. It also stands as a witness to God’s desire for justice on the earth.

Hammurabi and the kings of other middle eastern countries proclaimed periodic “releases” or “clean slates” to bring a return of economic balance. Otherwise absentee creditors would have amassed large real estate holdings. But whereas these proclamations were random and by royal decree, the Mosaic Jubilee was by law scheduled to follow a generational pattern. This law reinforced the idea that God Himself was Owner of the land and that His people were stewards upon it, rather than allowing the king to be the deciding factor above God’s law and the land’s God (Lev. 25:23). Hence, *Lex Rex*, not *Rex Lex*.

PERSONAL LIBERTY

Since God had redeemed His people from the bondage in Egypt (25:42), none of them was again to be reduced to the status of a slave (v. 39). Poverty could, even at its worst, reduce an Israelite to a status no less than that of a hired servant, a wage earner, and then only until the year of Jubilee (v.40). God’s chosen child was not to be

oppressed (vv. 43,46). Indeed, as citizens of a theocratic kingdom, masters and servants had become brothers together (cf. Neh. 5:7-12; Phlm. 16). Thus seen in its widest application, only through loyalty to God could Israel as a nation ever hope to be free and independent of other masters.

Comparative Semitic studies suggest that if a citizen was forced into poverty by selling his land to pay his debts, then he was disenfranchised. Only land-holders could perform military service for the king (since they had at stake their home estate); landless people were disqualified from serving in the military. This may be why King Zedekiah proclaims an economic “release” (Jer. 34:8), canceling debts and freeing indentured servants. Then when the Babylonians are driven off, the King reneges on his release (34:11; see Hudson, p. 33).

RESTITUTION OF PROPERTY

The purpose for the restoration of property was to demonstrate that the earth is subject to God’s law, and not to man’s desires: “for the land is Mine” (Lev. 25:23). God’s legislation concerned the inalienability of Israel’s land titles. It required the reversion of all hereditary property to the family that originally possessed it and the reestablishment of the initial arrangement regarding God’s division of the land.

This did not teach either the socialistic economic theory that a person is entitled to the ownership of goods on the basis of his need, or the [capitalistic] system that allows an unlimited expansion of private property [at the expense of others]. On the contrary, it established a fixed title to the property assigned by God (Dt. 21:16 -by inheritance), so that the implied humanitarian factor is given a deeper theological foundation.

It should also be noted that the restitution of Israel’s property appears to have a typical significance, for the possession of the land by its individual Hebrew owners served as an acted prophecy of blessings of the Messianic age (Is. 61:1-3).

The year of Jubilee foreshadows the restoration of all that has been perverted by mankind’s sin, the establishment of the true liberty of the children of God, and the deliverance of creation from the bondage of corruption to which it has been subjected on account of human depravity (Lk. 4:17-21; Rom 8:19-23).

D. Mosaic Covt summarized — 26

1. Note conditionalities (vss. 3,4,14,18,21,23)

2. Blessings for obedience, 26:3-13

—note OT refrain of vv. 11,12 cf. II Cor 6:16; Rev. 21:3

Leviticus 26:11-12 I will set My tabernacle among you, and My soul shall not abhor you. ¹² I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.

3. Curses for disobedience, culminating in dispersion, vv. 14-39

4. Restoration on the basis of the unconditional Abrahamic Covt, vv. 40-45

E. Appendix (27) on worship through devoted articles (and their possible redemption)

VI. Summary of Leviticus from Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 46

Leviticus is a book operating within a context of grace. God has redeemed Israel, separated the people from their world (18:24), and given them laws by which they are to live (18:5) and by which the land to which he is bringing them is to be protected (ch. 26). In the final sense Leviticus is a political document describing Israel as a theocracy, an entity ruled by God. God is to be obeyed because of his holiness, demonstrated in the saving history of Israel; underlying the demands for ritual and personal purity in Lev. is the theology of redemption (11:45; 22:32-33; 25:38,55; 26:13,45). He is thus to be served exclusively and completely but with the very practical issue of how life within the covenant is to be maintained. Obedience within this framework is the final requirement. As Israel and the Israelite reflected the law that was the product of their covenant connection, they were impelled by the divine injunction, “you shall therefore keep my statutes and my ordinances, by doing which a man shall live; I am the Lord” (18:5).