

For *most* of you, when you start your goal of reading through the Bible,  
you reach Leviticus and say,

"What is this doing here? What does Leviticus have to do with following Jesus??!"

Everything.

Michael Morales' has written an excellent book –  
with an equally excellent title:  
"Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the LORD:  
A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus."

He points out that Leviticus is *all about* how man may dwell with God.  
This is -- after all -- the whole point of, well, everything.

Think back to Genesis 1-3.  
Adam and Eve were banished from God's presence because of their rebellion.  
God is *holy*.  
How can sinners enter the presence of a holy God?

Think forward to Deuteronomy.  
Israel is about to enter the Promised Land –  
God is calling his people to dwell with him.  
But in order for God's people to dwell with him they must be holy as he is holy!

Leviticus sits at the very center of the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses).

Think of it this way:  
Genesis -- the holy seed /the holy land /the blessing of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob  
Exodus -- Conflict with Egypt/desert plagues/building the tabernacle  
Leviticus -- Sacrifices/Cleaness/Holiness  
Numbers -- Ordering the camp/desert plagues/conflict with Midian et al.  
Deuteronomy -- how the holy seed must live in the holy land/the blessing of Moses

There are dozens of patterns and connections that we could talk about  
in terms of the structure of the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses).  
But the most important thing for understanding Leviticus  
is that this is all about what it means for God's people to *dwell with God*.

It's worth noting that the whole of Exodus through Numbers follows a chiasmic structure:  
There are two springs (Ex 15 and Numb 21)

Two instances of water from the rock (Ex 17 and Num 20)  
Two wars with the Amalekites (Ex 17 and Num 14)  
Two appointments of elders (Ex 18 and Num 11)  
Two discussions of Moses with his father-in-law (Ex 18 and Num 10)

And at the center is Israel's time at Sinai – from Exodus 19 to Numbers 10.  
And Sinai is where God revealed himself to Israel –  
and particularly to Moses.

The whole book of Leviticus takes place at Mt. Sinai.

We know exactly when –  
because Exodus 40:17 tells us the tabernacle was raised up  
on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year  
(since they came out of Egypt),  
and Numbers 1:1 tells us that the LORD spoke to Moses in the tent of meeting  
on the first day of the *second* month, in the second year.

In other words, the whole book of Leviticus takes place in the first month of the second year.

Admittedly, there is not much action in the book!

The book of Leviticus consists mostly of laws –  
but there is a clear shape within the book.

The first half of the book is all about *approaching God* (chapters 1-15),  
Starting with how the priests are to conduct the sacrifices in chapters 1-7,  
then the institution of the priesthood (chapters 8-10)  
then dealing with clean and unclean in daily life (chapters 11-15)

At the center is the Day of Atonement (chapter 16)

Then it deals with the holy and profane in daily life (ch 17-20),

Then legislation regarding the priesthood (ch 21-22),

Before concluding with the festivals and the organization of time (ch 23-27).

So the first half of the book is about approaching God – through *blood*.

The second half of the book is about *holiness* – living in *communion* with God.

How do you draw near to God?

And then – once you are near – how do you live in communion with God?

It would be overly simplistic to say that the first half of Leviticus is about justification,  
and the second half about sanctification –

but many have noticed a connection with Paul's words in Rom. 5:8-10,

“Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood,

much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son,  
much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”

[Morales, 30]

So Leviticus is about the sacrifices of Israel and it is about the holiness of Israel.  
And at the very heart of the book is where sacrifice and holiness comes together –  
the Day of Atonement.

The basic point comes across very clearly:  
Without the sacrifices, holiness is impossible.  
And without holiness, the sacrifices are meaningless.  
The corporate and individual sacrifices of Israel  
form the foundation for their corporate and individual practice of holiness.

In the book of Leviticus, God reveals clearly the central challenge for sinful humanity:  
How can God draw near to us without destroying us?  
If God is a consuming fire – if God is *holy* (and we are not) –  
then how can humanity come into his presence?

The sacrifices of the OT were designed to show that the only way into God’s presence  
is through blood.  
But throughout the OT God makes very clear that the sacrifices are not *magical*.  
It’s not that if you offer these sacrifices then you get to be near God!  
That’s why the second half of Leviticus is also important.

You must be holy – as the LORD your God is holy.

### **Introduction: The Tabernacle and the Priests (Exodus)**

*The LORD called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying,*

The first verse of Leviticus situates us at the Tent of Meeting –  
with the LORD speaking from the Tent.

On the one hand this reminds us of Exodus 40 (the previous chapter),  
where the Tabernacle was erected and consecrated –  
and the glory of the LORD left Mt. Sinai and entered the Tabernacle.

This also reminds us  
that God created the world as a place where he might dwell with man.  
The Garden – in Eden – was the “holy of holies” in the beginning –  
it was the place where God met with man.

The consecration of the tabernacle borrows heavily from the creation narrative:  
“and Moses saw all the work, and behold, they had done it” (Ex 39:43)  
“Thus was completed all the work of the Tabernacle of the tent of meeting” (39:32)  
“When Moses had finished the work” (40:33)  
“Moses blessed them” (39:43)  
“to sanctify it and all its furnishings (40:9)

All these phrases have strong parallels to Genesis 1-2.

Because the Tabernacle is the first place on earth – since the Garden –  
where God promises to meet with man.

But Exodus ends with a problem.

Look back over to Exodus 40:34 –

“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting,  
and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”

That sounds great!

God has come to dwell with man!

But if the purpose of the Tabernacle is that God may dwell with man –  
then verse 35 raises a question mark:

“And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting  
because the cloud settled on it,  
and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”

God has come to dwell with man –

but man – even Moses! – may not enter.

Who shall ascend the mountain of the LORD?

Who can enter into the Holy of Holies?

Who can dwell with God?

So – it is in *that* context – on that *same day* – as far as we can tell,  
that the LORD called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting.

Hey Moses – You can’t come in right now –  
but let me tell you how you can!

I want you to be able to draw near.

But we need to deal with that whole sin and rebellion thing!

Leviticus begins with Israel – God’s firstborn Son –  
standing outside the cherubim-guarded entry to Eden (the Holy of Holies).

And now, “the God who dwells within begins to speak,  
revealing the way of entry, the way back to the tree of life.

To understand Leviticus, then, is to understand the way of YHWH,  
the path of life.” (Morales, 111)

How can you draw near to God?

This is what chapters 1-10 will answer.

You need offerings (chapters 1-7).

And you need priests (chapters 8-10).

<sup>2</sup> *“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or from the flock.*

Chapters 1-3 look at the first three sacrifices:

the burnt offering, the grain offering, and the peace offering.

It is interesting to note that the meaning of these sacrifices are not defined in Leviticus.

The sin and trespass offerings in chapters 4-5 receive much clearer definition,

probably because the sin and trespass offerings

have no counterparts in the ancient world,

while the burnt offering, grain offering, and peace offering

can be found in many ancient cultures.

The Israelites understood full well what a burnt offering meant

—or what a peace offering meant.

There was no need for Moses to spell it out explicitly.

The general point in Leviticus 1:2 is that you must bring a sacrifice from your own flock or herd

—in other words, your offerings must cost you something.

An offering must be a sacrifice

a wild animal is not acceptable

(Later God will allow for the poor to bring a dove or pigeon—v14-17)

As David will say later – “I will not offer to God that which costs me nothing!”

You cannot give to God the “leftovers”!

Whatever is first in your life will receive the first of your time and resources!

For some people, family comes first.

And it shows in how they organize everything around family!

The point of sacrifice – the point of the offerings of Leviticus 1-7

is to deal with sin and establish communion with God

There is an economic aspect of dealing with sin.

Holiness requires economic sacrifice.

You may not be able to maintain the standard of living you desire.

If you belong to God, then all that you have belongs to him as well.

Where are your priorities?

Look at what you spend your money on.  
Look at what you spend your time doing.

Yahweh insisted that the burnt offering must come from their own flock or herd.

What does this show us?

God is beginning to teach Israel that the sacrifice cannot come from outside the camp.  
It must be from within Israel that the sacrifice comes.

And the sacrifice must be brought to the priests (verse 5)

Other nations had priests—but Israel’s priests were distinct;  
they were not to be sorcerers or diviners.

They were solely charged with mediating between God and his people  
through the sacrifice and law.

In Genesis the family head functioned as a priest (Gen 12:7-8; 13:18; etc.)  
and in Exodus 24, Israel’s young men served in that fashion (Ex. 24:5)  
but now God has set apart the house of Aaron for priestly service (Ex. 28).

There is a gradual narrowing of the priesthood,  
from the family head in Abraham to a specific tribe (Levites),  
from a specific family (Aaron), to a single individual (Jesus).  
And then, in Jesus, all who believe in him became a royal priesthood.

But Israel had to learn about the specific calling and function of the priest.

The priest’s main task was to supervise the sacrificial system of Israel.  
And the three basic offerings of Israel were  
the burnt offering, the grain offering, and the peace offering.

Or, to translate them more literally, the “ascension” offering,  
the “tribute” offering,  
and the “peace” offering.

These three offerings all go together – as we will see.

### **1. Burnt Offerings from the Herd (v3-9)**

<sup>3</sup> *“If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD.*

1:3 The burnt offering – or “ascension offering” –  
was the foundation of the whole sacrificial system.

It is called the “ascension” offering because the whole animal is burnt –  
and thus, the whole animal “ascends” up to God in smoke.

The word translated “offering” is *qorban* – which means “to draw near.”  
So a burnt offering is quite literally, an ascent – drawing near to God!

When you offer a burnt offering – you are symbolically drawing near the deity.  
You are saying, in effect, we are here to worship you –  
we are here to draw near to you.

And the animal was without blemish.

The prophet Malachi rebuked the priests and the people –  
“when you offer blind animals for sacrifice, is that not evil?  
When you offer lame and sick animals, is that not evil?  
Offer such to your governor!  
Will he accept you or be favorable to you?” (Mal 1:7)

What do you offer to God?  
The best that you have?  
Or the leftovers?

Notice that the whole animal is burnt.

The entire animal is burnt which is a symbolic consumption of the food by God.  
The scriptures NEVER suggest that God is hungry and needs to be fed.  
Rather, the point is that God is the one who acts in the burnt offering.  
God sent fire from heaven to consume the burnt offerings on several occasions:

The first time was in Leviticus 9:24,  
when Aaron and his sons offered their first burnt offerings as priests.  
This was repeated for David in 1 Chronicles 21:26  
for Solomon in 2 Chronicles 7:1  
and for Elijah in 1 Kings 18:38

The ordinary burnt offering was designed to be a symbolic representation  
of what God had done for Aaron, and what he would do in Jesus Christ.

When God sends fire from heaven to consume the burnt offering,  
he is saying – in effect – *yes*, I receive this ascension,  
and bring it to myself!

This is why the Israelite must bring a male without blemish for the burnt offering.  
God was demonstrating that the perfect sacrifice must be an unblemished male.  
God is looking for a holy son who will be blameless and pure.  
(cf. Heb 9:14 and 1 Peter 1:19)

<sup>4</sup> *He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make*

*atonement for him.*

1:4 The worshiper must “lay his hand on the head” of the burnt offering,  
(This is more than just a touch, implies a leaning, or entrusting)  
cf. Numb 8:10, 12; 27:18, 23; Dt 34:9

Some have argued that this is a transference of sin from the worshiper to the animal.  
But that is misunderstanding the purpose of the ascension offering.

I used to think that the burnt offering was all about sin –  
but the thing that bugged me about that  
is that every ancient culture had burnt offerings –  
but other cultures didn’t seem to care much about sin.  
And the OT seems to assume that everyone knows what a burnt offering is  
(an “ascension” offering) –  
so I started watching more carefully:

what is going on in the burnt offering?  
What does the animal do on behalf of the worshiper?

Ascend in the smoke into God’s presence.  
There is truly an “atonement” (at-one-ment) made here.

There can be no atonement without blood – without death.  
Israel is not merely delivered *from* death –  
but *through* death.  
“dying to the old life-in-Egypt in the process  
and in preparation for life-with-God in the land of Canaan.” (Morales, 129)

Since you have been raised with the Ascension Offering, Moses might have said,  
seek the things that are above, where the Ascension Offering is,  
at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on things above, not on things that are on earth.  
For you have died, and your life is hidden with the Ascension Offering in God.

Of course, Moses couldn’t finish verse 4 –  
because the problem with the Ascension Offering  
was that the Ascension Offering stayed dead....  
but when that which the Ascension Offering points to appears,  
then you also will appear with him in glory!

And then watch what happens to the blood: (v5)  
*Aaron's sons the priests shall bring the blood and throw the blood against the sides of the  
altar that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting*



The blood represents the ‘soul’ or life of the worshiper.

Remember – the laying on of hands  
meant that the worshiper identified with the animal –  
so that the death of the animal became his own –  
and the ascension of the animal became his own...

which means that when the blood of the animal is thrown against the sides of the altar,  
that means that the worshiper is being brought into contact with the divine!

God and man are dwelling together through the blood of the sacrifice.

The burnt offering clearly includes an acknowledgement of sin.  
Sin separates us from God.  
And the only way for man to return to God is through death.

But the sin is not transferred to the animal in the *burnt* offering  
(that *does* happen at the Day of Atonement –  
but in that case the animal is then sent out into the wilderness).

In this case, the point of the burnt offering is to draw near –  
how would transferring sin to the animal  
enable the animal to draw near?!

On the Day of Atonement, when sin is transferred to the scapegoat,  
the scapegoat is not sent to God in the smoke!  
The scapegoat is sent out into the wilderness.

Rather, in the Ascension offering,  
the Israelite acknowledges that he is not able  
“to ascend God’s holy mountain himself,  
and so he must “ascend through his blameless substitute.”

<sup>5</sup> *Then he shall kill the bull before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall bring the blood and throw the blood against the sides of the altar that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting.*

1:5-7 The slaughter of the animal was not a priestly job, but that of the worshiper  
until late in the period of the Kings. (Cf. 1 Samuel 2:13-15);  
and especially 2 Chronicles 29:34,  
where the priests skinned the animals under Hezekiah;  
2 Chron 35:6-19 says that all Passover lambs  
were slaughtered by the priests in the days of Josiah;  
Also Ez. 44:11 has the priests slaughtering the burnt offerings  
and sacrifices for the people

This change occurred as the temple courtyard became known as the court of the priests,  
which was considered part of the Holy Place.

It is worth pointing out that something as significant in Old Testament worship as who actually kills the animal changed over time. We do not have a record of God commanding this change, but God certainly approved of it, as the prophet Ezekiel declares in 44:11. This suggests that the church does indeed have some discretion in the circumstances of worship and government

(as our Confession says: there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.—Confession 1.6)

*<sup>6</sup> Then he shall flay the burnt offering and cut it into pieces, <sup>7</sup> and the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. <sup>8</sup> And Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head, and the fat, on the wood that is on the fire on the altar; <sup>9</sup> but its entrails and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering, a food offering<sup>[a]</sup> with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.*

Aaron's sons would then arrange the pieces of the burnt offering on the altar. The fire hearth was 25 square cubits (probably around 400 square feet—Ex 38:1), so there was lots of room for sacrifices. The arrangement of the pieces on the altar is reminiscent of a meal, which then God would consume by fire.

Not because God is hungry, but because God alone can bring us near to himself. He must consume the burnt offering, and its smoke is considered a “pleasing aroma to Yahweh.” When God smells the sacrifice, he is pleased that Israel has drawn near to him by ascension, and trusted him for their salvation.

## **2. Burnt Offerings from the Flock (v10-13)**

*<sup>10</sup> “If his gift for a burnt offering is from the flock, from the sheep or goats, he shall bring a male without blemish, <sup>11</sup> and he shall kill it on the north side of the altar before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall throw its blood against the sides of the altar. <sup>12</sup> And he shall cut it into pieces, with its head and its fat, and the priest shall arrange them on the wood that is on the fire on the altar, <sup>13</sup> but the entrails and the legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall offer all of it and burn it on the altar; it is a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.*

Verses 10-13 set forth the same provisions in the case of bringing a male sheep or goat.

## **3. Burnt Offerings from the Birds (v14-17)**

*<sup>14</sup> “If his offering to the LORD is a burnt offering of birds, then he shall bring his offering of*

turtledoves or pigeons. <sup>15</sup> And the priest shall bring it to the altar and wring off its head and burn it on the altar. Its blood shall be drained out on the side of the altar. <sup>16</sup> He shall remove its crop with its contents<sup>[b]</sup> and cast it beside the altar on the east side, in the place for ashes. <sup>17</sup> He shall tear it open by its wings, but shall not sever it completely. And the priest shall burn it on the altar, on the wood that is on the fire. It is a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

Verses 14-17 then provide an option for the poor.

Doves and pigeons were the domesticated birds of the day.

A poor Israelite might have no herd or flock, but he could at least afford a bird.

The wealthy could bring a bull.

Ordinary folk could bring a sheep or a goat.

But the poor are not excluded from drawing near to God!

But also notice that even the poor are expected to bring something that costs them!

Birds are cheap – but they are not free.

Each one should bring what he is able.

(All of a sudden you start realizing that Paul's principles of giving in the NT sound an awful lot like Moses's principles!)

### **Conclusion: Christ, the Burnt Offering**

By now it should be really clear that Christ *is* the Ascension Offering.

He is the one who makes atonement for us.

Through his blood he has opened the way for us to dwell with God.

As Hebrews 10:19-20 says:

“we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,

<sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain,  
that is, through his flesh,

And so we draw near – because Jesus has brought us to God!