

Why Should Christians Study Leviticus? (Leviticus Introduction)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Leviticus

I. Why Should Christians Study the Book of Leviticus?

- a. For many Christians, this book may be the most unpopular one in the entire Bible!
 - i. Frequent objections I hear to studying this book include:
 1. This book is primarily focused on the Old Testament sacrificial system, including rather technical rules and regulations. Since that system was done away with by Jesus at the cross, many conclude that this book is no longer relevant.
 2. Many find it hard to understand and/or boring. It begins with a lot of detail about animal sacrifices.
 3. The presentation of God here is harsh: He is requiring many animals to be killed, with lots of blood and gore.
 4. Those looking for help to face the challenges of life and faith do not think they can find anything useful or helpful in this book. Therefore, they tend to ignore or neglect it in their personal study.
 - a. They do not consider it relevant to their lives.
 - ii. The first reaction of my wife, when she first heard we would be studying this book, was to wonder aloud *why* we were planning to do this. So, if your first reaction is similar, “Why would I want to study **Leviticus?**”, you are not alone!
- b. I believe there are several very good reasons why Christians today should study the book of **Leviticus**. Some of those reasons include:
 - i. Paul said that the Old Testament was filled with things *useful for Christians*.
 1. After quoting from **Psalm 69** to make a point about living to meet the needs of others rather than just living to please ourselves, Paul adds:
 - a. “For whatever things were written before were written *for our learning*, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”
(Romans 15:4, NKJV)

2. Paul told Timothy that all the Scriptures he learned from youth (the Old Testament) were both inspired and useful.
 - a. “and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*, that the man of God may be *complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*” (2 Timothy 3:15–17, NKJV)
 3. This is one of the reasons we strongly encourage all Christians to read and study *the entire Bible*, and why we do expository teaching from throughout both the Old Testament and the New Testament.
- ii. The temple practices and the Laws of Moses (found in **Leviticus**) are very helpful to better understand things that are discussed in other books of the Bible.
1. This will help us understand aspects of stories found in the historical books of the Old Testament, as well as things referenced in the **Psalms** and the writings of the prophets.
 2. In the gospels are several references to the Jewish religious practices, holy days, the High Priest, priests and the temple. They provide a backdrop to many of the events. Examples include:
 - a. Zechariah the priest is serving at the temple, burning incense at the altar of incense, in **Luke 1:8-23**, when the angel appears and speaks to him.
 - b. The baby Jesus is dedicated at the temple in **Luke 2:22-35**, in accordance with **Leviticus 12:8** (which is quoted).
 - c. The backdrop for the events of **John 7** is a celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, which is explained in **Leviticus 23**.
 - d. In **Matthew 8:1-4**, Jesus heals a man with leprosy and then instructs him to show himself to the priest and offer the gift prescribed by Moses. Here He is referring to instructions found in **Leviticus 13-14**.

3. The sacrificial system is the background for much of the book of **Hebrews**. That book is focused on explaining the excellence of the new covenant compared to the old, and what it means to live a life of faith. That involves persevering and remaining faithful to the end.
4. The apostles and writers use metaphors based on the Levitical system to describe important concepts.
 - a. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a *living sacrifice*, holy, acceptable to God, which is *your reasonable service*." (**Romans 12:1**, NKJV)
 - b. "Yes, and if I am being *poured out as a drink offering* on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all." (**Philippians 2:17**, NKJV)
 - i. While regulations related to the drink offering are discussed in **Numbers 15**, this is part of the entire sacrificial system outlined in **Leviticus**.
- iii. Understanding the Levitical laws will give us a better appreciation for much of the New Testament (and should help us not to take the teachings of Paul out of context). A major question in the early church was whether the Gentile converts also had to follow the Laws of Moses. This was touched on in:
 1. **Acts 10-11**: Peter's vision regarding eating unclean animals (**Leviticus 11**) helps show him that Gentiles can become Christians.
 2. **Acts 15**: The apostles wrestle with the idea of whether the Gentile converts will need to follow the Law of Moses (which includes Levitical dietary and other requirements).
 3. **Acts 21-26**: The reason the Jews rioted against Paul in Jerusalem, and that he was imprisoned there and ultimately taken to Caesarea and Rome, was for preaching to the Gentiles (and telling them they did not need to follow the Law of Moses).
 - a. Read **Acts 17:21-25**.
 - b. Read **Acts 22:20-24**.

4. **Romans 1-11**: Paul addresses what happened to the Jews spiritually, and how the Gentiles are now saved without having to follow the Mosaic Law.
5. Paul's letters to the **Colossians, Ephesians** and **Galatians** addresses the idea that we are salvation through faith in Jesus, without having to follow the Law of Moses.
 - a. In **Galatians**, Paul quotes from **Genesis, Leviticus** and **Deuteronomy** to make his point that we are no longer under the Law of Moses.
 - i. In **Galatians 3:12**, Paul quotes **Leviticus 19:18**.
 - ii. "Yet the law is not of faith, but 'the man who does them shall live by them.'" (**Galatians 3:12**, NKJV; where Paul is quoting from **Leviticus 18:15**)
 - iv. In the very beginning of the church, Gentile converts understood that the Law of Moses had been superseded by the teachings of Jesus. Therefore, the Levitical system was no longer binding. HOWEVER, I am convinced the *Gentile converts were taught the Law of Moses* not because they needed to follow the law, but for other reasons.

1. Two Questions:

- a. How do I know that the *Gentile converts* were taught the Law of Moses?
- b. And if they did not have to follow it, *why* were they taught it?

2. A Personal Story to Illustrate a Point: One of the books I often read to my 2-year old grandson, Elijah, is a rather famous and popular fictional story: *'The Little Engine that Could'*.

- a. The most famous line from that book, which is a moral tale about the importance of perseverance, is when the little engine perseveres in pulling a long train up a mountain incline while saying, "*I think I can, I think I can, I think I can...*".
- b. If you never heard me *actually reading* that book to Elijah, but heard me say to him when he was tempted to give up in the face of a hard trial: "*I think I can, I think I can...*", you likely would conclude *EITHER*:

- i. *Chuck* (his grandfather) had been reading that book to his grandson, *OR*
 - ii. *Chuck knows* that *someone else* (perhaps his mother, father or grandmother) had been reading that story to him.
- c. Now, consider two examples where the apostles Peter and Paul, were clearly writing to Christians who were predominantly from *Gentile backgrounds*: **1 & 2 Peter**, and **1 & 2 Corinthians**.
 - i. “You know that *you were Gentiles*, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.” (**1 Corinthians 12:2**, NKJV)
 - ii. “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; *who once were not a people* but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.” (**1 Peter 2:9–10**, NKJV)
 - iii. “Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. *For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—* when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.” (**1 Peter 4:1–4**, NKJV)
- d. The book of **Leviticus** was considered volume 2 of a 5-part set: the **Five Books of Moses**. Several places in the New Testament speak of “the Law of Moses”, referring to that set of five books.
 - i. Note that in some Bibles in other languages (for example, I believe, in Hungarian), the book of

Leviticus is referred to as: '*Third Moses*' or '*The Third Book of Moses*'.

- e. Now consider all the references that Paul and Peter make to details in the Law of Moses, including from **Leviticus** (the third book of Moses). As in my story of Elijah my grandson and '*The Little Engine that Could*', we can tell that they knew their hearers/readers, who were Gentile converts, *HAD TO HAVE KNOWN* the **Five Books** of Moses for their comments to have made any sense.
 - i. In **1 Corinthians**, Paul quotes directly from or alludes to stories from all five of the Books of Moses to make practical points.
 - 1. Addressing material support for those engaged full-time in preaching the gospel, Paul points back to **Exodus & Leviticus**.
 - a. "Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar?" (**1 Corinthians 9:13**, NKJV)
 - b. "For it is written in the law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.' Is it oxen God is concerned about?" (**1 Corinthians 9:9**, NKJV)
 - i. "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." (**Deuteronomy 25:4**, NKJV)
 - 2. Addressing sexual immorality, Paul points back to **Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy** and **Numbers**.
 - a. "Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new

lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” (1

Corinthians 5:6-8, NKJV, pointing back to the Passover and Feast of the Unleavened Bread story in **Exodus** and in **Leviticus 23:4-8**)

- b. In explaining that they need to expel the sexually immoral (and others involved in wickedness), in **1 Corinthians 5:11-13**, Paul quotes from a phrase that occurs several places in **Deuteronomy**: “Put away from yourselves the evil person.”
 - c. In the ‘**Exodus** map’ analogy Paul uses in **1 Corinthians 10:1-13**, he points to the example of the sin with the Moabite women, where 23,000 died in one day, which assumes the Corinthians are familiar with the story of **Numbers 25**.
- ii. In **2 Corinthians 6:11-18**, when addressing not being yoked with unbelievers, Paul quotes **Leviticus 26:12** and uses imagery (temple, clean/unclean and yoked together) from **Leviticus** and **Deuteronomy**.
 1. “I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.” (**Leviticus 26:12**, NKJV)
 2. “You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together.” (**Deuteronomy 22:10**, NKJV)
 - iii. In **1 and 2 Peter**, the apostle Peter quotes from or alludes to passages from each of the **Five**

Books of Moses, including **Leviticus**, to make very practical points.

1. “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 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.’” (**1 Peter 1:13–16**, NKJV)
 - a. Here Peter quotes from a line that occurs repeatedly in **Leviticus**, including in **chapters 11, 19** and **20**.
2. “Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, *a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*” (**1 Peter 2:4–5**, NKJV)
3. Now, let us reconsider the question I raised earlier. **Question:** Were the *Gentile* converts to the faith taught the Law of Moses, *even though they were not expected to follow its requirements* (animal sacrifices, foods, etc.)?
 - a. **Answer:** Clearly, Yes! Peter and Paul, in their letters addressing Gentile converts to the faith, assumed that these Gentiles had a very solid understanding of the **Five Books of Moses**.
 - b. They used it to teach foundational, very practical things.
 - c. James, also, when addressing discrimination in the church (treating the wealthy better than the poor), in **James 2**, points back to the “royal law” found in **Leviticus 19:18**.

1. If we first see a person's outline or silhouette before we meet the person, we can more easily recognize the person when we see them fully.
 - a. For example, I think the *silhouettes* we made, as children in grade school, of U.S. presidents Abraham Lincoln and George Washington.
 - b. Similarly, we can recognize Christ and the new covenant if we first see the foreshadowings in the Hebrew Scriptures.
- ii. Those sacrifices were a reminder of sin; they could not in themselves (the blood of animals) take away sin.
- iii. **Hebrews 10:5-10** quotes from **Psalms 40:6-8** (designated **Psalms 39:7-9** in the LXX), saying that the Lord *took no pleasure* in those burnt offerings and sacrifices.
 1. If the Old Testament passage looks different in your Bible (missing the phrase, "a body You have prepared for Me", etc.), it is because the **Hebrews** writer is following one of the LXX texts.
- iv. God had no desire for these offerings and took no pleasure in them, according to this passage. They could not take away sin. They foreshadowed the body of Jesus, which ultimately would be offered once for all time.
- v. Jeremiah also spoke of a "new covenant" that would come to replace the Law of Moses. (See **Jeremiah 31:31-34**; in the LXX designated **Jeremiah 38:31-34**)
- vi. Jesus is represented (foreshadowed by):
 1. The body of the animal sacrificed, and its blood that was sprinkled to purify the tabernacle and vessels of the ministry (**Hebrews 9:19-22**).

2. The High Priest (one in the order of Melchizedek, not based on genealogy)
 3. The curtain separating the Most Holy Place (which represented “heaven itself” as stated in **Hebrews 9:24**, the presence of God) from the Holy Place where the priests ministered.
5. So, just like the Gentile Christians who first received the gospel,
- a. We do not have to follow the Law of Moses, HOWEVER
 - b. We *still need to understand the Law of Moses*, which provides us valuable insights into the Christ, the gospel, and the rest of the Scriptures handed down to us from the apostles.

II. To Prepare for Upcoming Lessons in This Series

- a. Please review **Hebrews 9-10**.
- b. Begin reading **Leviticus 1-10**.
 - i. Notice the *five different types* of offerings mentioned at the beginning of **Leviticus**.
 1. Note that some of the offerings had parts reserved that were to be eaten by priests, but certain others (the burnt offering) did not.
 2. Note that honey was prohibited in the grain offering, but it *had to be salted*. **Question:** What might be the significance of *that*?