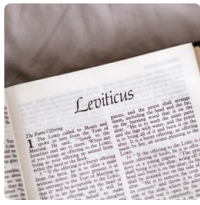


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Leviticus Introduction



Leviticus - Steve Gregg

Leviticus may seem tedious and irrelevant, but Steve Gregg highlights the importance of understanding God's character and the significance of the laws given in this book. While the book addresses the priesthood, it also addresses the people and their conduct. The concept of holiness and cleanliness is emphasized, with the word "clean" and its derivatives appearing 186 times in Leviticus. Although some of the laws described may not apply today, they can still teach us about the magnitude of the actions penalized and our need for grace and forgiveness.

Transcript

Leviticus Introduction Leviticus is an adjective. It means pertaining to the Levites. Now, the Hebrew name for the book is not Leviticus.

In the Hebrew language, in the Hebrew Bible, many of the books are named simply by taking the first word in the book and giving that as the name of the book. So that Genesis is in the Hebrew Bible called In the Beginning. Exodus in the Hebrew Bible is called Now These Are the Names because that's the first word in the book of Exodus.

In Leviticus, the first words in the book are And He Called. That is, And God Called Moses. And the word And He Called is one word in the Hebrew, which is, oh, let's see, it's kind of hard to pronounce, as you can see.

It's the Y-e-e-k-r-a. I think the accent on the last syllable, Y-e-e-k-r-a. Anyway, we don't ever have to say that word again, I don't suppose.

But that is the first Hebrew word in the text. And that is the name of the book in the Hebrew Bible. It means And He Called.

And it's not really a very fortunate title that it has come to be called Leviticus, which means pertaining to the Levites, because it's not really about the Levites. The Levites are only mentioned one time in this book. As such, when we say Levites, as opposed to the priesthood itself, the Levites are mentioned in chapter 25 and verse 33, but not in a particularly important sense.

worship in our modern Western way of thinking about things.

But that concept is only very recent. I shouldn't say very recent because it's been around probably as long as Christianity has been, but it's relatively recent in the sense that before Christianity for thousands of years, people worship God in a different way than that. Worship always meant offering sacrifices.

Remember when Abraham was told to offer Isaac on the mountain, he took his servants with him and Isaac to the foot of Mount Moriah. And then he told the servants, wait here. The lad and I are going up on the mountain to worship and we will return.

Now, he said, we're going up to worship. The servants knew what that meant and so did Isaac. And so Isaac said, well, where's the rent? Where's the land we're going to offer? Because worship always meant offering a sacrifice to God.

And by the way, it still does. It's just that now the sacrifices we offer are spiritual sacrifices. If in any sense our singing to the Lord is in fact worship, it is only because it is presenting the fruit of our lips as an acceptable sacrifice, a spiritual sacrifice to God.

If our giving in the offering is in fact worship, it is only because it is the sacrifice of our goods to the Lord. Really, the true sacrifice that we offer is that of our own selves. We present our bodies as a living sacrifice.

This is our acceptable service or spiritual worship, as some people translate, some translators translate Romans 12.1. The point is that worship does mean offering sacrifices. Our spiritual worship, Paul said, is offering our bodies as a living sacrifice. And these other things that we offer, spiritual sacrifices.

So sacrifice is worship and worship is sacrifice, whether we understood that way or not, because of our cultural upbringing in church and so forth. Now, that being so, the tent, the tabernacle was a worship center and therefore it was to be a place for sacrifices. Now, in those days it wasn't the spiritual sacrifices, it was bloody sacrifices.

We sometimes think of the tabernacle and maybe of the temple later, which Solomon built, as sort of the counterpart of our church buildings. You know, we go to church on Sunday, the Jews went to temple or tabernacle on Saturday, we think. But that's not really correct.

Eventually, the Jews in their religion did have something that resembled our local churches. They called those synagogues. God didn't institute the synagogue, but the Jews did after the Babylonian exile.

And the synagogue was very much like what we call a local church. People went there on Sabbath, they would sing, they would pray, they'd hear a sermon. And there was one of these synagogues in every town.

So it was like a local church. The temple never was like a local church. There was only one temple and before that only one tabernacle.

And it wasn't where everyone went on Saturday to sing songs and to hear a sermon. It was a slaughterhouse, is what it was. It was a bloody slaughterhouse.

And so what they did was they bring their animals there, slit their throats, drain out the blood, dismember them, burn them on an altar, eat some of it. And that's what temple worship was. That's what the tabernacle was for.

And therefore, now that we have the tabernacle standing, it's time to worship. And yet, how do you do so? Now, sacrifices had been offered for a long time, you know, from the days of Cain and Abel, maybe even before Cain and Abel, for all we know, with Adam and Eve. But God had never set up a system where he gave the procedures for acceptable sacrifices.

He apparently accepted, you know, willing sacrifices, no matter how they were offered before, if they were the right stuff. But this law of Leviticus wants to tell exactly all the procedures that need to be done in the case of certain kinds of sacrifices. There's different kinds of offerings.

And so Leviticus gives the means of worshipping God. It also gives the means of remaining ceremonially clean. A lot of the concern in Leviticus, like chapters 11 through 15, are about how to remain ceremonially clean, which means not being debarred from the sanctuary.

When you're clean, you can come and worship at the tabernacle. When you're unclean, you cannot. So again, these are concerns related to worship at the tabernacle.

Then the book also has a lot to do with holy living and moral living. And there's instructions for the priests about certain festival days and so forth. Now, the book of Leviticus, therefore, is a manual of worship for the Jews, primarily for the priests, but for the Jews in general.

And that would be the nature of the book. It's a manual of worship. Now, like the rest of the Pentateuch, the book of Leviticus is from Moses.

We don't know that Moses wrote down every word, but we know that Moses was the source. More probably, God was the source. We read that God spoke to Moses.

And Moses is specifically said to have written down much of what is there. And Jesus himself indicated that the laws in Leviticus were given by Moses, because when the leper was healed in Matthew chapter 8, Jesus said, go and offer the sacrifices that were commanded by Moses. He means those sacrifices which pertain to lepers in Leviticus chapters 13 and 14.

So Jesus indicated that Moses had given these laws. And in Leviticus, we are told again and again that this is so. In chapter 1, verse 1, it says, Now the Lord called to Moses and spoke to him.

In chapter 4, verse 1, it says, The Lord spoke to Moses saying. In chapter 6, verse 1, The Lord spoke to Moses. Chapter 8, verse 1, The Lord spoke to Moses.

Chapter 11, verse 1, The Lord spoke to Moses. Actually, of the 27 chapters in Leviticus, 17 of them begin with these words, The Lord spoke to Moses. So there's a very emphatic declaration that Moses and the Lord are the source of these laws.

The Lord is the real source and Moses is the one through whom they were given. God communicated these things to Moses. And as I mentioned in Matthew 8, 4, Jesus also attributed them to Moses by telling the leper who had been healed to go and offer the sacrifices that were commanded by Moses in the book of Leviticus.

Because it is primarily a manual of worship, there's really not much historical movement in the book. It would appear that these laws were given as soon as the tabernacle was erected. That would be necessary because they couldn't do anything in the tabernacle until they had these rules.

There'd be nothing to do. They'd have a big building standing up there and not a clue of what to do with it until these rules were given. So it would appear that the time frame of the book of Leviticus is immediately upon the construction of the tabernacle.

And it seems like it was about a month later that they began to move as the book of Numbers instructs them to do. And so between the setting up of the tabernacle in Exodus chapter 40 and the children of Israel beginning to move in Numbers chapter 1, we have God giving these instructions. So there's not much historical information here.

There are two historical portions. One of them is in chapters 8 through 10. And this is where the priests are consecrated and also where they sort of begin the ceremonies.

Although, as you know from reading the book already, in chapter 10 two of the priests are killed instantly when they defile the sanctuary by not following instructions. And that's one of the two historical bits that we find in the book of Leviticus. This matter of the first day of the priesthood, their consecration and they begin their services.

The other historical information is very brief. It's in chapter 24 verses 10 through 16. And that is the story of a man who is half Jewish and half Gentile and he blasphemed Yahweh.

And so Moses had to seek counsel from God as to what to do about the man and the man was put to death. But that's the only other historical story in the book of Leviticus. There's really only those two things.

The rest are all legislation. They're all code of behavior and worship. Now, obviously, as you've been reading through the Old Testament, you've now read through Leviticus as well, I'm sure.

You probably found Leviticus even more difficult in some ways than Exodus. Genesis is easy because it's a story that's rather interesting. Exodus is a story also up to about the halfway point.

But then later after that, we have all the details of the tabernacle, which some people find tedious. In fact, I think everyone probably finds in some measure tedious, but still, Exodus has a lot of interesting story in it. Leviticus does not.

Leviticus just is a law code. In fact, it presents lots of difficulties for people who decide they want to read through the Bible for the first time. They usually get through Genesis and they usually get through or almost through Exodus.

And if they try to get through Leviticus, many people get bogged down there. Because there's several difficulties that modern readers have with the book. And the first difficulty is just understanding what's going on in the rituals.

As you read, especially the first seven chapters and this description of the sacrifices and what the priests are supposed to do and the worshippers are supposed to do, we're just given sort of the specs. We're getting sort of like when we're given a description of the tabernacles. It's not exactly like a photograph.

It's more like a description of its specs, of its dimensions and things like that. Although there is a lot told about the colors and things like that, so we can in some measure get a mental picture of the tabernacle. Though we still don't know what a cherub looks like, although we're told, oh, there's two cherubim over the mercy seat and there's this ornate rim around the table of showbread.

But we don't know what that looks like. All we know is it's something. And we just have to realize that when, in addition to the information that God gave Moses about the tabernacle, he'd showed him a visual image of it, a pattern which could guide him in guiding the men, Bezalel and the others who worked on the tabernacle furniture.

He could say, oh, no, it didn't look like that. It looked like this, because Moses had seen something. We haven't seen it.

And the same thing is true for these rituals. We don't see the rituals. We only see, you know, make sure it's this kind of an animal and you do this with it and so forth.

But we can't, you know, if we were actually asked to act out these rituals just on the basis of what we have here, there'd be certain steps we wouldn't be sure how to take. But the priests would because they, you know, Moses was there receiving instructions

from God and every generation of priests after the first generation would have been raised watching this done. So all the procedures would be known.

The value of the book would be in case they woke up with amnesia one day and couldn't remember, is it a ram or is it a bull we're supposed to offer in this kind of a sacrifice? And it tells, you know, well, this is going to be one of those and this sacrifice and so forth. It's more like a technical manual. So it makes it hard for us to picture a lot of what's going on there, it seems to me.

Another difficulty is finding relevance today in these rituals. It is so foreign. I mean, animal sacrifices and the other things associated with ancient ritual religion are just really far removed, not only from our experience, but even from our sympathies.

Most of us would find it very unpleasant to be involved in this kind of thing. Now, I say most of us because most of us are probably urban or suburban dwellers. Actually, a farmer, a rancher who kills animals all the time wouldn't find anything particularly unpleasant about this.

Although I have heard that even people who work in slaughterhouses, it gets on them and they have to kind of rotate them in and out. They have to take a break because just killing the animals and all that bloody, violent stuff, I guess, gets to people. I would think it would.

Now, I used to say when I taught Leviticus that, you know, one of the values of the sacrifice is to show the violence and the loathsomeness and so forth of sin because of the horrible measures that had to be taken to remedy it in the sacrificial system. And I had a man in my classes once who had been raised on a farm. He said, you sound like a city slicker.

And I am. I have to admit it, I am. I was never raised on a farm.

I never butchered an animal. When I was about junior high, a friend of mine butchered a rabbit for a 4-H project and I about fainted. I dropped out of biology class when they started dissecting earthworms.

I don't like to cut animals open. To me, it's not pleasant, but that's just because of my sheltered conditioning. These people were all agrarian society folks.

Killing animals was not so unusual for them. Nonetheless, just because someone becomes accustomed to it doesn't take away from the fact that it's strange. You know, you bring an innocent animal, a little baby goat or a little baby sheep or a calf or something, and you slit its throat, and the birds, you twist the heads off the birds and you tear them apart.

It's pretty violent stuff. It's pretty nasty stuff. So a lot we get used to it.

I mean, I haven't gotten used to it, but people have done that kind of thing when they're plucking chickens to eat and so forth forever. But when you think about it, that living thing giving its blood and giving its life when it's completely innocent is something that no matter how used to it a person becomes, it still is a pretty violent and a pretty harsh thing to the animal. And we often, especially those of us who are raised more in a city life, would find it very difficult, very unpleasant to have this kind of sacrifice and so forth.

And we don't see how it's relevant to us because we don't do that anyway. You read Leviticus and you're reading page after page after page of rituals that you know that you don't have to ever do. You'll never do this, nor would you like to.

And so that's a difficulty. It just seems remote from us culturally and in experience. And another difficulty, as I said, is the difficulty we find in sympathizing with God's judgment about certain matters.

Putting to death a man who blasphemes, two priests burned to a crisp under the judgment of God because they offered incense with the wrong coals. It's pretty severe. There's a lot of capital crimes mentioned in Leviticus that we might think, well, you know, those are bad things, but really, are they worthy of death? And so our sympathies are not always entirely with the book of Leviticus, at least not naturally so.

Now, my opinion is this, that when we find ourselves out of step with what God's word says, it's not God's word that's got the problem. It's we who have to be transformed by the renewal of our mind. Now, that doesn't mean that we need to develop a state of mind where we want to go out and kill adulterers and kill homosexuals and kill witches and so forth.

That's not what I'm suggesting. I don't think God liked killing them either. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, the Bible says.

It's a matter of understanding what justice is and what righteousness is. It's not a question of whether we want to go out and be the enforcers or the executioners. It's just a question of whether we recognize that some things are heinous crimes.

And when we find that God has ordered the death penalty for certain things that we wouldn't have thought deserve the death penalty, instead of thinking, well, how is God going to justify himself in this? We have to ask ourselves, well, how do we justify ourselves in seeing it otherwise? Because God's law is perfect and good and true. And therefore, when we find that God assigns a certain penalty to a certain action, that should tell us something about the magnitude of the action that has to be penalized in that way. God's law instructs us about what's just and good.

And although we are not the ones and would not even wish to be the ones who would go out and execute those who do these things, they give us a correct perspective on how

evil certain things are that we might otherwise be acclimated to. Just like I said, we're not used to killing animals, but we could become used to it if we lived on a ranch or a farm or worked in a slaughterhouse. We could get numb to it.

But it's still when you step back from it a little bit and you're not used to it, you think, that does seem kind of violent. That seems kind of ugly. That seems rather severe.

But you can get used to it. And the same thing is true about many sins. We get used to them.

We get numb to them. But what the law points out is how evil sin is. The exceeding sinfulness of sin, we might say, is illustrated in the judgments that God brings.

And when we find ourselves out of sympathy with God's judgments, we have to realize that we are the ones who are out of touch with the reality, not God. God is not out of touch with reality. He knows what the just penalty is for certain actions.

And when the penalty seems extreme or severe or overmuch from our point of view, then it means that we have underestimated the magnitude of the particular crime for which such punishments have been prescribed. But these difficulties do attach to the study of the book of Leviticus. And as we recognize these difficulties, we need to realize that these difficulties arise because of deficiencies in our own sympathies, in our own experiences and not any problems with God.

We can be glad as we read these things that this is not the way that we conduct our worship today, that this has been changed. There's a new covenant and these procedures are no longer required, but there are still lessons from them. Remember, Paul said in 2nd Timothy, chapter 2, chapter 3, excuse me, verses 16 and 17, 2nd Timothy 3, 16 and 17 says all scripture and Paul means Old Testament scripture.

He doesn't have any New Testament scripture to refer to. He says all scripture is given by inspiration of God. And he said it's all profitable to the Christian for what? For teaching, for reproof, for correction and for instruction in righteousness.

So certainly, Paul, when he thought of all scripture, meaning the Old Testament, he certainly had the law in mind, as well as the prophets and the other parts. And he said these things are profitable to Christians to instruct us, to teach us, to correct us, to modify our sensitivities, hopefully, so that we might be changed, we might be transformed by the renewing of our mind. Obviously, we have even greater challenges in some ways with the teachings of Jesus, because he makes the requirements, he raises the bar for us, makes the requirements more difficult.

On the other hand, we find his teaching more palatable many times because he doesn't seem to be in favor of killing the woman taken in adultery and things like that. You know, we find ourselves more sympathetic with Jesus in many cases. But the point is, Jesus

actually did not disagree with the law.

In fact, in that very issue of stoning an adulteress, which the law prescribed, what did Jesus think about that? They brought a woman taken in adultery to him in John chapter eight. And they said Moses said we should stone her. What do you say? Now, Jesus didn't say, Moses, he was way off on that.

Moses, he was just too severe. What he says, well, whoever is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone. Now, what does that really, what's that really saying? Okay, fair enough.

Stoning her does sound like the right thing to do. So who's going to do it? You know, go ahead and throw the first stone. Now, we might say that in saying that Jesus was abolishing stoning adulteress and maybe, in fact, he was.

But his statement assumes that if somebody was qualified to throw that first stone, it should be done. What she had done deserves what Moses prescribed. However, everybody in the crowd had done things that deserved punishment.

So it would be rather hypocritical, he seemed to be implying, for anyone to make himself an executioner. But he did not diminish the magnitude of her crime. Had he wished, since he had not sinned, he could have cast the first stone.

But he chose not to. He chose to have mercy instead. But he did not ever indicate that stoning an adulteress was not an appropriate punishment.

He didn't, as far as I know, disagree with it. But he transcended it by showing mercy. And likewise, when Jesus dealt with the subject in the Sermon on the Mount, when he said, you've heard that it said an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

This is found in the law in Leviticus and so forth. When Jesus said, but I say to you, do not resist the evil man. But, you know, if a man strikes you on one cheek, turn the other and so forth.

Jesus was not abolishing or disagreeing with the law for an eye and tooth for tooth. That law was given to the magistrates. That was the code for criminal justice.

Jesus didn't come and present an alternative criminal justice code. He didn't say from now on, the judges shouldn't use that code. They should use this other code because Jesus didn't address any magistrates.

He addressed his disciples. He said, if someone strikes you, turn the other cheek. In other words, yes, the law code does say that if someone strikes you on one cheek, then you can take them to court and the judge will let you strike them on one cheek.

And that's an eye for an eye, tooth for tooth. That's what the courts would allow. But you

don't need to seek redress in the courts.

You can forget. You can just absorb injuries, can't you? In other words, Jesus didn't say that an eye for an eye, tooth for tooth is an unjust law and should be changed. He didn't show any evidence that he didn't agree with it.

He simply was pointing out to his disciples that even though that is the code, even though that is the way that the judges are required to penalize criminals. Who are brought before them, you as the victim don't have to bring them out of the court at all. If someone strikes you, let them strike you again.

You don't have to make an issue of it. However, if it was brought to court, there certainly is nothing more just than equal justice. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, stroke for stroke, life for life.

So we do not find Jesus in any way criticizing the justice of these laws. He simply brings in a new order which allows for grace, which allows for forgiveness, which encourages that his disciples exhibit the same grace and forgiveness that God is offering through Christ. And therefore, we don't see the same harshness and the same vengeance and so forth in the New Testament that we seem to see authorized in the law.

But remember, there still are law courts and Jesus did not come to abolish civil government. Jesus didn't come and say, from now on, we're just going to have anarchy here and everyone do what's right in his own eyes. That would be perhaps okay if everybody was a godly person.

But if there's a lot of criminals running around, it's not loving to set up a society that doesn't have any way to stop the criminals from victimizing people. The law courts are still there to do that. And Jesus never told the judges, turn the other cheek.

You know, when a murderer is brought into your court and you're the one who's supposed to protect society from any future crimes of offense, you don't just turn the other cheek. That's not what the courts do. That's not what the courts are for.

That's what Christians do in their relationships with people who are hostile to them. And so we need to put things in their proper perspective. Israel was a civil government as well as a worshipping community.

And the laws of Leviticus guide them in their worship and in their civil organization as a society and therefore give instructions, and as far as we know, very good instructions, to the judges and to those who rule how to punish criminals and such. The primary message of the book is the holiness of God. The expression in Leviticus 11 is also quoted by Peter as belonging to the Christian as well.

Chapter 11 of Leviticus 44 and 45 says, For I am the Lord your God, or I am Yahweh your

God. You shall therefore sanctify yourselves and you shall be holy for I am holy. You shall be holy for I am holy.

He says it also in chapter 19 and verse 2. It says speak to all the children of Israel and say to them, you shall be holy for I the Lord your God am holy. And so Peter quotes that as being something that's still relevant to us as Christians. And we better keep that in mind, because this is the central message of Leviticus.

And if Peter says it's still for us, then we better know how this message applies to New Testament community. In 1 Peter chapter 1, it says in verses 15 and 16, But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, Be holy for I am holy. So we see that Peter quotes Leviticus as a guide to all of our behavior.

Be holy in all your conduct, because Leviticus says, Be holy, I am holy, God says. So the Holy God is still the Holy God, even in the New Covenant. And the Holy God still expects his people to approximate his own behavior.

That is really the obligation of all the creation is to reflect the glory and the character of the Creator. And so those who actually have come back over to his side from the rebellion are those who are expected to do that. I mean, all people are going to be judged for whether they do that or not.

But most of the world is a rebellion. Christians are by definition, the people who've given up on the rebellion and have come over onto his side. And therefore, our job description, our task, our assignment is to be holy like he is.

The stress on holiness is seen, for example, in that the expression, I am Yahweh. Sometimes I am Yahweh, your God is stated 45 times. And the word holiness or holy or the derivatives of that word are found 131 times in Leviticus.

Interestingly, the word clean or unclean or cleanness or those derivatives of that concept are found 186 times Leviticus. Being clean, being holy, recognizing that Yahweh, the Holy God is your God, is really strongly repeated. You find a lot of repetition of these lines, obviously.

And if you've got 27 chapters and you've got 45 times in those chapters that he says, I am Yahweh, your God, and 131 times that he uses the word holy or something equivalent to it, then that's rather thick occurrence of these concepts in such a book of this length. The setting of the book. We, you know, every book has its setting, and this has a time frame and it has a geographical setting, although it's really not a book of historical information, except in the case of the two stories it tells.

But there is a geographical setting that is repeatedly mentioned, and that is at Mount Sinai. Four times we're told that these laws were given at Mount Sinai. Now, the Tabernacle was erected after the Israelites had been at Mount Sinai about, what about,

how many months? They'd been out of Egypt for 11 months or so.

And I think they'd been at Mount Sinai probably nine of those months, something like that. And they didn't stay there much longer than that. And so Mount Sinai, there's only a small window of time that this could have been given, and it was while they were still at Sinai.

In chapter 7 and verse 38 it says, The Lord commanded Moses on Mount Sinai on the day when he commanded the children of Israel to offer their offerings to the Lord in the wilderness of Sinai. And so also there are three other times, chapter 25, verse 1, chapter 26, verse 46, and chapter 27, verse 34, that mention that Mount Sinai was the location where this was given. As far as the time setting, not much is said about any particular date except in chapter 9, verse 1, which says it came to pass on the eighth day.

That's the only day that specifically is given as any, you know, something you could mark on a calendar. The eighth day apparently is the eighth day after the tabernacle was set up. And there was a seven day period of consecrating the priests.

And so on the eighth day, things began. And the tabernacle was open for business, so to speak. Not for business, but for worship.

And so that's the only time reference given in the book. Despite its difficulties that it presents to a modern reader, the book does have abiding value to a Christian. And we need to know that if we're going to study it, because it takes some energy to study a book like this.

It takes a commitment of some time and focus. And we're not likely to do that unless we see there's some value in it to us. It's worth the effort, worth the investment.

And the first thing that it provides is a revelation of the character of God, because God's character doesn't change. God may make a new covenant that supplants the old covenant, but it's the same God. And he's not any different after he's made the new covenant than he was when he made the old covenant.

A lot of times people think that God in the old covenant was a very harsh and mean and peevish and short-fused individual, but that in the New Testament, somehow God became more, I don't know, secure, more mature, more generous. Somehow God became nicer. But the Bible doesn't teach that at all.

The impression that people get that way is because we do read about a lot of judgment in the Old Testament. And we don't read about very much judgment in the New Testament. And so we figure, well, God was really doing a lot of judging, a lot of penalizing, a lot of killing in the Old Testament.

Thankfully, we don't find him doing that so much in the New Testament. But the truth of

the matter is that disparity only exists because the Old Testament covers 4,000 years of history and the New Testament covers only about 30 years of history. Now, God did a lot more judging in 4,000 years than he did in 30 years.

But you know what? He did the same kind of judging in those 30 years as he did in the previous time. You find Nadab and Abihu destroyed instantly for burning strange fire in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, we see Ananias and Sapphira being struck down instantly for lying to the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament, we find the earth opening up and swallowing Korah and his rebels. In the New Testament, we find the angel of the Lord striking Herod while he gives a speech and worms eat him and he dies in Acts chapter 12. These are exactly the same kinds of things in the Old Testament is in the New Testament.

The difference is you've got a lot more of them in the Old Testament because it's a lot more stories, a lot more generations, a lot more time for God to deal with people. In a single generation, we find instances in the New Testament of such judgments. And the book of Revelation certainly is a New Testament book that describes judgments every bit as horrendous as any of those that came upon sinners in the Old Testament.

So the Old Testament God is the same as the New Testament God, and we find much about his character revealed in the book of Leviticus. What makes him upset? What he wants? What his values are? God's character. If we're going to relate with God now, we need to know what kind of God he is.

And we find that he is a God who has revealed himself in his law as well as in other ways since then. Because in the Psalms and in the prophets and of course in Jesus himself, we find revelation of God's character that goes beyond the law, but doesn't contradict it. And so this is one aspect of God.

Behold the goodness and the severity of God, Paul said in Romans 11, 22. We see the goodness of God in many of the Old Testament and New Testament stories, but we also see the severity of God in his laws, in the penalties and in many of the stories of the Old Testament and of the New. So we got the revelation of God's character there.

We also have in Leviticus an inspired civil law code and by civil law code, I'm referring to the way that governments and courts judge criminal cases. Now, it could be argued that many of the things in this civil law code do not apply to other nations other than Israel, because there were penalties for things like breaking the Sabbath and blaspheming God and worshiping idols and so forth. And obviously these penalties accrued, applied to Israel because they were in a special covenant relation with God and for them to worship idols or to violate the Sabbath was to violate the specific covenant that God had made with them.

And therefore, you know, some of those laws would not be relevant to other societies that are more what we call pluralistic. For example, America or frankly any Western nation today, they do not have an understood covenant between them as a nation and God. They're pluralistic.

Christians are welcome to be there. Muslims are welcome to be there. Buddhists, atheists, anyone could be in these countries on equal terms.

There is no assumption that the country, America or England or Germany or Australia or France, that those countries are somehow God's countries in covenant relation with God. And therefore, in pluralistic societies like that, one could argue that the civil code that punishes Sabbath breakers and blasphemers and idolaters would not be applicable. But many of the crimes that are for which punishment is assigned in the book of Exodus are issues that are more moral and social issues, things that have to do with general relations between human beings.

And that's just the kind of thing that criminal law is supposed to be controlling. Criminal law courts should be concerned primarily with one person victimizing another person, with one person being a victim and needing some kind of redress from the courts and one person being a criminal and requiring some kind of punishment from the courts. And while, as I say, in Leviticus, some of those crimes are religious crimes that wouldn't apply to a pluralistic or a secular society, yet every society has got to protect its citizens and every society must have courts to punish criminals who victimize other people.

And so we find in Leviticus, as in the rest of the Law of Moses, appropriate penalties to certain crimes that must remain criminal offenses in any society because they victimize people. Now, does that include things like adultery? It does. Adultery is a criminal offense.

I mean, it's perjury, isn't it? You make an oath, a person proceeds into a marriage covenant with you because you've made a promise to them. I mean, if you make a contract and commit a breach of contract, the courts will deal with it. And adultery is a breach of contract, and therefore there's a victim.

If someone commits adultery, their spouse is a victim, and therefore the courts should do something about it. Our courts don't, but in the Bible they did and courts should. And same thing with theft and other things.

Now, notice in the civil codes of Leviticus there was not really such a thing as a prison sentence. One might think that's largely because when they're wandering through the wilderness it's kind of hard to maintain prisons since they don't even have any settled existence, but we don't even read of them building prisons once they settled in the land of Canaan. Rather than people being viewed as enemies of the state and getting punished by putting put in jail, violent criminals or people who are in some sense were

dangerous to society were given very severe penalties, usually death.

If you raped, you know, well, you could get married if you raped somebody, if their father would permit it. But if you kidnapped, if you murdered, if you committed adultery, if you were a menace to society, there were many things that the criminals could just put to death for that, and society wouldn't have any more of those menaces around. If you damaged somebody's property, well, you had to make restitution to them.

That means you had to pay it back with interest. That's just. You didn't just go to jail and the victim remains without his property and you're paying off some kind of a penalty that you owe to the state.

There was no state to be offended. There was God and there were people that got offended by crimes and penalties did not reflect the same kind of mentality of our modern civil laws where, you know, the victim of the crime often is never given back what he had lost. And the courts just want to punish people who break their laws because it's an offense to the state.

Now, the law of Moses is different than that. Now, when we were talking about Exodus before, I mentioned that in Deuteronomy chapter 4, Moses indicated that these laws that God gave are the most righteous and good laws that a society could have. And in fact, the laws of God that are given to Israel would be a model to all nations of what's good and what's right.

In Deuteronomy chapter 4, verses 5 through 8, it says, Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore, be careful to observe them for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, Surely this is a great nation. I'm sorry, this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

For what great nation is there that has God so near to it as Yahweh our God is to us for whatever reason we may call upon him. And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day. So we say the nations will say, Wow, where these people get these wise and good laws.

And so Moses himself believed that although God only gave these laws to Israel and not to other nations, yet they would be a light to the nations in a sense. The nations could learn what is justice and what is right and what's wise. And so we do find in Leviticus an inspired code of criminal justice of civil law in Romans chapter seven.

Again, I recently pointed these verses out to you when we're talking about some of the laws in Exodus. But in Romans chapter seven verse twelve, Paul said, Therefore, the law is holy and the commandment is holy and just and good. He means the Old Testament

law.

He goes on to say, But it didn't do me much good because I'm sold under sin and I can't do the things that I want to do. But as far as the law is concerned, Paul said, I got no complaints about it. It's holy, it's just and it's good.

Well, what better things can you ask for from a law? Any nation that has laws, if the Apostle Paul could say of those laws, those laws are holy and they are just and they are good. That nation would have as good laws as any people could hope to ever have. And so it would seem that nations can be enlightened by Leviticus, although, of course, one has to discern which laws in Leviticus apply to Israel as a covenant people of God and which ones would apply simply as laws describing justice that any nation should follow.

It's also got an inspired moral code. Of course, the morals of Leviticus are pretty foreign to our own ideas, and it may be in some ways that ours have even gone farther ahead in a good sense. For example, in the law of Moses, we do find still the practice of slavery.

We do find the permission to have multiple wives or to divorce without very much specific, you know, information about what constitutes grounds for divorce. The law doesn't change everything that needed to be changed. Some of that was left to be changed by Jesus and the Apostles and the Christian message and the influence of the kingdom of God in the world.

And so it has. It has been to a very large degree the influence of the kingdom of God going to the nations that has eliminated polygamy and slavery and even the kinds of easy divorce that was practiced in the law. Unfortunately, as our own society has moved further away from God's word as a guide, we see our own society crumbling in these very areas.

And although we don't see a reinstatement of slavery again, we certainly do see destruction of marriage, which the New Testament would have preserved us from if we'd been loyal to it. But the point is that under the law, slavery was permitted. It was not considered to be an injustice to own a slave and therefore, apparently, it is not an injustice to own a slave.

There may be things that are injustices associated with slavery, like if you kidnap your slave from somewhere or if you abuse your slave or treat a slave in an unjust way. Well, then, of course, that's unjust. But if a man, for example, in Israel had sold himself into slavery because he couldn't pay his debts and because he was more financially secure as a slave of a good and rich man than as a man trying to make it out on his own and had already proven he couldn't handle his own finances.

There's nothing unjust about a man owning a slave. It's against our own cultures understanding, but there's again the case where, you know, unfortunately, we have

people today who are judging the morality of the Bible by the popular morality of modern times. And as far as I'm concerned, there's really nothing about our modern times, unless it reflects what the Bible itself teaches that, let's say, unless our modern times, if the mentality of our modern times is more agreeable, let's say, with the spirit of Christ, than something that we find in the law, well, then that's fine.

But a lot of times our modern times, our sensitivities are contrary to that of Leviticus, not because we are more in touch with the spirit of Christ, but because we are simply more humanistic or more feministic or more something else, just more pluralistic. And therefore, we, you know, our society does not stand up for some of the principles that are true and which would be found, assumed to be true in Leviticus, but not assumed to be true in our post-Enlightenment era Western civilization. By the way, the Enlightenment era of the 18th century was maybe good in some ways, but when we call it the Enlightenment, that's a secular term.

It's not, it was not a revival of religion. It was, in very many respects, a humanistic and even an atheistic revival, or at least agnostic of, you know, it was an Enlightenment in terms of philosophical affirmation. Of the value of man and so forth.

And of course, man does have value and a lot of positive changes come to society because of the appreciation for human rights and human dignity. But unfortunately, a lot of times the assertion of human rights and human dignity is at the expense of God's rights and God's dignity. And man is put almost in the place of God so that not everything in the Enlightened world is closer to Christianity than it was before.

So some things are. We have to judge all things by the scriptures. And Leviticus is still scripture.

Jesus judged things by Leviticus. Paul seemed to believe that the morals of the law were good morals. In Romans chapter 7, when he's complaining about how he does not do the things he wants to do, and he does do the things he doesn't want to do, in verse 16 of Romans 7, he says, If then I do what I will not do, I agree with the law that it is good.

That is, if I find myself falling short of what the law says to do, and that is what I don't want, I don't want to fall short of it, then I must be agreeing that the law is good. The morality of the law is a good thing. And that when I fall short of it, I don't, I'm doing something that I don't really want to do.

My own heart approves with the law that is good. In Romans 8 chapter 4, Paul said that what Christ has done for us has provided a circumstance that allows us, in verse 4, that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. That is, if we're walking in the spirit, we find that the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in us.

And the righteous requirements I take to be the moral requirements of the law. We, if we walk in the spirit, we will not be murdering and committing adultery and stealing and bearing false witness and dishonoring our parents and violating the morals of the law. Paul said that what the spirit does is actually brings to pass in our lives the fulfillment of that righteous behavior that the law requires.

So it is a moral code, a code of righteousness that the New Testament seems even to approve of. Now, Jesus, obviously, in the Sermon on the Mount, some people think that he changed the standards of the law. But when people say that, they're not really paying attention to anything Jesus said on the subject.

They're thinking, oh, yeah, it seems like Jesus said, you have heard that it was said something or another from the law. But I say to you something else. And they think, oh, I think Jesus changed it.

Did he? When he said, you have heard that it was said you should not murder? What did he change about that? Did he say, but I say to you to go ahead and murder? No, he's, of course, you're still not supposed to murder. He expanded on it and don't even be angry at your brother. He said, you have heard that it was said do not commit adultery.

Did he change that? He didn't change that. He never said, but I say you commit adultery. No, he said, I'm telling you that you shouldn't commit adultery.

Just like you've heard, you shouldn't, you shouldn't. In fact, you shouldn't even look at a woman to lust after because that's adultery too. When he said, if you divorce your wife, you've heard it was said, if you divorce your wife, give her a writing of divorcement.

Does Jesus turn around and say, but I say if you divorce your wife, don't give her a writing of divorcement. No, he just says you shouldn't divorce her at all if not for the cause of fornication. He doesn't change the law.

He says, you've heard that it was said, do not lie under oath, don't defraud yourself. But I say to you, lie under oath. No, he says, don't, don't even require oaths to be honest.

Be honest even when you don't have, don't lie even when you haven't made an oath. That's what he says. He doesn't change anything.

He says, you've heard that it was said, an eye for an eye, truth for truth. I say, don't resist the evil man. But like I said, he's saying true, the civil law code says that a man who takes your eye, if he's brought before the judges, the judgment is his eye should be removed.

But I say to you, don't even let it go to court. Just turn the other cheek. He doesn't say the courts should change their standards.

He just says, you as a victim don't have to seek legal redress against someone who comes against you. He doesn't change the law. He changes our behavior.

He changes our attitude. Sure, you can go to court and the courts should still send a criminal to jail. If someone breaks into your house and you take him to court, the courts should punish him.

But, and Jesus didn't really say in any ways that the punishment should be changed. He just indicated you should be willing to absorb those injuries rather than seeking retaliation and redress from the courts. And when he said, you've heard that it was said, you should love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

Well, he did contradict that, but that's because that wasn't in the law. The law doesn't say you shall hate your enemy. It does say you shall love your neighbors, you love yourself.

And that was in Leviticus. And Jesus didn't disagree with that. But it says, you've heard that it was said, you shall hate your enemy.

Well, where'd they hear that? It must have been from the rabbis because it's not in the Old Testament. The Old Testament doesn't say you shall hate your enemy. In fact, it says the opposite.

It says if your enemy hungers, give him food. If he's thirsty, give him drink. It says that in Proverbs chapter 25, verses 21 and 22.

It says in the law of Moses and what I guess is chapter 22 of Exodus. It says, if you see the donkey of your enemy falling under its load, help it up. If you see the ox of the man who hates you wandering free, you take it back to him.

In other words, do good to your enemies. That's what Jesus taught. Jesus didn't, I don't know of anything Jesus ever taught that contradicts the Old Testament laws.

Even the, you know, let him that is without sin cast the first stone at her. He didn't say, no, she should not be stoned. He just, it's rather like the turn the other cheek thing.

He didn't say that it shouldn't be an eye for an eye, tooth for tooth. It's just you shouldn't, you know, you shouldn't require that the matter be taken to court. And likewise, you know, sure, she should be stoned, but you guys aren't the ones to be doing that.

And probably no one should be because there's probably no one here who's righteous enough to qualify. And so what Jesus taught is that if people were to be stoned to death, it should be by people who aren't guilty of similar crimes, who themselves don't deserve to be stoned to death. Judges should be righteous people.

They're going to judge. Well, anyway, the code, the moral code in the book of Leviticus is abiding in value. Also, there's many types of shadows of Christ, which we'll look at as we go through.

And of course, Christ and teaching about Christ are of abiding value to us. So the ultimate value of Leviticus probably is the picture it paints of Christ and the things it tells us about him. Real quickly, the outline of the book, and then we'll take a break here.

I would divide the book pretty much into two major sections with an appendix. The last chapter, 27, would be an appendix about tithes and things that are dedicated to God and so forth. It doesn't seem to fit into the outline of the book in general.

Looks like just sort of some scraps after the rest has been given. But the first 16 chapters, chapter one through 16, seem to focus on atonement and cleanness, the sacrifices and ceremonial cleanness. Whereas the chapter 17 through 26 could be called the holiness code.

And the holiness code is how to live a holy life. Now, the first part, the first 16 verses, is how to maintain access to God, how to get right with God, how to settle matters up if you've sinned against God, how to stay clean so that you, in a sense, don't get alienated from the tabernacle, so that your access to God is not impinged upon. But the second part is how to live a holy life before God.

And for Israel, it's in some ways a little different because they had to be a religiously holy community. But we too, but we have different religious practices. We don't offer the animal sacrifices and the blood and all that stuff.

But the point is, the book divides pretty much into those two concerns, atonement and cleanness in the first part and holiness of conduct in the second part. So we might compare those things to, in the first instance, justification. How are we made just in the sight of God? How are we made acceptable to God through the blood sacrifice of Christ? The second part we could refer to as separation.

That's what holiness means, separate, set apart. And so the law of holiness is how we are separate from the world. Not geographically separate, not like we go off into some monastery somewhere and separate ourselves that way, but we are separate in principle and in spirit and in our behavior and our values.

We're separate from the world. And so that's what the second part would be about. You can see in the notes I gave you that these, of course, break down into smaller sub points.

The first 16 chapters, here's how I would divide it. The first seven chapters are the five offerings. The next three chapters, chapters 8 through 10, are dealing with the priests, their consecration and their beginning, their ministry and the judgment that came on Nadab and Abihu.

Then chapters 11 through 15 would be different things related to cleanness and uncleanness, animals, body secretions, things like that, leprosy. And then chapter 16 is the Day of Atonement, which has to do with God cleansing the whole nation once a year through the ministrations of the high priest and the holy of holies. So that's how the first part breaks down.

The second part has more pieces to it. The holiness code. First of all, the holiness of blood being separated for God and chapter 17 verses chapters 18 through 20 has to do with the holiness of the behavior of the people.

A whole lot of laws are given in chapter 18 and then in penalties for the breach of them in chapter 20. The holiness of the priests and their behavior, who they can marry and what they can do, what they cannot do. In chapters 21 and 22, then you've got the holy festivals, the holy calendar of Israel, chapter 23.

Chapter 24 has more than one thing in it, but it's perhaps the thing of greatest interest is the law of the blasphemer and the penalty that comes upon a blasphemer who, of course, violates the holiness of God's name. And then there are holy years as well as holy days. In chapter 25, we have the Sabbath years and the Jubilee years.

And then finally, in chapter 26, kind of a fitting close to the book. And that's why I said chapter 27, which has scraps of other concerns, almost seems like an appendix. Chapter 26 has a lengthy pronouncement of blessings on people who do the right thing and curses on those who do the wrong thing.

And, you know, lists of things that people will be blessed for and cursed for. And that's how the book ends. Or should end.

Actually, there's the appendix. It doesn't quite end there, but the third part of it would be the appendix at the end, chapter 27. And so that's the outline of the book.

So we take our break and we come back. We'll look at the first seven chapters, the five offerings that are prescribed there.