

What's the Point....of Leviticus? **Mark Garner**

The book of Leviticus may at first seem drab or confusing, yet it can help us understand some aspects of God's understanding and of his relationship with the Israelites. While the Old Covenant has now been replaced by the New, many of the sacrifices and regulations have deeper parallels in the New Covenant that tell us about our Heavenly Father and about our walk with him.

The Holy & The Common; The Clean & The Unclean

Much of Leviticus deals with ideas like the distinction between 'clean' and 'unclean', and the difference between what is holy and what is 'common' (see, for example, Leviticus 10:10). While these ideas mean something more profound to God than human words can fully describe (especially holiness), the Scriptures can help us understand their significance.

Cleanness, or purity, is the absence of uncleanness, the absence of dirt or stains or imperfections.

Many of the sacrifices and instructions in Leviticus are meant to cleanse God's people, so that his presence could be near them. Holiness means more than cleanness. It applies to things that belong to God, or to things that do not belong to this world (including God himself). A number of times the Lord says "Be holy, for I am holy", to encourage us to focus on imperishable things.

In a sense, cleanness is an absence of 'bad' things, while holiness comes from the presence of God and the meaning that this brings. One of the many wonders of Jesus' sacrifice is that he does both of these for us - he washes away our sins to cleanse us; and he also sanctifies us, gives us God's Spirit, and makes us part of God's own family.

Overview Of Leviticus

The book opens by describing the main sacrifices in the Levitical ministry (Leviticus 1-7), starting with the most common one, the burnt offerings. They also show us that the shedding of blood is necessary for the forgiveness of sin. Sin separates us from our Heavenly Father, and leads to spiritual death; and as Leviticus tells us later, the life of a creature is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11).

Then the Levitical ministry begins (Leviticus 8-10). After the tabernacle and the priests are consecrated, the first sacrifice is greeted with both joy and reverence (9:23-24), yet this is soon followed by a somber reminder of God's holiness. Many of the laws of cleanness and holiness that follow may make some more sense in view of their intent (the laws in Leviticus 11-15 focus largely on cleanness, while those in Leviticus 17-22 focus largely on holiness).

In the middle of this section, God discusses the Day Of Atonement (Leviticus 16). On this day, once a year, the high priest followed an elaborate procedure to make sacrifices for himself and for all of the people. All this is merely to make atonement for one more year, and it again helps us understand the full understanding and compassion we can see in the cross of Jesus.

The book concludes by describing holy days, special years, and more principles of the covenant that are each significant in their own way (Leviticus 23-27). Many of them parallel what Jesus did for all of us in deeper ways. We also see God's promise to walk among us (26:11-13), a promise that is there for us too, a promise that has an even deeper meaning in Jesus.

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What's the Point....of Leviticus? **Caleb Dillinger**

Oh, Leviticus. That dreaded book of the Old Testament that has stopped so many Christians from reading through their entire Bible. All its got is a bunch of laws and numbers and punishments, right? At first glance, that appears to be true.

The first seven chapters deal with various kinds of offerings. Chapters eight through ten deal with Aaron and his family appointed as priests. Chapters eleven through fifteen deal with purity and cleanliness. Chapters sixteen through twenty-two deal with holiness. Chapter twenty-three describes various feasts, and chapters twenty-four through twenty-seven seem to cover all the miscellaneous rules and laws that couldn't be grouped in one category. So you might wonder: why bother reading this boring book under the Old Covenant? Didn't Christ free us from all these restrictions? What's the point?

You may be surprised to find out there are several valuable lessons to be learned from this old book. First, it teaches a Christian reader about perspective. Do you realize that you DON'T have to follow all of these offering commands and purity laws in order to be near to God? Do you realize that the only reason you don't have to follow the book of Leviticus is because of the death of Jesus? Christ's sacrifice did so much more than just free you from your sins and offer you eternal life. It opened the door for freedom here on earth! Holiness laws were established for Israel to set them apart from the other nations, but you are set apart from others by your faith in Jesus. Next time you open Leviticus, pay attention to every little (or big) thing you are glad you don't have to follow, and then give thanks to Jesus who is the reason you have this freedom!

Another valuable lesson to be learned is the necessity of Jesus for your current relationship to God. For the ancient Israelites, they needed Aaron and the priests and multiple sacrifices in order to even consider a relationship with God. You just need faith that Jesus lived and died and rose for you! The holiness of God is emphasized throughout Leviticus - a holiness that ultimately is unattainable by humankind. But thanks be to Jesus, you are clothed in his holiness. You may not fully grasp how great a blessing that is without reading this old book.

And the last valuable lesson to be learned from reading Leviticus is a deeper appreciation of God's love for humanity. Yeah, I know, you would think all these rules were instituted because God didn't trust humanity or didn't believe in their goodness. That may be somewhat true, but the greater picture reveals God's concern for his people's livelihood. Laws concerning purity actually helped people be healthier! The feasts described near the end were intended to keep the Israelites in a holy, focused relationship with God. You'll find instructions to protect the poor and strangers. In fact, it is in Leviticus (19:34) that you find the basis for the second greatest command - love your neighbor as yourself.

So if you wonder what the point of Leviticus is, I'd urge you to read the book with these lessons in mind. You will experience greater thankfulness for the work of Jesus and you will recognize the love and protection that God demonstrates towards his people. That's the point of Leviticus.