

Leviticus¹

Author

Although many scholars hold that Moses did not write the first five books including Leviticus², the book itself as well as the New Testament attributes the writings of Leviticus to Moses. At least 56 times, Leviticus indicates that God gave these words to Moses. Such a focus upon the authorship is unparalleled throughout the Holy Scripture. The New Testament also supports Moses as the author. Jesus supported Moses' authorship as He instructed a leper (Matt 8:4; Mark 1:44; Luke 5:14; Lev 13:2; 14:2-32; 17:14) and debated not only the elder's tradition concerning giving (Mark 7:10; Lev 20:9) but also their actions concerning circumcision (John 7:22ff; Lev 12:3). Whenever the Pharisees addressed Jesus concerning the stoning of the woman caught in adultery, He did not question their support of Moses as the lawgiver concerning stoning (John 8:5; Lev 20:10; Deut 22:21-24). Luke noted Mary's time of cleansing according to the Law of Moses (Luke 2:22; Lev 12:2-6). Paul quoted Moses in order to describe a most important theme of Romans... righteousness (Rom 10:5; Lev 18:5). While current day critical scholars question Moses' authorship, Jesus, Jesus' critics as well as His apostles accepted Moses' authorship without question.

“A remarkable authentication of the divine origin of this Mosaic code is to be found in the semi-prophetic twenty-sixth chapter. Here there is a preview of the subsequent history of Israel, with its progressive decline from faith to apostasy, and a clear intimation of the Babylonian Exile (vv. 32-39) and the subsequent restoration (vv. 40-45). It is not to be wondered at if antisupernaturalist critics felt under compulsion to date the origin of Leviticus (document H) and post-exilic (document P). No other course is open to one who on philosophical grounds denies the possibility of a supernatural prediction.”³

Dating

Moses wrote the book of Leviticus near Mount Sinai (7:28; 25:1; 26:46; 27:34). Israel left the Sinai area in the second month of the second year (Num 10:11). Therefore textual evidence indicates an early dating of Leviticus. The book was written sometime around 1445 BC while Israel encamped before Sinai.

Gleason notes that Law codes found in Leviticus are similar to those found in writings dating before Moses including the Code of Hammurabi (circa 1875), and Bilalama (circa 1940 BC.). He also notes that phrases found in Leviticus (Lev. 25:23, 30) are similar to those in recent Ugaritic finds.⁴ Similarities in language within Leviticus simply indicate that such passages commonly labeled as “P” by those who promote a documentary hypothesis existed well before their claims.

¹ “the English name of this book comes from the Vulgate, which took over the title found in the LXX. “Leviticus” is an adjective for “the levitical (book)” or “the book pertaining to the Levites.” David Allan Hubbard William Sanford LaSor, Frederic Wm. Bush, *Old Testament Survey the Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, Second ed.(Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996). 81.

² I have covered the Documentary Hypothesis in the previous introductions to Genesis and Exodus.

³ Gleason L. Jr. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*(Chicago: Moody Press, 1994). 258.

⁴ Ibid. 261.

Recipient

Moses wrote this book to that group of people who left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea.

Purpose

Leviticus was written in order to teach the nation concerning the way to approach God as well as how to live within His will from day to day.⁵ While the book was written for the congregation as a whole, the book provides particular instruction for priests.⁶ A balanced perspective of the book and its intention is provided by the following quote:

“Is Leviticus primarily a handbook for the *priest*? No. Numerous details and directions that the priests would have needed in order to carry out the sacrifices and to officiate at the high days are missing: (1) there is no description of the instruments required for slaughtering, skinning, and cutting up an animal; (2) nothing informs a priest where to stand while performing the sacrificial rites; (3) no liturgy is provided for a priest to speak during the sacrifice. Such details would hardly have been omitted from an official manual.

This book, then was compiled for the instruction of the *congregation* in matters pertaining to the cult, i.e., the correct procedures for making sacrifices, for observing the high times in the calendar, and for living as a holy people. This knowledge enabled the people both to perform their worship acceptably to God and to monitor the accuracy of the priests’ handling of the law. In addition, it guarded the priests from gaining improper control over the people by holding as secret knowledge the basic operation of the sanctuary.”⁷

Message

The basic message of Leviticus is that God demands holiness on the part of His people. God demanded specific standards concerning their sacrifices (1-7) as well as their priestly order (8-10). He also demanded a lifestyle that reflected a holy standard of living (17-25). Neglect of God’s standards could result in a lack of forgiveness for their sins, exile (26:14-37) or even death (10:1-11; 24:10-23). Although the book stresses the complete “otherness” of God it also stresses that God is merciful and forgiving. God’s provision of a sacrificial system (1-7) that extended to not only the leper himself but also to his possessions (13-14) indicates His great mercy. His mercy is further supported as He promised Israel blessing for keeping His Law (26:1-13), reassured them of His forgiveness even in exile (26:40-46) and promised to never forget His covenant with their Ancestors to bless the nation of Israel (26:44-45). According to Leviticus, God’s Holiness provides extensive mercy to those who approach Him according to His commands.

Theme

Holiness

⁵ Paul N. Benware, *The Essential Bible Survey of the Old Testament*(Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003). 63.

⁶ Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests a History of Old Testament Israel*(Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996). 23.

⁷ William Sanford LaSor. 81-2

Outline of Leviticus

I. Restoration 1-16

A. Personal Restoration 1-7

1. Basic Rules for Sacrifice 1:1-6:7
 - a. Offerings Soothing to God 1:1-3:17
 - b. Offerings for Forgiveness 4:1-6:7
2. Added Details
 - a. The Burnt Offering 6:8-13
 - b. The Grain Offering 6:14-23
 - c. The Sin Offering 6:24-30
 - d. The Guilt Offering 7:1-10
 - e. The Peace Offering 7:11-38

B. Priestly Restoration 8-10

1. Aaron and His Sons' Ordination 8:1-36
2. Aaron and Sons' Make Sacrifices 9:1-24
3. Aaron and Son's Tested 10:1-20
 - a. The Unholy Service of Nadab and Abihu 10:1-11
 - b. The Righteous Response of Aaron 10:12-20

C. Societal Restoration 11-16

1. Laws Identifying Unclean Food 11:1-47
2. Laws of Restoration from Impurity 12:1-16:34
 - a. Restoration of Newborns 12:1-8
 - b. Restoration of Lepers 13:1-14:54
 - i. *Laws to Identify and Restore Lepers 13:1-14:32*
 - ii. *Laws to Identify and Restore Leprous Possessions 14:33-54*
 - c. Restoration of the Unclean 15:1-33

D. National Restoration 16:1-34

II. Righteous Living-17-27

A. Personal Life 17-20

1. Concerning Sacrifices 17:1-16
2. Concerning Sex 18:1-30
3. Concerning Man and God 19:1-37

4. Concerning Life 20:1-27
 5. Concerning Priests 21:1-22:16
 - a. Commands for their Lifestyle 21:1-24
 - b. Commands for their Holy Gifts 22:1-16
 6. Concerning Sacrifices 22:17-33
- B. Ceremonial Life 23:1-25:55
1. Introduction 23:1-2
 2. Weekly Sabbath 23:3-4
 3. Passover and Unleavened Bread 23:5-8
 4. Pentecost 23:9-23
 5. Blowing of the Trumpets 23:24-26
 6. Day of Atonement 23:27-32
 7. Feasts of Booths 23:33-44
 8. Command Concerning the Oil of the Lamp 24:1-9
 9. Stoning of the Blasphemer 24:10-23
 10. Seventh Year of Rest 25:1-7
 11. Year of Jubilee 25:8-55
- C. Covenantal Life 26:1-46
1. Promise of Blessing For Keeping the Statutes 26:1-13
 2. Promise of Correction through Exile For Ignoring Statutes 26:14-37
 3. Promise of Restoration Upon Repentance 26:40-46
 4. Holy Living Concerning Tithes and Offering 27:1-34

Questions for Leviticus

1. What is the occasion for the writing of Leviticus?
2. Was Leviticus written for the Priests or for the people?
3. What arguments support an early date of Leviticus?
4. Would you describe Leviticus as a book indicating that God was strict or merciful or possibly both? Defend your answer.
5. Describe the various offerings mentioned in chapters 1-7.
6. What is the significance of God's treatment of Nadab and Abihu in 10:1-2?
7. What is the significance of God's rules concerning the clean and unclean animals in chapter 11?
8. Describe the Day of Atonement mentioned in chapter 16?
9. What is the significance of God's treatment of people with leprosy in 13-14?
10. Describe the event of Jubilee in chapter 25.

Bibliography

Archer, Gleason L. Jr. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994.

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