

# Leviticus

An Introduction

**Leviticus 1:1** The LORD called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting (testimony; LXX), saying...

## Targums on Leviticus 1:1

### Onkelos

Then the Lord called to Moses and spoke with him from the Tent of Meeting, saying...

### *Neofiti*

*And when Moses had finished erecting the tent and had anointed and consecrated it and all its accessories, and the altar and all its accessories, Moses thought in his heart and said: "Mount Sinai, whose consecration is but the consecration of a moment, and whose anointing is but the anointing of a moment (an hour), I did not ascend it until the time it was spoken with me from before the Lord; the tent of meeting, whose consecration is an eternal consecration and whose anointing is an eternal anointing, it is but just that I should not enter within it until the time it is spoken with me from before the Lord." Then the Dibbera called to Moses, and the Lord spoke with him from the tent of meeting, saying:*

### *Pseudo-Jonathan*

*When Moses finished erecting the Tabernacle, Moses thought and debated in his heart, and said: "As for Mount Sinai, whose anointing was the anointing of an hour, and whose consecration was a consecration of three days, I was not able to ascend it until the Dibbur spoke to me. Surely then, this tent of meeting, whose anointing is an eternal one and whose consecration is an eternal one, it is only right that I should not enter it until I have been told from before the Lord." Then the Dibbur of the Lord called to Moses, and the Memra of the Lord spoke with him from the tent of meeting, saying:*

# The Old Heave-Ho

He is a typical new Christian convert, eager to learn and willing to obey. He asks his mentor, “What can I do to grow as a Christian?” “Read through your Bible,” he is told. So, he embarks on a new journey—to read through the whole Bible in a year. The reading requirements begin easily enough, 18 verses of John’s Gospel.

But he quickly learns that this won’t be the easiest of assignments. Four chapters a day of Genesis keep him busy. He’s a slow reader, but the material is interesting and even fun. Every day he gets more excited. After a few chapters, it changes over to Job. He is reading through the Bible chronologically. Job was an unexpected change of pace, but certainly readable and understandable. He returns to Genesis and begins making his way through Exodus. It is now well into February now, and things are going amazingly well. He’s learning so much about his new Faith and God.

Suddenly, he comes to the Ten Commandments. He had heard about those before, but he wasn’t prepared for what followed. Several chapters of strange and sometimes outdated feeling laws followed by a couple of interesting

historical chapters, followed by over a dozen chapters that give exhaustive and exhausting details about how Moses is to make the Tabernacle. It's hard to stay awake, especially when he is reading at night after a long day of work. To make matters worse, several of those chapters repeats themselves almost verbatim!

Then, he enters into the impossible. **Leviticus**. Chapter after chapter of tedious, monotonous laws about things that no one does anymore—sacrificing animals, going to a temple with various offerings, and so on. With the addition of scores of seemingly random and inexplicable rules from everything to moldy houses to nocturnal emissions to lists of clean and unclean animals, he has absolutely no idea what the point of this is. He feels like throwing the book across the room but thinks the better of it, because it is God's word. But if this is the way the rest of the Bible is going to be, he's not sure he can read another chapter.

**More than one** sincere Christian has felt this way when they come to Leviticus. This book is so ancient and so different from anything resembling the modern world that most people have no idea what to think about it. Many preachers won't touch it. Teachers won't offer it. Students

run from it. Entire systems of theology and ethics are rooted in overthrowing everything about it. It just seems so hopelessly out of touch to so many people. In fact, it seems worse. It seems downright mean.

I don't blame people for not understanding the book, though such visceral reactions against it are rather unfathomable to me. You can always buy a study Bible to help you. It is that we live in an age that does not want to look deeply into God's word. Leviticus is one of the deepest parts of that word, and one that few understand, because it is so hard to even want to care.

But did you know that this twenty-seven chapters book contains **more direct speech by God himself** than any other book of the Bible? And have you considered that it is placed **at the center or heart** of the Torah or Pentateuch (the five books of Moses), which forms the foundation for all of Scripture?<sup>1</sup> One would think this is important. Indeed, I would argue, it is at the heart of most of what the NT refers to when it talks about the “**old covenant**” passing away, and even that is misunderstood. There is much confusion here, because many people think this language refers to the Ten

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<sup>1</sup> Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 23.

Commandments, as if we are no longer under any sense of obeying them because we are in the age of grace.

We are living in a **wretched generation** in the church. We are wretched intellectually. We are wretched morally. **Holiness** is passé. Nothing is sacred, certainly not **space** that we dwell in. **Religion** is so yesterday. Spirituality is what is in. **Ritual** is set aside for the novel, or at least the mystical. Monotony and daily rhythms must give way to adrenaline rushes of ever renewing excitements. That God of love is no longer that Levitical God of **wrath**. We are totally forgiven in Christ, so let's move on with the living already!

Because of these things and more, I'm undertaking to study this book as a church together. Today, I will only be introducing the book. I'll do it by looking only at the first verse. "**The LORD called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting**" (**Lev 1:1**). You can hear even at the beginning how the LORD is speaking directly. Later, we will look at the expansions of this verse in the Targums, as they will do two things for us. They will **root this verse** back in a very important passage in Exodus, and they will ground the whole book in the most important things we can think

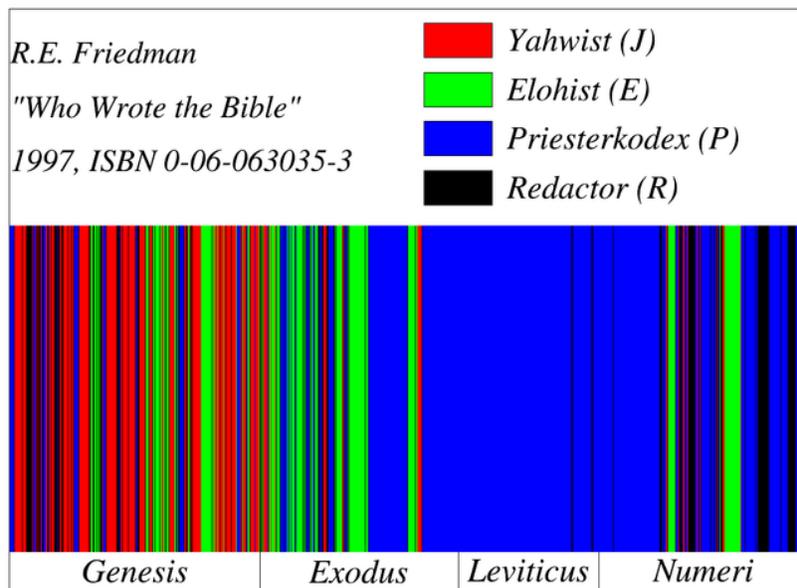
of as God works its message out in our souls—the one speaking here to Moses.

## Author

Who wrote Leviticus? This is perhaps the most controversial and debated question about the Pentateuch, at least today. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Protestant “Higher Critics” sought to get behind the text and figure out how it down came to us. The idea was to take it apart and put it back together in order to figure out things like authorship. When I took a class on the Pentateuch in college, I remember having both a feeling of utter boredom and not a little anger at my professor for spending so much time talking about what they call the “Documentary Hypothesis.”

Sometimes called JEPD for the supposed late sources (850-500 BC) that very late editors used to compile the Pentateuch (Jahwist from Yahweh; Elohist from Elohim, Priestly, Deuteronomy), the idea was that there were at least four very different versions of parts of the Pentateuch that each had their own spin on the story. Then, probably around

the time of Ezra or later, some scribe(s) decided to compile them all together into five books.



Leviticus was written, in this thinking, almost entirely by some very late priest(s) after the return from the exile, in an attempt to get the Jews to take their religion seriously after all that had happened to them. It should be no surprise that theory remains the **dominant one in mainline schools** to this day. Evangelicals have given serious pushback to it; in part because the point of this was to **subvert** a Christian's belief in the authority of the Bible—it's just a human book; Moses didn't really write it; other later Jews did.

While editorializing to help a "modern" audience understand what was said as you were recopying the scroll

certainly exists (such as spelling “Nephilim” two ways for Aramaic speakers to help them understand the word in Num 13:33; or writing about Moses’ death, something Moses himself did not do; or adding how something ancient is here “to this day”), it is time that **Christians take seriously again** what Christians and Jews believed about authorship for millennia. **God gave it to Moses** and oversaw the transmission of the text in its final form. However interesting the editorial process may be, it is far more important to take the basic claim at face-value.

Thus, our verse says, “**The LORD called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying...**” God spoke to Moses over the course of his time in the wilderness.<sup>2</sup> Moses faithfully wrote it down, most likely as soon as the tabernacle had been completed.<sup>3</sup> There is **human authorship**; there is **Divine authorship**. As **Andrew Bonar**, youngest brother of the famous hymn-writer Horatius, in his commentary put it, “**There is no book, in the whole compass of that inspired Volume which the Holy Ghost has**

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<sup>2</sup> **Rabbi Akiva** said long ago, ‘Both the generalities and the specifics were [first] spoken at Sinai. They were reiterated at the Tent of Meeting and stated a third time in the steppes of Moab’ (*Zevachim* 115b).

<sup>3</sup> So **John Gill**, *An Exposition of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, The Baptist Commentary Series (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1810), 541, following the Targums.

given us, that contains more of the very words of God than *Leviticus*. It is God that is the direct speaker in almost every page; his gracious words are recorded in the form wherein they were uttered. This consideration cannot fail to send us to the study of it with singular interest and attention.”<sup>4</sup> This is a very different way to approach the book than tearing it apart in order. This is **the approach of faith**, the only way a Christian should ever come to the Holy Scripture.

## Structure and Themes

What is Leviticus about? First, it has **a singular theme** that all other things drive home. “**Leviticus seems to have a ... unified overall theme: how to protect the holiness of the house of God.**”<sup>5</sup> Notice how in the very first verse, the LORD is speaking to Moses “from the tent of meeting.” This is his house. That is established right away. In this way, themes such as **holiness, purity, sin, God’s wrath, man and**

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<sup>4</sup> **Andrew A. Bonar**, *A Commentary on the Book of Leviticus, Expository and Practical* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1851), vii.

<sup>5</sup> **Mary Douglas**, "Poetic Structure in Leviticus," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells*, ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 247.

his soul, ritual and symbolism (and typology) all fit well into the book's purpose.

How does all of this **unfold**? The most common way scholars look at the book is **linearly**. Here are a couple of examples:

1. Leviticus 1-7: Offerings
2. Leviticus 8-10: The Ritual System Founded
3. 11-16: Cleanliness Laws
4. 17-27: Holiness Code<sup>6</sup>

1. Leviticus 1-7: Various Kinds of Offerings
2. Leviticus 8-16: Successful Execution of Ex 28-29 Commands
3. Leviticus 17-22: Holiness and Becoming Holy
4. Leviticus 23-26 [27]: Holy Time<sup>7</sup>

I think these are helpful, but also **rather cold and clinical** ways of approaching the book. Perhaps better is to see it grouped **thematically** like this:

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<sup>6</sup> From **Michael Heiser**, *Notes on Leviticus from the Naked Bible Podcast*.

<sup>7</sup> Compiled from **Nobuyoshi Kiuchi**, *Leviticus*, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary* 3 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 19ff. He further divides these sections into **smaller units**.

1. Approaching the House of God (Lev 1-10)
2. Cleansing the House of God (Lev 11-16)
3. Meeting with God at the House of God (Lev 17-27)<sup>8</sup>

I like this one for its ability to help you understand a key theme of the book. Leviticus tells us all about how we are to approach a holy God who comes to dwell in our midst. It concerns his space, his house, his stuff, his people, his land, and so on.

It is also possible to see it as a complex **chiasm**, or as someone calls it, a **ring**.<sup>9</sup>

- A. Exposition: Leviticus 1-7 (5:1-6 accounts for sins)
  - B. Clean and Unclean: Leviticus 8-17
  - C. Sexual Ethics: Leviticus 18
  - D. **The Holiness of God: Leviticus 19** (19:33-35 Egyptian reference)
  - C<sup>1</sup>. Sexual Ethics: Leviticus 20
  - B<sup>1</sup>. Clean and Unclean: Leviticus 21-22
  - A<sup>1</sup>. Exposition: Leviticus 23-25 (24:10-23 “eye for an eye”)
  - D<sup>1</sup>. **Holiness of the Name: Leviticus 26** (26:44-46 Egyptian reference)
- Conclusion: Holy Things Belonging to the LORD: Leviticus 27**<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Michael L. Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 37, New Studies in Biblical Theology (England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2015). These are his chapter headings.

<sup>9</sup> The following is a summary chart of Douglas’ discussion in “Poetic Structure in Leviticus.” See also her article, “The Forbidden Animals in Leviticus,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 59 (1993): 3-23.

<sup>10</sup> Another chiasm takes into account the three books of Exodus-Numbers. In this structure, **Leviticus 16 and the Day of Atonement is the center.** Raymond R. Hausoul “Leviticus 25-27 in de metafysische grootheid van Exodus-Leviticus-Numeri,” *Das Heilige Herz der Tora: Festschrift für Hendrik Koorevaar zu seinem 65, Geburtstag*, Theologische Studien, ed. Siegbert Riecher, Julius Steinberg (Germany: Shaker Verlag Aachen, 2001): 130.

This adds fascinating layers that help bring out a point made by Mary Douglas in her treatment of Leviticus. Why do we find Leviticus so hard to read? Perhaps it is because we are approaching it the wrong way. We do not let it affect us the way it was written, we demand that it meets our agenda. Often, a **modern agenda** is in direct conflict with it, so people throw it out, as so many today have done. Or, we take it one chapter at a time and get **lost in the trees**, unable to see the forest. But it isn't written like Proverbs. It is written more like a Chinese poem or an English sonnet. **“In the sonnet there is the expectation that each part will contribute fully to the development of the rhyme structure, that a complex theme will be deployed, and that the ending will return to enlarge and more richly affirm the opening lines. The meaning, which is elusive and scattered if the parts are read in isolation or in strict linear sequence, becomes coherent.”**<sup>11</sup> That means, the beginning is very important. It also means that you have to stick with it. All becomes clear at the end. Part of my purpose today is to take you to this ultimate purpose before our time is finished, so that you can understand the whole point up front.

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<sup>11</sup> Douglas, Bells, 247.

# Covenantal Title

Let's look at the title of the book. "Leviticus" comes from the Latin *Leviticus* which is the translation of the LXX *Leuitikon*. This is the title the LXX translators chose to give the book.<sup>12</sup> You might think this title refers to the Levities. But the Levites are actually only mentioned a single time in the book (**Lev 25:32-34**), and this is almost as an afterthought. The title does not refer to them. Rather, it refers to **Levi**, the third son of Jacob, through him, the Priests. Hence, the Jews often called this "the Manual of the Priests" or the "book of the Priests"<sup>13</sup> or the "law of the priests."<sup>14</sup>

But you say, **isn't a Levite a Priest?** This is a very important question. The answer is no. All Priests are Levites, but not all Levites are Priests. Levites are simply those people descended from the tribe of Levi, the third-born of Jacob through Leah. There was a Levitical order that certain qualified men from that tribe could serve in the tabernacle,

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<sup>12</sup> The Hebrew title *wayyiqra* comes from the first word meaning, "And he called." The Aramaic name *siphra* means "the book" and "alludes to the special importance Leviticus had among the five books of Moses in the Jewish tradition." Kiuchi, 15.

<sup>13</sup> **Jacob Milgrom**, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 1

<sup>14</sup> **Gill**, 541.

in a kind of OT equivalent to the [deaconate](#). Their responsibilities were to serve and guard the house of God. It was the priests' duty to offer sacrifices. They were the special intercessors that represented man to God. Levites could not do that. They could only aid.

For just a moment, I want you to consider [Levi](#). In one of the bizarre stories of Genesis, the sister of Jacob's sons, Dinah, is raped. In a calculated and brutal plot, Levi and Simeon make the entire city swear to be circumcised in order that that the king might take Dinah as his wife after he had disgraced her. They agree. When they are all laying there in pain, the two men swoop down and kill the entire city in revenge.

This becomes [a curse](#) for both Levi and Simeon. Jacob predicts to them on his death-bed that God “[will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel](#)” ([Gen 49:7](#)). They will have no inheritance among the tribes. Simeon ends up being enveloped into Judah and ceases to be a tribe with its own identity ([Josh 19:9](#)). But God does something only God can or would with Levi. He turns the curse into a [blessing](#). His scattering will be for the benefit of the entire nation!

In fact, this blessing is a **covenantal blessing**. The book of Jubilees, probably drawing upon oral tradition, summarizes the biblical implications. “The seed of Levi was chosen for the priesthood and Levitical (orders) to minister before the LORD always just as we [angelic hosts] do. And Levi and his sons will be blessed forever because he was zealous to do righteousness and judgment and vengeance against all who rose up against Israel” (**Jubilees 30:18**). Jeremiah refers to this as **covenant with the Levitical Priests** (**Jer 33:21**). Nehemiah calls it **the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites** (**Neh 13:29**). Malachi calls it the **covenant with Levi** (**Mal 2:4, 8**). Jubilees tells us that on his death-bed Jacob, “Put garments of the priesthood upon [Levi] and he filled his hands... and Levi served as priest in Bethel before Jacob, his father, (apart) from his ten brothers. And he was a priest there” (**Jub 32:3, 9**).

All of this is to say that my belief for many years now has been that Leviticus is so named because this is the covenantal document<sup>15</sup> that God gave to the Priests in order to guide them to be guardians of Israel’s religion for the sake

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<sup>15</sup> Scott Hahn in the popularized publication of his dissertation calls it, “Leviticus as a Grant-Type Covenant,” thus seeing the entire book as a covenantal document. **Scott W. Hahn**, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2009), 155.

of the people. In this way, it is not the Mosaic covenant. It is a **different** covenant, just like the covenant with David (**Jer 33:21**) is a different covenant. This has implications for what it means in the NT when God says the “old covenant” with its shadows and symbolism is now done away. But that is for another time and place.

## **The Targums and Leviticus 1:1**

### *Understanding the Relationship to Exodus and the Priests*

At this point, I want to turn to the Targums of this verse. I do this for teaching and purposes of edification and preaching, which is really why they were written in the first place. A **Targum** is basically a paraphrase of the Scripture that often gives additional commentary for the sake of helping people understand the meaning. They were written not in Hebrew but in Aramaic.

We have three Targums of Leviticus. All date to the first-second centuries in terms of when they were written, but their traditions go back much earlier. One is called **Onkelos**, possibly a Roman convert to Judaism, whom some

think was the nephew of Emperor Hadrian. It is almost always the one that sticks closest to the text. In this case, it is almost identical. “Then the Lord called to Moses and spoke with him from the Tent of Meeting, saying...”

The two other Targums are called Neofiti (Jerusalem) and Pseudo-Jonathan. Both are perhaps four times as long as both Onkelos and the biblical text, and in this verse, they are virtually identical. Here is Neofiti:

*And when Moses had finished erecting the tent and had anointed and consecrated it and all its accessories, and the altar and all its accessories, Moses thought in his heart and said: “Mount Sinai, whose consecration is but the consecration of a moment, and whose anointing is but the anointing of a moment (an hour), I did not ascend it until the time it was spoken with me from before the Lord; the tent of meeting, whose consecration is an eternal consecration and whose anointing is an eternal anointing, it is but just that I should not enter within it until the time it is spoken with me from before the Lord.” Then the Dibbera called to Moses, and the Lord spoke with him from the tent of meeting, saying...*

Only the last bit [no italics] is the biblical text. All the rest is preliminary information. What’s so interesting about it is

that it roots the whole thing deeply in [Exodus 19](#),<sup>16</sup> even while connecting it to the end of Exodus, after Moses had obeyed the Lord and built the tabernacle. Exodus 19 is the prelude to the giving of the Ten Commandments.

It is a vital chapter to understand when reading Leviticus. First, it connects the theme of the [house and the mountain](#). In Scripture, God dwells on mountains and then God dwells in a tabernacle-temple. So, what happened on Mt. Sinai when Moses went up is now being repeated, but from the confines of the Tent of Meeting, God's new house. Moses is in God's house and the LORD is speaking directly to him.

Second, it is in this chapter that Israel is called “[a kingdom of priests and a holy nation](#)” ([Ex 19:6](#)), something repeated by Peter and Revelation who are talking to [Christians](#) ([1Pe 2:9](#); [Rev 1:6](#); [5:10](#)). The point is, there was a moment when the entire nation was considered priests, not just one tribe. In the NT, that status transforms from the physical nation of Israel to the spiritual priesthood of the

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<sup>16</sup> The notes in the critical edition of the Targums refer in no less than three places in this one verse to Exodus 19:3 (in the Exodus Rabbah), 19:14-16, and again in 19:3. See the notes on this verse in both Targums in [Kevin Cathcart](#), Michael Maher, and Martin McNamara, eds., *The Aramaic Bible: Targum Neofiti 1: Leviticus and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Leviticus*, trans. Martin McNamara, Michael Maher, and Robert Hayward, vol. 3 (Collegetown, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994).

believer in Christ. But **something terrible happened** along the way.

As that chapter unfolds, we learn that Israel is eager to obey the LORD (**Ex 19:8**). Moses then has them prepare for their priestly washing and consecration (**10-11**). On the third day (which the Targum is referring to; **vs. 16**), there was thunder and lightning and a very loud trumpet blast. The angels of Sinai were signaling that **the LORD had come** to his new sanctuary (**Deut 33:2; Ps 68:17**). And it was terrifying.

God warns the people not to come near (**Ex 19:12-13, 21**), and then a peculiar thing appears. “**Let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves ... go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest he break out against them**” (**22, 24**). There are priests in the midst of the nation of priests. This is explained by Levi. The chapter ends, God comes in the next chapter, gives the Ten Commandments, the people are completely terrified.

Moses then disappears for 40 days, and by that time they have utterly lost hope and have decided to take matters into

their own hands. They forsake the holy worship of God in his own holy territory and fashion him in their image (Ex 32:1ff), desperately hoping they can control him. For nothing is happening—Moses is dead, and they are lost in a barren waste left to die. So they think.

God hears the partying of the people and tells Moses he is so angry that he is about to destroy them (32:10). Moses, like a good priest, intercedes for the people and the Angel of God stays his hand. The people are spared God's wrath. Almost. When Moses comes back down, the sons of Levi gather to him (he is one of them after all, from the tribe of Levi; Ex 32:26). Then, like their ancestor Levi before them, they take out their swords and begin hacking the people to pieces. This time, it was at the Lord's command (27). What has happened in this event is so significant that the entire book of Leviticus needs to be written.

Scott Hahn summarizes. “The expression ‘kingdom of priests’ is not applied to Old Testament Israel as a nation ever again ... the Rabbis recognized this loss of royal priestly privileges.”<sup>17</sup> So what happens?

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<sup>17</sup> Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Promises* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2009), 144.

The golden calf incident made it necessary for Moses to implement a complex program of covenant renewal before the first generation could leave Sinai one year later ... This renewal of the covenant with Israel is precisely what God sets about doing in Exodus 35–40 and in [Leviticus 1–26](#) [in other words, in our entire book] ... In Exodus 34, [God renews the Sinai covenant](#) that had been ratified earlier (Exod 24). He then extends a [new and distinct covenant](#) first to Aaron (Exod 35–40) and then to the [Priests, his sons]<sup>18</sup> (Lev 1–16). This new Levitical covenant will govern all of the congregation of Israel (Lev 17–26). In this bicovenantal system, the Priestly Code (Lev 1–16) was formulated to teach and prepare Aaron, his sons, and the Levites to assume priestly authority over the twelve tribes.<sup>19</sup>

### *New Beginning, but Deadly Serious*

It is this covenant renewal that thus allows God not to destroy the people and more, to give them a chance at [a new beginning](#), even though they have sinned mightily against him. But now things are different. Their access to God will

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<sup>18</sup> Hahn reads, “Levites.” I believe he has conflated the two.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 147, 148, 149.

have to be mediated by Aaronic priests. A major theme of Leviticus thus comes to the foreground. “You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a man does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD” (Lev 18:5). In this way, you can only understand Leviticus once you understand Genesis and Exodus.

Yet, this book becomes the very heart of the Pentateuch. Leviticus is the middle. Why? Why would this book be called *siphra*—“the book?” You just heard why. If you do what God says, you will live. If you do not, you will die. That’s quite serious, isn’t it? All of this turns upon the vital fact that when God chooses to dwell in your midst, you become his people, it becomes his land, things must be consecrated because they belong to the LORD.<sup>20</sup> This is learning what it means to be God’s people. He has to show you what this means in order to show you what he is like.

Reading Leviticus impresses one thing upon the reader. This is *very serious business*. From the tedious nature of the preparation of the various offerings to the laborious recitation of law after law after law, the impression you get is that while this covenant gives the nation a second chance,

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<sup>20</sup> This is essentially how **Mary Douglas** summarizes the way Leviticus ends the way it began. See Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 244.

they had better learn how severe it is when they break covenant. In fact, I believe the difficulty many have in reading this book is part of the point. You can't come away from this thinking that God takes purity and holiness in any way other than deadly seriously. In fact, I think part of its purpose is to overwhelm you in this, so that in the **impossibility** of carrying out the things, you might end up seeing the grace in the thing. And yes, there is much **grace** in Leviticus. As Boner says,

*The Gospel of the grace of God, with all that follows in its train, may be found in Leviticus. This is the glorious attraction of the book to every reader who feels himself a sinner. The New Testament has about forty references to its various ordinances. The rites here detailed were typical; and every type was designed and intended by God to bear resemblance to some spiritual truth. The likeness between type and antitype is never accidental. The very excellency of these rites consists in their being chosen by God for the end of shadowing forth “good things to come” (Heb. 10:1).<sup>21</sup>*

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<sup>21</sup> **Andrew A. Bonar**, *A Commentary on the Book of Leviticus, Expository and Practical* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1851), viii.

I'm going to say **something provocative** at this point. In this case, I do not think "doing" *these* laws here refers particularly to *moral* commandments, that is, keeping the Ten Commandments. It isn't that God doesn't care if you keep those. Of course he does. Those commandments exist for all people at all times, generally speaking. and Paul seems to take this very verse and apply it to both moral and ceremonial law (**Gal 3:12**).

### *Sacred Space*

But the context of living by them is *Leviticus*. Immediately after it says this, the Lord starts talking about sexual purity laws. You might think those are just a kind of fleshing out of the adultery commandment and are thus purely moral. And of course, there is a moral component to them. But the focus of those is not so much moral as ritual. Of course, there is obviously overlap. But the two are not the same thing.

For instance, there is nothing particularly moral about wearing clothing made of two kinds of material (**Lev 19:19**). Nor is God saying that because an **eagle** is "unclean" and

“detestable” (Lev 11:13, 16) that some kind of aberration that occurred after the fall and evil birds began to be born. God doesn’t hate eagles or Fruit of the Loom. There is symbolism going on here.<sup>22</sup> We will come to all of this in due time.

The context of the sexual laws is about contamination and ritual purity. This has to do with something called sacred space or holy ground. Especially postmodern people no longer think anything like this, and we shouldn’t, at least in the context of how it worked in Leviticus. Nevertheless, there still is sacred space and common space. It still exists and symbolism still matter.

It exists in the place that God indwells. In the OT, God indwelt the tabernacle. He did so in the land that he chose to make his own. As Heiser says, “Leviticus is concerned with what goes on in Yahweh’s territory (i.e., his inheritance).” “Levitical theology is concerned over what is allowed to go into or not into Yahweh’s domain.” Other places are controlled by other divine entities and demons. Not Israel.

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<sup>22</sup> One can take, for example, the use of such unclean animals and how a prophet like Isaiah associates them with the demonic world (Isa 13:21-22; 34:11-15; cf. LXX and also Rev 18:2). Curiously, animals such as ravens and owls and the like have been associated with the demonic realm for ages (and today, the UFO realm, which is probably very similar in nature). Heiser has some stuff on demons that will be helpful later.

That isn't the way it is going to work with Israel. They will not be like the rest, for they are chosen and special and specially loved.

### *Living in Light of the New Covenant*

In the NT, the occupation of physical land has been transformed to **physical people** whom God indwells and who make up together the “**new man**” (**Eph 4:24**) or “**body of Christ**” (**1Co 12:27**), so that now his domain and presence is not located in one place in one land far far away, but wherever he people are, be they in church or at home having dinner or in school or court or prison!

Here I want to take you to the second reason for bringing up the Targums. There is one thing that Targum Pseudo-Jonathan adds to Neofiti. At the very end it says, “**Then the Word of the Lord called to Moses, and the Word of the Lord spoke with him from the tent of meeting, saying...**” It has “word of the Lord” twice. And the Word is speaking and calling. These are different words in Aramaic. The first is **Dibbur**; the second is **Memra**. Both are functioning not as words, but as a person—The Word of

God, the Logos, Jesus. The Targum is saying that Jesus came and spoke to Moses.

This means that it is **Jesus who is indwelling the tabernacle** as he is surrounded by the Shekinah Glory-Cloud of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is sitting enthroned above the cherubim of the ark-throne. Jesus is saying very specific things to Moses about his place and time. This is a book about Jesus and his holiness, what he is like, what it is like to be in his presence.

But in these last days, **Jesus indwelt a human body**. That is, Jesus became a man. The Word became *Immanuel*—God *With Us*. That Word then fulfilled the law. Particularly, in Hebrews, he fulfilled the *Levitical* law. Why? Hebrews says, “**If perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron?**” (**Heb 7:11**). All the sacrifices, the Day of atonement, the offerings, Jesus gave the perfect one to the Father. In as much, he ascended to the heavenly tabernacle and to make atonement for sins and to make the space clean—once-for-all.

Therefore, there is **no more need for the tedious laborious rituals of Leviticus**, not because God has changed, but because God has come in human flesh and transferred the place of his indwelling from a tabernacle made with human hands to a tabernacle made by God—his church and the Christian. The sacred space is now where you are, not where Israel is. The Holy Spirit now indwells all who call upon the Name of God. You are his temple.

But that means, **the principles behind the reasons for these laws remain**. God has not changed. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. What you are going to see, chapter after chapter, week after week, is the seriousness with which our Lord takes holiness. God's people today desperately need this. It may be the greatest need of the hour. You will see it in the way he tells you to approach him. You will see it in the way you are to live like him. You will see it in the way you are to contrast with the world who does not know God nor his ways.

But most of all, you should see it in the way it **typifies and glorifies Christ**. You should see it in what it must have meant for him to perform all these things. And you should see it in how he performed them *for you!* If we get **bored and**

tired reading through this book, then we have not considered the Christ who gave it nor the Christ who spent his life studying it, reflecting upon it, and obeying it. If we can't imagine ever doing all of these things, then we have not considered the Christ who did them all perfectly in his incarnation for us. And if we feel the freedom of not being under such religious ritualistic purity laws as these, may it never be because we are people who have forgotten that someone had to do them, and because he did them perfectly, we have the once-for-all freedom of being considered ritualistically pure forever in God's site because Christ is not in us, the hope of glory.

There may be someone here who does not know this hope. It could very well manifest itself in your sitting here thinking to yourself that you can't imagine what a nightmare the next few months will be. Some who do not know Christ nevertheless still get excited about exercising their minds Romans or their emotions in Psalms. But Leviticus exposes us at the root of who we are. Turn to Christ and may he open your heart to see the beauty of this book.

The heart of the Torah needs to be the heart of God's people in the new covenant. Friend, if that is your heart, then I ask you to inspect it very closely. For the laws here reveals God's **holy and righteous** nature. And they also show you his great **mercy, kindness, and grace**. A people who absolutely turned their back on him were given a second chance, covenantally speaking. In Christ, a new covenant has come and God invites you to drink deeply of the wine and eat fully of the choice morsels of his covenant goodness in Christ, the Great High Priest, who has broken down the wall of separation, made atonement, satisfied God's wrath, stood in the gap as a sacrifice, pleased the Father in all things, all so that you might know the goodness, truth, and beauty of the God who condescended to Moses to lead his people into the Promised Land.

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