

Leviticus - Introduction & Background

Authorship

Although the Book of Leviticus is an anonymous work, several lines of evidence point to Moses as the book's author. First, the book repeatedly reiterates how God imparted the Law to Moses (1:1; 4:1; 5:14; 6:1, 8, 19, 24; 7:22, 38; 8:1, 4-6; 9:1, 5-7; 10:3-7; 11:1; 13:1; 16:1; 26:46; 27:34). This concept appears fifty-six times in Leviticus' twenty-seven chapters. In fact, the phrase "the Lord said to Moses" appears over 25x in the book. Interestingly, this phrase appears in every chapter of the book except chapters 2, 3, 9, 10, and 26. If it is assumed Moses wrote down the revelation that he received from God as he had done regarding the content for the Book of Exodus (Ex 17:14; 24:4; 34:27), then Moses is an obvious candidate for the authorship of Leviticus.

Second, Leviticus is interconnected with the rest of the Pentateuch. The conjunction "and" in Leviticus 1:1 indicates that it is to be read in harmony with the Book of Exodus. This interrelationship is buttressed upon remembering that the formulas "the Lord said to Moses" (Ex 31:1; 33:1; 34:1; 40:1; Lev 1:1; 4:1; 6:1) and "Moses did as the Lord commanded" (Ex 40:16; Lev 8:13; 16:24) is used in both books. Thus, Leviticus is the sequel to Exodus. Harrison also notes the connection between the two books when he says, "Leviticus enlarges upon matters involving the ordering of worship at the divine sanctuary that are mentioned only briefly in Exodus."

Third, Christ attributed authorship of Leviticus to Moses (Matt 8:2-4; Lev 14:1-4; Matt 12:4; Lev 24:9; Luke 2:22; Mark 1:44; Lev 14:1-32). Fourth, Leviticus' setting seems to fit the general time period when Moses lived. Examples of a Mosaic setting include "economic, civil, moral, and religious considerations," "a migratory lifestyle," and a desert setting. Thus, if one accepts the interconnectedness between Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus, and one also accepts the Mosaic authorship of these first two books, then logic seems to dictate that Mosaic authorship is also applicable to the Book of Leviticus.

Fifth, Jewish and Christian tradition has accepted Moses as the book's author. Not until roughly one hundred years ago was this presupposition challenged.

Recipients & Place of Writing

If the above chronology is accurate, then Leviticus was written from Sinai to the generation that had experienced the Exodus. If the 1406 BC date is accurate, then the book was written from the plains of Moab to the second generation. Although, like the rest of the Pentateuch, Leviticus is written to all Israel (1:2; 4:2; 11:2), it also "narrows its scope to particular persons or groups such as the priests and the Levites" (9:1-2; 13:1-2; 16:1-2; 17:1-2).

Scope

God revealed the contents of Leviticus to Moses after the renewal of the Mosaic Covenant (Ex 32–34) and His indwelling of the tabernacle (Ex 40:34–38). However, this material was revealed prior to the census recorded in Num 1. The following chronology is helpful. Israel's calendar began with the celebration of the first Passover on the first day of the first month of the first year (Ex 12:2). The tabernacle was erected exactly one year later on the first day of the first month of the second year (Ex 40:17). The census was taken exactly one month later on the first day of the second month of the second year (Num 1:1). The events of the Book of Leviticus transpired in the one-month interim in between the erection of the tabernacle and the census. Israel departed from Sinai exactly twenty days after the census on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year (Num 10:11). The book was most likely written in the 20-day interim in between the census and the beginning of the journey from Sinai. Because the events of the book transpired in between the arrival at Sinai but before the nation departed from Sinai, no geographical movement is represented in the Book of Leviticus. All of the allotted events took place while the nation was encamped at Sinai.

Date

Leviticus is obviously a pre-exilic work since Ezekiel makes extensive use of its legislation. Assuming Mosaic authorship and an early date for the Exodus, it is likely that Leviticus was written sometime after the erection of the tabernacle (1445 BC) and before Moses' death (1404 BC). External evidence confirms this early date. "The Ras Shamra Tablets (c. 1500–1300 BC), found along the Syrian coast, indicate that the antiquity of the Levitical system of trespass offering extends to the time of Moses. This evidence answers the criticism that the Book of Leviticus was written during a period much later than Moses' day."

Although the date of Leviticus is most likely early, a debate continues among conservative scholars concerning whether the book was written closer to 1444 BC or 1406 BC. Some hold that the revelation was given at Sinai (Lev 25:1–2; 26:46; 27:34) and was finally recorded in written form on the plains of Moab after the forty years of wilderness wanderings just prior to Moses' death (Deut 31:24).

For example, while other books of the Pentateuch seem to assume an arrival on the plains of Moab, Leviticus only mentions Sinai as a geographical reference. Also, the grammar of Lev 1:1 seems to connect the book to the book of Exodus in such a way that both works should be read as a continuous narrative. However, it seems more likely that the book was written in between the conclusion of the Sinai revelation and when the nation departed from Sinai fifty days after the erection of the tabernacle (Ex 40:17; Num 10:11). Several reasons exist for making this determination. Thus, if it is concluded that Exodus was written at Sinai, then it should also be concluded that Leviticus was written from there. Moreover, given the gravity of the contents of Leviticus for the sanctification of the nation,

it seems unlikely that Moses would wait an additional forty years before writing these contents down. On the other hand, it seems far more likely that he would write these ideas down immediately. All things considered, a date of 1444 BC for the composition of Leviticus seems appropriate.

Message & Purpose

The purpose of the Book of Leviticus is to teach Israel how they are to walk in practical holiness with God. Such practical holiness was necessary because of Israel's status as God's elect (Ex 4:22-23), redeemed (Ex 12), and regenerated (Ex 14:31) nation. A nation of such exalted spiritual status needed to know how their daily behavior must conform to what had already been positionally declared of them. They also needed to learn about practical sanctification so they could satisfy their obligations under the Mosaic Covenant and thus fulfill their mandate to be a kingdom of priests (Ex 19:5-6). While Israel was born in Genesis and became a kingdom of priests in Exodus, Leviticus teaches them how to fulfill their priestly calling. Their practical sanctification would also help them retain the presence of God in the tabernacle (Ex 40:34-38) as well as prevent apostasy (Ex 32-34) from reoccurring. The book focuses upon the priesthood since the proper functioning of this vital institution was necessary to guide the nation into progressive sanctification. The message of Leviticus is that the nation could achieve progressive sanctification and thus become distinct from the surrounding nations through daily access to God via the sacrifices (1-17) and through obedience (18-27).

Christ in Leviticus

Christo-centric typology is evident through the five offerings (1-7). The burnt offering shows Christ's submission. The meal offering shows Christ's sinlessness. The peace offering shows the fellowship that believers have with the Father through Christ. The sin offering reveals Christ as the sin bearer. The trespass offering shows Christ as the one who pays for the damage caused by sin. Similar typology can be seen in the seven feasts (Lev 23). The activities of Aaron, the Jewish high priest, also foreshadow the work of Christ, the ultimate high priest. These parallels can be drawn since Aaron mediates between Israel and God just as Christ mediates between the believer and the Father. The Day of Atonement (Lev 16) also typifies Christ's work on the cross. Just as the Day of Atonement postponed the nation's indebtedness due to sin for another year, Christ's sacrificial death cancelled this note of indebtedness.

Unique characteristics

First, the book places great stress upon holiness. The word "holiness" or *qodesh* is used 87x in the book. The root q-d-sh is used 152x in its adjectival, noun, and verb forms. Second, the book stresses sanctification. The word "sanctify" is found 17x in the book. Third, the book stresses sacrifice. The first major section of the book stresses the sacrificial system as the way to maintain fellowship with God (1-17).

Fourth, the book stresses worship. This emphasis can be seen through the various feast days mandating when and under what circumstances the nation must appear before the Lord to worship Him (Lev 23).

Outline

I. Sacrifice as the means of fellowship with God and sanctification (Lev 1:1—17:16)

(1) Instructions concerning sacrifices (Lev 1:1—7:38)

(A) Sacrificial instructions for Israel (Lev 1:1—6:7)

(a) Fellowship or sweet savor offerings (Lev 1:1—3:17)

(i) Burnt offering (1:1-17)

(a) Herd (1:1-9)

(b) Flock (1:10-13)

(c) Birds (1:14-17)

(ii) Grain/meal offering (2:1-16)

(iii) Fellowship or peace offering (3:1-17)

(a) Herd (3:1-5)

(b) Flock (3:6-11)

(c) Goat (3:12-17)

(b) Sin or guilt offerings (4:1—6:7)

(i) Sin offering (4:1—5:13)

(a) Priest (4:1-12)

(b) Community (4:13-21)

(c) Ruler (4:22-26)

(d) Ordinary Israelite (4:27-35)

(e) Sinful acts, omissions, inadvertence (5:1-13)

(ii) Trespass/guilt offering (5:14—6:7)

(a) Sin involving worship (5:14-16)

(b) General sins against the Lord (5:17-19)

(c) Sin against a fellow member of the community (6:1-7)

(B) Sacrificial instructions for the priests (Deut 6:8—7:38)

(a) Burnt offering (6:8-13)

(b) Grain/meal offering (6:14-23)

(c) Sin offering (6:24-30)

(d) Trespass/guilt offering (7:1-10)

(e) Fellowship or peace offering (7:11-38)

(2) Instructions concerning priests and the sacrifices (Lev 8:1—10:20)

(A) Priests consecration (Lev 8:1-36)

(a) Israel assembles (8:1-5)

(b) Priests' cleaning and clothing (8:6-9)

- (c) Priests' anointing (8:10-13)
 - (d) Offering on priest's behalf (8:14-36)
 - (i) Sin offering (8:14-17)
 - (ii) Burnt offering (8:18-21)
 - (iii) Offering of consecration (8:22-36)
 - (a) Offering (8:22-30)
 - (b) Priests partake of offering for seven days (8:31-36)
 - (B) Priests' commencement (Lev 9:1-24)
 - (a) Preparation for sacrifices (9:1-7)
 - (b) Priests' initial sacrifices (9:8-21)
 - (i) Sin offering (9:8-11)
 - (ii) Burnt offering (9:12-17)
 - (iii) Fellowship offering (9:18-21)
 - (c) Priestly blessing (9:22-23a)
 - (d) Divine approval (9:23b-24)
 - (C) Priest's condemnation (Lev 10:1-20)
 - (a) Nadab and Abihu consumed for offering strange fire (10:1-7)
 - (b) The need for sobriety (10:8-11)
 - (c) Eleazar and Ithmar fail to consume their allotted portion of the sin offering (10:12-20)
- (3) The distinction between clean and unclean (Lev 11:1—15:33)
- (A) Animals (11:1-47)
 - (a) Clean animals have divided hoofs (11:1-8)
 - (b) Marine creatures with both fins and scales (11:9-12)
 - (c) 25 flying animals whose flesh was unsuitable (11:13-19)
 - (d) Unclean insects (11:20-23)
 - (e) Contact with carcasses (11:24-38)
 - (f) Dead bodies (11:39-40)
 - (g) Prohibition against eating crawling creatures (11:41-43)
 - (h) Reason for restrictions: the holiness of God's people (11:44-47)
 - (B) Childbirth (Lev 12:1-8)
 - (a) Time for impurity (12:1-5)
 - (b) Sacrifice for impurity (12:6-8)
 - (C) Leprosy (Lev 13:1—14:57)
 - (a) Classification (Lev 13:1-59)
 - (b) Cleansing (Lev 14:1-57)
 - (D) Bodily discharge (Lev 15:1-33)
 - (a) Male (15:1-18)

- (b) Female (15:19-30)
 - (c) Summary and conclusion (15:31-33)
- (4) Day of Atonement (Lev 16:1-34)
 - (A) Ritual (16:1-28)
 - (B) Permanent establishment of the ritual (16:29-34)
- (5) Sacrifice and blood (Lev 17:1-16)
 - (A) No slaughter of animals outside the camp (17:1-9)
 - (B) Sanctity of blood as a metaphor for life (17:10-13)
 - (C) Life of blood applied at altar rather than through ingestion (17:14-16)
- II. Sanctification as a means of walking with God (Lev 18:1—27:34)
 - (1) Sanctification for the individual Israelite (Lev 18:1—20:26)
 - (A) Sexuality (Lev 18:1-29)
 - (a) Israel to be distinct from the Egyptians and Canaanites (18:1-5)
 - (b) Prohibitions against incest (18:6-18)
 - (c) Prohibitions against intercourse during menstruation, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality (18:19-23)
 - (d) Israel not to imitate the Canaanites or they too will be driven out (18:24-29)
 - (B) Holy behavior toward God and man (Lev 19:1-37)
 - (a) God's holiness leads to proper behavior toward God and man (19:1-4)
 - (b) Impact on behavior (19:5-18)
 - (i) Offerings (19:5-8)
 - (ii) Harvest gatherings (19:9-10)
 - (iii) Property rights (19:11-14)
 - (iv) Legal rights (19:15-16)
 - (v) Summation (19:17-18)
 - (c) Illustrations of holiness (19:19-22)
 - (d) Behavior in the land (19:23-36)
 - (e) Conclusion (19:37)
 - (C) Capital offenses (Lev 20:1-26)
 - (a) Offering offspring to Molech (20:1-5)
 - (b) Spiritism (20:6-8,27)
 - (c) Cursing one's parents (20:9)
 - (d) Sexual deviance (20:10-21)
 - (e) Israel to also be evicted for following Canaanite practices (20:22-23)
 - (f) Call for Israel to be holy (20:24-26)
 - (2) Instructions for priests (Lev 21:1—22:33)
 - (A) Personal sanctification (21:1-15)

- (a) Of the priests (21:1-9)
 - (i) Concerning contact with the dead (21:1-4)
 - (ii) Concerning bodily disfigurement (21:5)
 - (iii) Concerning his marriage (21:6-8)
 - (iv) Concerning his daughter (21:9)
- (b) Of the high priest (21:10-15)
 - (i) Concerning his clothing (21:10)
 - (ii) Concerning contact with dead bodies (21:11)
 - (iii) Concerning his relationship to the sanctuary (21:12)
 - (iv) Concerning his marriage (21:13-15)
- (B) Physical requirements (21:16-24)
- (C) Ceremonial purity (22:1-9)
- (D) Laymen not to eat priestly foods (22:10-16)
- (E) Concerning sacrificing animals (22:17-33)
 - (a) Concerning the perfection of the sacrifice (22:17-25)
 - (b) Concerning the administration of the sacrifice (22:26-33)
- (3) Worship (Lev 23:1—24:23)
 - (A) Feasts (Lev 23:1-44)
 - (a) Sabbath (23:1-3)
 - (b) Passover and Unleavened Bread (23:4-8)
 - (c) First fruits (23:9-14)
 - (d) Pentecost (23:15-22)
 - (e) Trumpets (23:23-25)
 - (f) Atonement (23:26-32)
 - (g) Booths (23:33-44)
 - (B) Consecration and desecration (Lev 24:1-23)
 - (a) Preparation of the oil for the lamp and the bread for the table (24:1-9)
 - (b) Punishment of a blasphemer (24:10-23)
- (4) In the land (Lev 25:1—26:46)
 - (A) Sabbatical and Jubilee years (Lev 25:1-55)
 - (a) Sabbatical year (25:1-7)
 - (b) Jubilee year (25:8-55)
 - (i) Consecrate the fiftieth year (25:8-12)
 - (ii) Buying and selling to be conducted with consideration of approaching Jubilee year (25:13-17)
 - (iii) God's promise to provide during the Jubilee year (25:18-22)
 - (iv) Redemption (25:23-34)
 - (a) Redeem the lands (25:23-28)

- (b) Redeem the property in and outside the city (25:29-34)
 - (v) Prohibition of usurious loans to fellow Israelites (25:35-38)
 - (vi) Slavery (25:39-55)
 - (a) Indentured fellow Israelites not to be treated as slaves and granted release at Jubilee (25:39-43)
 - (b) Indentured aliens could become property and slaves (25:44-46)
 - (c) Obligation to redeem an Israelite purchased by a non-Israelite (25:47-55)
- (B) Blessings and curses (Lev 26:1-46)
 - (a) First four commandments (26:1-2)
 - (b) Blessings for obedience (26:3-13)
 - (c) Curses for disobedience (26:14-39)
 - (d) Ultimate repentance and restoration (26:40-46)
- (5) Vows (Lev 27:1-34)
 - (A) Regulations regarding what could be given (27:1-25)
 - (a) Gender and age criteria regarding the giving of silver (27:1-8)
 - (b) Giving dedicatory animals (27:9-13)
 - (c) Giving a house (27:14-15)
 - (d) Giving fields (27:16-25)
 - (B) Regulations regarding what could not be given (27:26-33)
 - (a) Prohibition against giving firstborn ritually qualified animals (27:26-27)
 - (b) Prohibition against giving items under divine ban (27:28-29)
 - (c) Prohibition against giving tithes (27:30-33)
 - (C) Conclusion (27:34)