

Walk Through The Bible

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
8The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
9The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
10More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
11Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.
(Psalm 19:7-11. NKJV)*

*25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.
(James 1:25. NKJV)*

The Sacrificial System

April 15th, 2012

Leviticus 1:1-9

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Introduction:

Open your Bibles this morning to Leviticus chapter 1. That will be the section of your Bible with all the yellow highlighting, I'm sure. I want to begin this morning by reciting together our memory verse from September. I know that was a few months ago now but I think we will be well served by revisiting it briefly before we begin our message this morning.

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 3:16-17. NKJV)

Will you say amen if you believe that verse with all your heart? Amen. Good. However, in practical terms we often act as though that verse does not apply to the Book of Leviticus. Many of us, practically speaking, are tempted to say: "All Scripture, except for Leviticus, is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof etc." Leviticus is rarely read and even more rarely preached upon in today's Evangelical church. In fact the whole reason we selected the RMM reading plan for our Walk Through The Bible journey is that most people using the standard 4 chapters a day from Genesis to Revelation approach DIE IN THE DESERT of

Leviticus. They start off full of enthusiasm, loving the stories of Genesis and Exodus and then they crash hard into the impenetrable rock of Leviticus. My hope today is to make this book of the Bible more accessible to you because it is absolutely critical to our understanding of the cross of Jesus Christ. Let me read to you the opening 9 verses of Leviticus, which are reasonably typical of the book as a whole and then we will deal with this book at an introductory level, giving the tree top tour so that you can explore at ground level in your own devotional time. This is God's Word:

¹Now the LORD called to Moses, and spoke to him from the tabernacle of meeting, saying,

²“Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of the livestock—of the herd and of the flock.

³‘If his offering *is* a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD.

⁴Then he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him.

⁵He shall kill the bull before the LORD; and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood and sprinkle the blood all around on the altar that *is by* the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

⁶And he shall skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces.

⁷The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar, and lay the wood in order on the fire.

⁸Then the priests, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head, and the fat in order on the wood that *is* on the fire upon the altar;

⁹but he shall wash its entrails and its legs with water. And the priest shall burn all on the altar as a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD. (Leviticus 1:1-9. NKJV)

I want to begin with addressing some frequently raised objections to studying a text such as this.

Objections

1. Isn't Leviticus “primitive” and “dated”?

When we read these stories of animal sacrifice and slitting throats and sprinkling blood it feels like we have stepped back into the stone age. What kind of primitive, knuckle dragging cave men could think that killing an animal somehow affected God and the nature of our relationship with God? What possible relevance could these primitive acts of worship have for our day? Have you ever asked that question? Not out loud I bet. Well it is actually a pretty good question and the answer is perhaps not what you would expect. Is Leviticus primitive? Yes it is. There is no way around that. It is primitive, it is visceral and it is tactile to an alarming degree and there is a very good reason for that.

One of the things that we learn about God by reading Leviticus is that God is a master teacher. God teaches his people as if they are children. I have 5 kids and three of them are actively engaged in learning the Bible around our table. Peyton is just starting to get involved and Noa is generally filling her pants or vomiting while I'm teaching and for now I am not taking that personally. But my primary teaching audience for family devos involves a 14 year old, a 9 year old and a 7 year old. That leaves me with two options: dumb down God or learn to make good use of illustrations, analogies and object lessons. The Book of Leviticus is one giant illustration, analogy and object lesson. We have to remember that the Bible wasn't written just for 21st Century North American, post enlightenment, post modern, University educated Christians. Part of the reason it has been the most important book in EVERY DAY and TIME for the last 3000 years is because it is written in accessible forms and genres that transcend time, culture and education. You don't need a PhD to understand what is going on in Leviticus. It was designed to be understood by children.

Imagine for example that you were a father in the 9th century B.C. in Israel. You are living almost a 1000 years before Jesus. You are living 2500 years before the printing press! You are living 600 years before the rise of Classical Greek civilisation and the birth of what we tend to think of as wisdom, philosophy and western style thought. You are a primitive by our definitions. And you are standing in line at Solomon's Temple and you have with you your 8 year old daughter. You also have with you a 25 pound baby lamb. It's about the size of a 6 month old Golden Retriever puppy and your daughter thinks it is the cutest thing ever. She is patting his curls and twisting them around her fingers and she is feeding him scraps of hay that she has picked up from the dirt floor beneath her feet.

"Why are we here daddy?" she asks.

"Because we have sinned child, and our God is Holy and we have transgressed his law." She grows quiet now as she hears this distressing news.

"What will happen to us?" she asks with concern in her voice. "Are we going to die?" She has heard enough about this Holy God to know that he does not tolerate sin. She remembers a story about a man who once touched the ark when he had been told not to and he was struck dead right there on the spot. She is a little worried that the same thing might happen to them.

“We will not die today”, her father reassures her. “But blood will be spilt. The wages of sin is death.”

“Who will die” she asks. You do not answer her but you take the reins of the little lamb that she has unhelpfully named “Fluffy” and you pull him over to your side while you look forward and wish the line was shorter.

“Are they going to kill Fluffy daddy?” she asks with tears forming in her eyes.

“No child. They are not going to kill fluffy; we are going to kill Fluffy. Fluffy is going to die today in our place. Fluffy will die so that we can live. This is the way it is child, this is the cost of sin.”

And then when you arrive at the front of the line you take out a blade sharpened for this day. You put your hand on Fluffy’s head and he lifts his mouth to nibble at your hand thinking now that you are about to feed him some grain and instead you stretch out his neck and with a prayer of gratitude you quickly run your knife across his throat being careful to slit the jugular cleanly and you let his lifeblood spill across the temple floor. Your daughter tries very hard not to scream or weep. The priest takes the blood and sprinkles it around the altar and he and his helpers skin the carcass and wash its parts and then the flesh is burnt upon the altar. The whole place smells like the world’s greatest bar-b-q and you are told that God is satisfied, that he is pleased with you and that you can depart in the peace and favour of the Lord.

Can you picture that scene? Can you imagine the conversation you have with your daughter on the way home? Does she need a Ph. D to understand penal substitutionary atonement? No she does not; she gets it; the truth of it is splattered on her shoes. Leviticus is primitive. It is intended to be. It teaches the most important truths in the universe and it does so in ways that a child can understand. God will have no one perish from ignorance.

2. Isn’t the ritualism of Leviticus at odds with the spirituality desired in the NT?

The simple answer to that is NO. That the question is even asked reveals that the person asking it does not understand worship in the Old Testament or the New. The Old Testament is brutally clear that it is not simply performance of the ritual that restores ones relationship with God, rather it is a matter of the heart. That principle was taught long before Leviticus.

³And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD.

⁴Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering,

⁵but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

⁶So the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?”

⁷If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire *is* for you, but you should rule over it.” (Genesis 4:3-7. NKJV)

God-fearing parents have been reading that story to their children for 3500 years. What question do you think a 7 year old is likely to ask as she hears this and ponders it in her heart? “Why did God accept Abel’s offering and not Cain’s?” And when she asks that question her parents might have responded the way the author of the letter to the Hebrews responded:

⁴By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks. (Hebrews 11:4. NKJV)

It was what was in Abel’s heart that made his sacrifice effective. It was what was in Cain’s heart that made his sacrifice an abomination. The Bible says this again and again – you read a few weeks ago in Proverbs:

²⁷ The sacrifice of the wicked *is* an abomination; how much more *when* he brings it with wicked intent! (Proverbs 21:27. NKJV)

As a parent you would tell your child: “It is not simply the ritual that maintains our right relationship with the Lord. We must have a pure heart full of faith and love for his holiness.” No one has ever been saved by the mere performance of a ritual. Not in the Old Testament, not in the New. That is why you can find verses in the Old Testament like

²¹ “I hate, I despise your feast days, And I do not savor your sacred assemblies.

²² Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept *them*, Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings.

²³ Take away from Me the noise of your songs, For I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments.

²⁴ But let justice run down like water, And righteousness like a mighty stream. (Amos 5:21-24. NKJV)

Why would God hate their religious observances? After all, hadn't he commanded these observances in the Book of Leviticus? What turned them from being "a sweet aroma" to being unsavoury and hateful? The condition of their hearts. As a 10 year old boy I memorised Psalm 51:17 in the KJV which says:

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. (KJV)

God only accepts worship when it is offered by a humble, contrite and repentant person. That was true in the Old Testament and that is true in the New Testament. No one has ever been saved by the faithless, loveless performance of a ritual. It is an extremely ignorant contrast to suggest that worship in the Old Testament was merely ritualistic, which as we've seen it was not, and worship in the New Testament is purely spiritual. Both sides of that statement are equally absurd and unbiblical. The New Testament says:

³³For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

⁴⁰Let all things be done decently and in order. (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40. NKJV)

Just as it is unfair and untrue to say that Old Testament worship is merely ritualistic it is unfair and untrue to say that New Testament worship is sentimental, formless, free flowing and esoteric. The Greek words used there in 1 Corinthians 14 instruct us to be spiritual in a way that is true to the character of God. Our worship should reflect a sense of "peace" – that word can be translated equally as gentleness or quietness, our worship should exhibit "decency" – a word which equally means decorousness and our worship should be characterized by "order" which equally means a regular or dignified arrangement. There is really no difference in the way worship is spoken of in the New Testament and the Old Testament. Both emphasize the priority of the inner heart, the attitude and disposition of the mind and affections and both emphasise a certain reasonable and dignified structure and order. The contrast that is often suggested is a false contrast based on a misunderstanding of both the Old Testament AND the New Testament.

Transition:

Well then, if Leviticus is such a wonderful book how come none of us brought Fluffies with us to slice and dice and burn up on the platform? Obviously something has changed, so what is it? Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount:

¹⁷“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. (Matthew 5:17. NRSV)

Jesus understood that his coming did something to the Torah. Jesus’ coming DID something to the book of Leviticus and as readers of this book on the other side of Jesus we need to know what he did. Well, for starters he says that he did not abolish it, that is set it aside or make it irrelevant or lacking in authority. He did not do that. He says that he fulfilled it. He uses the Greek word *play-ro-o* which is translated as “fulfil” and it equally means “to satisfy”, “to finish” or “to accomplish”. That is a very odd thing to say. He doesn’t say that he has come to keep the law, though he did that, he says that he has come to accomplish it or to do it utterly and finally. This introduces a very important theological concept called “typology”. You cannot understand the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament without understanding typology. The word is all over the place in the New Testament although it does not always make it into the English translations. Sometimes it does as in the case of 1 Peter 3:

when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while *the* ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.

²¹There is also **an antitype** which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

²²who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him. (1 Peter 3:20-22. NKJV)

Peter there uses the Greek word *tupos* or here actually he uses *antitupos* which is the other side of the coin. Sometimes the word gets translated as “example” or as a “prefigure”. We see the word “example” in 1 Corinthians 10 where Paul is saying that the events of the Old Testament Exodus are a type, or a “prefiguring” of our own salvation:

¹Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea,

²all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,

³all ate the same spiritual food,

⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

⁵But with most of them God was not well pleased, for *their bodies* were scattered in the wilderness.

⁶Now these things became **our examples**, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted....

¹¹Now all these things happened to them **as examples**, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. (1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 11. NKJV)

Both times there the Greek word *tupos* is translated as “examples”. So typology is about stories, characters or rituals in the Old Testament that were intended to teach the people about how God intended to save them in Jesus Christ. When Jesus arrives he fulfils the anticipation, he realises the hope, he colours in the outline. That is why John the Baptist exclaimed when he saw Jesus:

“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29. NKJV)

John looked at Jesus and he immediately understood that this was what that had been pointing to! John remembered how year after year the same people would line up before men like his father and present lamb after lamb after lamb. And John must have asked his priestly father: “Father, why is it that the same sinners must come back time and time again and offer the sacrifice? Is the blood of the substitute not effective?” His father may have answered in words little different than those recorded in the Book of Hebrews:

“For *it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. (Hebrews 10:4. NKJV)

“If it is not effective father, why is it offered?” And Zechariah would have answered: “Because John we must keep before our eyes an awareness of our sin and our hope in God’s salvation. God himself will provide the effective sacrifice, just as he did for Father Abraham. Watch, wait and see, my son.” And so he did. And when he saw that which God provided he declared: “Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” That is typology!

Leviticus told us what to look for and now that we have that which we looked for we do not repeat the anticipations as though to say that we have not what we looked for, that is why we do not sacrifice lambs in here, we have the lamb of God! Why then do we read this book? Because after the fulfilment, we are still instructed by the trajectory and shape of the anticipations. That is what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10. He didn’t say: “Now that we have our own Passover lamb in Christ you should never read the Exodus”; no, he said:

⁶Now these things became our examples, **to the intent that** we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.... (1 Corinthians 10:6. NKJV)

The line that was drawn between the ritual of anticipation and the person of fulfilment serves as a plumb line for plotting our way forward between the person of fulfilment and the time of consummation at Christ's return. They taught you this in geometry way back in grade school. When you were learning how to draw lines between fixed points you were learning theology. Paul says that we can look at the Old Testament story of salvation and use that as an interpretive guide for our own salvation story in Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 10 he is making the point that some people can go through all of the external rituals of salvation – they can walk through the waters, they can eat the bread and drink the cup of the rock and yet not actually be free of Egypt in their hearts. Likewise he is saying, do not assume that you are saved just because you have been baptised and have taken communion, you have to be FREE IN YOUR HEART! Typology assumes a continuity of principles between the Old Testament and the New Testament and nowhere is that more clear than in the Book of Leviticus. Real quickly then, let me show you how this works by pointing out the principal¹ continuity between Leviticus and the New Testament.

The Authoritative, Timeless, and Necessary Principles Taught in Leviticus:

1. The wages of sin is death

There is no way that a child growing up in ancient Israel could have come to the conclusion that God is super super gracious and permissive and that really, at the end of the day, God is cool with our sin. People today talk like that because they've never had to slit the throat of their Golden Retriever because Daddy said a swear. We live in a world where most of us never even see death let alone make connections between death and sin. A child who watched her father slit Fluffy's throat grew up understanding that God is Holy, sin is defiling and God is not cool with it! This is why we have to make use of these Old Testament typologies. Typology is just geometry applied to theology. If I want to make sure I am in geometric alignment with the cross I need to know what lines of origin lie on the other side of the cross. I need to go back over here and get familiar with the Old Testament sacrificial system. And then I need to drop a marker. And then I need to walk forward from that marker to Jesus Christ on the cross. Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Then I need to walk forward in this line to my day in Orillia in 2012.

¹ By "principal" I mean that the structures and forms are different but the PRINCIPLES are constant.

I need to stand here and look back and assess: “Am I in alignment?” This is geometry applied to theology. When you hear people today say: “Well I know I’m going to heaven because I sincerely believe that Jesus died on the cross and I got baptised when I was 13 and I take communion and I go to church and so when I sleep with my boyfriend or do drugs or watch porn I just trust God to forgive me because he is super gracious and merciful” you are listening to a fool. You are listening to someone who is way off line here. They are way outside the geometry of faith. You are listening to somebody who needs to read Leviticus. When you read Leviticus and you trace that story forward to the bloody body of Jesus on the cross you will never think again that God is cool with it. The wages of sin is death.

2. Sin leaves us ill prepared for the presence of the Lord

In Genesis when Adam and Eve sinned and then they heard God coming to see them, what did they do? They hid themselves and they tried to cover their shame with fig leaves. They did that because sin makes us instinctively aware that we are ill prepared for the presence of the Lord. If we want to enter into God’s presence now, we need a covering. Were those fig leaves effective? No. What then did God do? He killed an animal and made them garments. This anticipated the sacrificial system – it looked forward to Leviticus.

As you have been reading Leviticus you will no doubt have noticed that the blood of the sacrifices is sprinkled by the priests upon the altar. On the Day of Atonement this symbol becomes even more central when the High Priest sprinkles the blood on the mercy seat on the top of the Ark of the Covenant which is in the Holy of Holies. The mercy seat is the place that represented the meeting place of God and man. Many scholars suggest that it was designed after the pattern of the footstool of Pharaoh in Egypt. If you think of God as being seated on his throne in heaven, we come to bow at his footstool to make our requests. The mercy seat is the foot stool, the point of contact. You sprinkle blood on it because the sin of man and the holiness of God can never come face to face. Our God is a consuming fire. Something has to stand between you. You need a covering. You need a robe, a garment, a spiritual hazmat suit if you want to be in a relationship with a God whose face is like the very shining of the sun. So once a year the High Priest took the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkled it over the mercy seat. The word for “mercy seat” in Greek is the word *hil-as-tay-ree-on*, it is a word that can also be translated as “propitiation” as it is in Romans 3:

²⁴being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
²⁵whom God set forth *as* a **propitiation** by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,
²⁶to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:24-26. NKJV)

Same word. Paul is saying that the blood that was sprinkled on the mercy seat looked forward to the blood shed by Jesus on the cross. His blood becomes our covering, our spiritual hazmat suit that allows us favour in the presence of the Lord. Paul understood Jesus because he had studied Leviticus. In Romans 13 he said:

¹⁴But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts. (Romans 13:14. NKJV)

Do you see? You can draw a straight line from Adam and Eve to the Day of Atonement to Christ on the cross and forward into right Christian living. If you lose any of these markers then you are in danger of misinterpreting the cross and living out of alignment with God's revealed character and will. This is geometry applied to theology. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Before the Benediction:

I know that reading Leviticus can be challenging to our faith; it is supposed to be. It is supposed to jar us back into alignment with some truths we try very hard to forget. It forces us to confront the fact that the wages of sin is death. It forces us to remember that our God is a consuming fire and one does not walk into his presence reeking of sin and rebellion. You need to see that. But you also need to see two others things that many people miss. You need to see the patience of

God who is a very careful teacher. You also need to see the love of God. He loved you enough to die for you and he loved you enough to kill for you. Don't waste that loving and careful and costly instruction. Put your faith and trust in the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Put on Christ and make no provision for the flesh. Let's pray together.