

Bible 101 - Leviticus / Hebrews - Leviticus Outline

This is the liturgical book God gave Moses, but it goes beyond worship to include daily life. The book is in "first person God" meaning it's God's voice that we hear speaking the commands and regulations. The NIV splits the book into two sections, and those headings follow:

Part 1: Worshiping a Holy God

Chapters 1-7

The five great sacrifices are described (what they are, how they are to be offered and when) along with their purposes.

Chapters 8-10

The priesthood is established with the consecration of Aaron and his sons.

Chapters 11-15

Daily life: what is ceremonially clean or unclean; what to do about leprosy (a type of sin), and its effects not only on people, but on fabric, the house and its furnishings.

Chapter 16-17

Yom Kippur: The Day of Atonement; further instructions for the altar.

Part 2: Living a Holy Life

Chapters 18-22

More regulations for daily life

Chapter 23

Sabbath observance and three great festivals

Chapters 24-27

Laws of sanctification and consequences of disobedience

God's purpose in this book is to create (1) the means by which sin is covered or atoned for, and (2) the regulations by which his people are set apart - made holy and live as holy people, different from their neighbors, and from any other nation on earth.

Bible 101 - Lev. 1-3, Heb 1

Prologue: Before we get to Leviticus - and with it, parts of Hebrews that are parallels under the New Covenant - it's important to look back. Remember that I said in the very first session, before we read a verse of Genesis, that the Bible is a linear narrative, a unified literary work, the story beginning in Genesis and ending in Revelation. The main character is God, the theme is redemption-and the conflict is sin. God's gift of the law and Tabernacle to the children of Israel while they were camped at Mt. Sinai, is in response to sin. So let's review.

In **Genesis 1**, we see God creating the world and all that's in it in six days, resting on day 7. After each day of creation, God said "it is good," and he blessed his work and his creation. Order and balance were the hallmarks of the world God made, and when he created human beings (the details of that are in ch. 2), he gave them control over the physical world. But in **Gen. 3**, the serpent, the craftiest and slyest of all the creatures God had created, planted doubt in Eve's mind; she gave in to Satan's misrepresentation of God's commands, disobeyed God, and Adam followed suit. Sin destroyed their relationship with each other and with God; now they are conscious of their differences and make clothes to hide their nakedness. God calls to Adam and he hides.

Sin has four characteristics: it's subtle, it gets bigger, it distorts our judgment and it cascades down through the generations. We see this when Cain kills Abel, and then in ch. 4, when Lamech marries two wives and distorts God's plan further. By ch. 6, God saw that his perfectly harmonious world had been destroyed because "he saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." Sin had done this, and God decided to start over. Noah builds the ark, the world's animal and human life is wiped out, and Noah, his family, and the animal cargo get off the ark to start repopulating the earth. By ch. 11, we have Babel as evidence that people have forgotten God.

In **Genesis 12**, God intervenes and calls Abraham, making a covenant with him, and in it, promising salvation. God has seen how wicked people are; their sinful condition brings out sinful behavior, and without God's grace and a means of reconciliation, the human race cannot do anything to reverse sin's destruction in the world. So God tells Abraham "through you all the earth will be blessed." a promise of Jesus' coming to earth, his death and resurrection; the plan of salvation has been introduced. Abraham has Isaac, Isaac has Jacob and Esau, and Jacob has 12 sons. God had told Abraham (Gen. 15) that his descendants would live for 400 years in a land not their own-not the land God promised to give Abraham-and at the end of Genesis, Jacob and his 12 sons, 70 people in all, are in Egypt. Exodus begins 400 years later, fulfilling God's prophecy that Abraham's descendants would live as foreigners and slaves. Now God is ready to deliver them.

In **Exodus 3**, God calls Moses, an 80-year-old man who'd been raised as a prince in Egypt, though he was born to two of Abraham's descendants. Moses is now 80 years old, a scruffy shepherd in Midian. But after convincing him he, God would go with him, Moses answers God's call, and returns to Egypt. Ten plagues, each one more severe than the last, bring Pharaoh to his knees, decimating the country of Egypt, an Pharaoh frees the people who'd provided slave labor for many projects. They cross the Red Sea by God's miracle, Egypt's army is drowned, and three months later, we get to Exodus 19, and

they're at Mt. Sinai, the Mountain of God, where God called Moses and promised he'd bring him back there to worship him. Exodus 20: the people hear the voice of God as he gives them the law: the 10 commandments or principles for living in relationship with God and other humans. In Ex. 21-24, God gives Moses case law examples for application of those principles, and in ch. 25, God begins to outline his plan for the Tabernacle. For the rest of the book, plans for the Tabernacle are conveyed to Moses, who then gives them to the people to build. By Ex. 40, the Tabernacle is erected, and the glory of God fills it.

Now we're at Leviticus, and it begins once the Tabernacle has been put up. The Tabernacle is finished exactly a year after the children of Israel left Egypt; the book of Leviticus takes the next month. In Leviticus, the people are taught how to use the Tabernacle; as he did with the plans for this "tent of meeting," God reveals the Tabernacle's purpose in great detail.

Leviticus (the Latin name of the book) derives from Levites or the priestly tribe. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew scripture, the name was Leukiton or "that which pertains to Levites" and in Hebrew, the title is Wayyiqra "And He called." The Talmud refers to it as "The Law of the Priests and the Law of the Offerings." It is the third book of the five in the Torah, all of which were written by Moses.

Leviticus has 27 chapters. The first 7 deal with the five great sacrifices and offerings; the next three cover the priests' ordination and duties; the next chapters regard purity: clean and unclean food, childbirth, leprosy, and bodily discharges. **In ch. 16 and 17, the Day of Atonement** is described along with the way sacrifice is to be made on that day, also known as Yom Kippur, the only day on which the High Priest may enter the Holy of Holies. The next chapters (Lev. 18-27) cover laws that define an acceptable walk with God: human sexuality, regulations for priests, worship on the festival days and keeping Sabbath, and laws for using the land and its harvests when they enter Canaan. Finally God speaks of consequences of disobedience.

Leviticus is a book in which the word "holiness" is key; being "holy" means being set apart for God and God's use. God tells them in Lev. 19:2: "You must be holy because I am holy." To meet God, a sinful people must have a means by which they can achieve holiness. The people's redemption came through the shed blood of lambs in Egypt; the covenant with God was sealed with shed blood. Now an entire system of sacrifices will be instituted so that the people's sin can be covered by the blood of an animal standing in the human being's place. The law was given in Exodus; now God gives detailed instructions for worship, for sacrifice, for the great festivals, for Sabbath observance, and for dealing with daily life—all to achieve holiness. He tells them to "set yourselves apart to be holy, for I, the Lord am your God. Keep all my laws and obey them, for I am the Lord who makes you holy." (Lev. 20:7-8) Jesus said to the religious leaders who challenged Jesus' claim to be God's son, in John 5:45-46: "But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me."

Hebrews: Chapters 2 through 10, and 13 of Hebrews provide a New Testament or New Covenant parallel to Leviticus, and we'll touch on those chapters as we go through Leviticus. The authorship of the book of Hebrews is unknown. Some thought it was Paul, but that seems unlikely. Whoever it was

knew Timothy (Heb. 13:21) so it might have been Barnabas, Silas, Luke, or even Apollos, Priscilla or Philip—all mentioned in Paul's epistles in connection with Timothy. Nevertheless, the book was written to convince Jews that Jesus was the Messiah, and that through Jesus' death, a superior covenant was made. Paul says in Romans 8:3 Jesus was a sin offering—and the sin offering is one of five described in Leviticus. We'll look at Hebrews frequently as we study Leviticus to see how Jesus is the New Covenant that fulfilled the Old Covenant, the one God made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and then reaffirmed with his people at Mt. Sinai.

Leviticus 1-7: The five offerings or sacrifices are described in ch. 1-7. The first 4 chapters deal with the person taking the offering to the tabernacle, the last 3 to the duties of the priest.

Leviticus 1: The Burnt Offering comes first in the description of the five great offerings and sacrifices. Notice that for each of the five offerings, God describes (1) the substance of the sacrifice—whether animal or grain; (2) the way the sacrifice or offering is to be made, and (3) the purpose. The first three are known as "sweet savor offerings" and the last two "non sweet savor offerings." The first three speak of the person of Christ, and the last two of the work of Christ. The burnt offering, then, involves an animal totally consumed on the altar. It speaks of Christ's willingness to surrender of himself for our sins. The individual may bring any number of animals, each depending on the means, but all must come from the herd or flock and be a male without spot or blemish. Remember in Ex. 12 when God gave instructions for the Passover lamb that it, too, had to be a male without spot or blemish. The animal is brought to the entrance of the Tabernacle, and there the individual puts his hands on the bull, sheep or goat's head and cuts its throat. Its blood is caught by the priest. If he is too poor for either of those animals, he may bring a bird, and instead of cutting its throat, the priest twists off its head. The blood is sprinkled on the altar, the larger animal is skinned, cut up, the pieces washed of all that would make them impure, and all of it burned. It rises in a sweet savor to the Lord who accepts the offering. Because it is totally consumed, this offering speaks of our surrender to God. Jesus gave all of himself; he asks of us all of ourselves. Notice that in all cases the animal was valuable, and thus it cost the person something. All sacrifice involves cost: it's implied in the word. We don't offer what does NOT cost us something. It costs something—our will, our desires, our plans for our lives—when we surrender ourselves to God to let his will, his desires and his plans dominate us.

Leviticus 2: The grain or meal offering is the second offering described. Various forms of bread or flour could be offered, but each was to be without yeast or honey. The bread could be offered as flour, or a cake fried or baked with oil. The oil speaks of the Holy Spirit and sanctification, being set apart for God. All grain or meal offerings were to be offered with salt which speaks of the covenant, preserving the covenant. In middle eastern countries, salt was the seal of a bargain or agreement. God is using what is familiar, salt and animal sacrifice, to seal the covenant with his people. The meal offering is symbolic of what we eat and that all gifts come from God. It also symbolizes Christ's purity—he was without artificiality; he was completely without guile and artifice in his dealings on earth. His personality was not bitter or sour; it needed no sweetening. And he was without sin; yeast symbolizes sin or corruption in the Bible.

Leviticus 3: The fellowship or peace offering is described. It too involves an animal; only the grain or meal offering is not an animal sacrifice. The peace or fellowship offering was not offered to make peace with God but to celebrate and enjoy one's peace with God, and it always followed a sin or burnt offering. It was a form of thanksgiving, and as such, is closest to our communion or Eucharist in its intent. The animal is also from the herd or flock, either male or female without blemish, and presented in the same way: the person offering it put his hands on its head, slit its throat and the blood was caught by the priest. The blood is sprinkled on the sides of the altar, and instead of the entire animal being burned, only the fat was burned. The fat is the best part. The rest of the animal was given to the priests as food. It had to be eaten that day or the next. This speaks of the peace that Jesus made between us and God, peace for all time by his sacrifice. And Jesus was the best-no spot or blemish, no sin in him. At the end of chapter 3, God reminds them that they are never, under any circumstances, to eat the blood of an animal. This ordinance is given in more detail in the dietary laws which appear in Lev. 17.

Hebrews 1 tells us that Jesus, above all the rest of creation, was superior in every way to angels and prophets and all the ways God had revealed himself before Christ came to earth as a human being. We'll see as we move on that Hebrews gives us much more detail about Jesus as the fulfillment of the law, the replacement of all the sacrifices Leviticus prescribes; they were not able to take sin away and make us one with God as Christ's sacrifice was.

Next week, we'll begin with Leviticus 4.

Let's close in prayer.

Bible 101 - Leviticus - Chapters 4-10

Introduction and review: Last week we began our study of Leviticus, the third book Moses wrote. We learned that the children of Israel, who left Egypt in 1446 BC, are still camped at Mt. Sinai; a year has gone by since they crossed the Red Sea. Gradually God is shaping them into "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6) a covenant people, descendants of Abraham and heirs of the promise God made to him in Gen. 12. They are to be different from all the nations and peoples of the world because God chose them and because they have only one God, Jehovah, obeying his laws and worshiping as he commands.

In Exodus, God gave them two great gifts: the law and the Tabernacle. Hebrews tells us that the "[Tabernacle] is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the Tabernacle: 'See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.'" (Heb. 8:5) Moses did that, and we saw the construction of the Tabernacle in Exodus; when we finished the last verse of ch. 40, we left the people staring at the Tabernacle filled with God's glory. But they still don't know how it is to be used. That's what we learn in Leviticus.

Five offerings: There are five great offerings or sacrifices which God instructs Moses to institute in Lev. 1-7: the burnt offering, the grain or meal offering, the peace or fellowship offering - all called "sweet savor" offerings because their aroma pleases God; and the sin offering and the guilt offering, the non-sweet savor offerings, required by God to complete their cleansing from sin.

Sin: Leviticus deals with it, and since God's voice is what we hear throughout Leviticus, God meets sin head on in the regulations and rituals described - and commanded - in this book. Many of these regulations seem outdated to us, and in fact they are. **All were made obsolete when Jesus came and offered himself as our sin offering**, atoning for all the sins of the world. Hebrews tells us that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." Jesus shed his blood; Paul tells us in Romans 8:3 that "what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering." And in II Cor 5:14-21, Paul writes about Jesus' sacrifice and ends with this statement: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Sin affects us physically, emotionally and spiritually; it separates us from God, and we're born into a sinful condition. Look at **Psalm 32**; David graphically describes a person before and after he's been forgiven. He does this also in Psalm 51.

Sin has 4 characteristics: It's subtle, it begins small but grows, it distorts our judgment and it cascades down through generations. We see a vivid example of these characteristics of sin in Ex. 32 in the golden calf incident. Moses had gone up at God's invitation and was busy receiving the law and the plans for the Tabernacle. He was gone for more than 24 hours. The people got worried and said to Aaron, "where is this Moses? Make us gods to lead us; we don't know if this Moses will return." And Aaron responded by telling them to take off their gold jewelry, melting down their gifts, making a golden calf and inviting them to a party the next day. Sin is subtle: Aaron listened to the people instead of to God. It sounded reasonable: "Moses is gone; we need help." Sin distorted Aaron's

judgment: instead of saying to the people "remember the voice of God you heard? Remember the laws he gave us?" he got a creative idea: "I'll make them a god; I'll be the hero." Sin grows: it's grown from being an untrustworthy leader to breaking the first commandment, and then, he tells the people "we'll have a festival to the Lord," and he also tells them "O Israel these are the gods who brought you out of Egypt." He's given them another god beside The God; he's lied about who actually delivered them, taken the Lord's name in vain, and he's broken the first three commands, as well as the 9th about lying!! Sin grows. It cascades down through the generations, and we'll see that in Aaron's sons later tonight.

Leviticus points to Jesus: all five of the offerings that we are studying and we'll see offered over and over again in the OT speak of Christ: who he is and what he did. We needed a savior; as human beings we are powerless to atone for our sin.

Leviticus 1-3, last week, we read about the first three offerings; now in **Leviticus 4**: we'll study the sin offering, the first of the non-sweet savor offerings. These last two are required; the first three are voluntary. The sin offering is a ritual of purification. We are forgiven by God's grace when we repent of our sins and ask for forgiveness; but we see in Leviticus that the offering or sacrifice was a way to seal the redemption: it made it visible. The person had to "pay" for his/her sin with an animal sacrificed on his/her behalf. This was the means of purification, of wiping the slate clean. God wanted the offering/sacrifice to be complicated so that the people would remember what they had to do to be forgiven and purified, and thus to re-establish fellowship with God.

Later in Lev. 6:24-30 we read more instructions for the sin offering. Note that in addition to the blood being shed, the fat portions burned on the altar and the blood poured or sprinkled, the rest of the animal was taken outside the camp to be burned. This was symbolic: the corruption of sin was thus destroyed away from the holy place. Often sins required people to live outside the community for a period until they fulfilled the time of cleansing. Some law-breaking was so grievous, death was the penalty: breaking Sabbath, dishonoring one's parents, killing a human being. This is the ultimate separation from the community and from God.

In Leviticus 5, we read about some types of law breaking or sins that would require a sin offering: false testimony or refusal to testify; touching something unclean, making a rash vow - once a person understood that he/she was guilty, a sin offering had to be made. Also in ch. 5 we learn that if a person is too poor for a sheep or goat, two young turtledoves or pigeons can be substituted. And if even the birds, which can be caught, are impossible, two quarts of flour can be brought as a sin offering.

How does the sin offering picture the work of Christ? Paul said in Rom. 8:3, "For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering." Jesus is our sin offering. Paul tells Timothy, "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." (1 Tim. 1:15). "He [Jesus] sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself" (Heb. 7:27) Because Hebrews 9:22 tells us "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness," and that Jesus replaced the old covenant - the law - by becoming the sacrifice without blemish, without sin (Heb.

9:13-15). Ephesians 1:7 reads: "In him [Jesus] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." And Peter tells us in I. Pet 1:18-19, "for you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."

In Leviticus 5:14-19 and 6:1-7, we learn of the fifth offering, **the guilt offering**. This is the offering that recognizes that sin has consequences; it does damage. The guilt offering was a sacrifice of an animal and the payment of restitution. Also in **Lev. 6 and 7**, there are further instructions for the burnt offering, and the peace offering, along with situations requiring such offerings.

Rite I: Rite I in BCP (p. 323) is a great comparison for us - a context into which we can fit the five offerings described in Leviticus.

First we have the reading of the word and prayer; Moses was to remind the people of the law and it was read before the covenant was ratified by them (Ex. 34); prayer was symbolized by the offering of incense in the Tabernacle.

Second we have confession; this is consistent with both the sin and guilt offerings. The individual or group who had broken the law had to confess their sin before the Lord and offer the animal as a means of showing sincerity to God, and attitude of repentance.

Third we have absolution: we're forgiven and we can then enjoy the Peace offering in Holy Eucharist.

Fourth, the Great Thanksgiving acknowledges God's holiness and his power and might; it is also the opening of the Peace or Fellowship offering. We've been forgiven; now we celebrate our peace with God.

Fifth, we have the whole burnt offering when we hear the words "And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice unto thee. . . " (p. 336). We commit ourselves, our talents, our gifts, our hands and feet, minds and time to God as a "living sacrifice" as Paul exhorts us to do in Romans 12:1-2.

And at the end of communion, our fellowship and thanksgiving meal, we thank God, as I'm sure the children of Israel did when they left the Tabernacle knowing their sins had been covered, atoned for, by the substitute of an animal's blood for their own.

We'll see the Rite I pattern as the priests are ordained: All through the instructions, God tells Moses that Aaron and his sons will take the animals from the people to put them on the altar; we know that Aaron and his sons will staff the Tabernacle and perform these rituals. And in Ex. 28 and 29, God described to Moses the special garments made for the priests' honor and dignity, as well as the way they were to be ordained. Now we'll see this happen.

Leviticus 8: This is the dedication of the priests; they are to be dressed and made ready for the tasks that God has called them to do. Two words are used here: sanctification and consecration. They have

to do with holiness or being set apart for God, dedicated to God's use. The holy furnishings and tools of the Tabernacle are set apart for single uses: they are not to be used in any profane way. Now the men who will serve God in this holy place will be sanctified, consecrated and dedicated to his service. There are five parts to the ceremony:

Lev. 8:1-5 is the prologue and presentation

Lev. 8:6-9: the purification

Lev. 8:10-13 the anointing

Lev. 8:14-30 the atoning offerings

Lev. 8:31-36 completion of the consecration

Note that the ordination is accomplished before the entire congregation; the priests are to serve the people. They are witnesses. Everything is done "as the Lord commanded Moses" so the instructions are from God himself. The priests must be cleansed and their sin atoned for before they can serve. They are given instructions to stay in the Tabernacle for the next six days because the entire consecration takes 7 days to complete (7 is the number of completion in the Bible).

While they are in the Tabernacle, they have time to pray and to commune with the Lord; they make offerings, and they learn the various methods they will follow. This is a special time for them - a retreat.

Leviticus 9: The offerings are made as the Lord commanded, and in v. 22, Aaron blessed the people, and the Shekinah glory of the Lord appeared: this was the final blessing on the ordination ceremony and on the priests themselves: God approved and accepted them. Then fire came down from heaven and consumed the whole burned offering and the fat on the altar. The people shouted for joy and hit the ground. They were overcome, overwhelmed by the glory and power of God.

In Leviticus 10, we see inappropriate use of the fire from heaven and God punishes Nadab and Abihu for this sin by killing them. Aaron and his remaining two sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, are forbidden to mourn for them. Remember, sin has consequences. And their sin was not taking seriously the tasks God has given them. And God also tells them in v. 8, not to drink wine before performing their tasks at the Tabernacle, a sure clue that that's what Nadab and Abihu did. They celebrated their ordination, took matters into their own hands, and were killed. Aaron and his two remaining sons fast; that's what the last few verses are about - it is their only mourning for Nadab and Abihu. God is serious about the instructions he gives; remember, they are to be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation," set apart for God's use and God's work.

Next week, we'll begin the Kosher food laws, and get into leprosy, its detection, and the way lepers were excluded from the camp. Leprosy is a type of sin, and only God can cure it, just as only God can cure us of our sinful condition by extending forgiveness to us through Jesus atoning sacrifice on the cross.

Let's close in prayer.

Bible 101 - Leviticus - Chapters 11-15, Hebrews - Chapter 9

Review: Last week we completed quite a few chapters (Lev. 4-10), and finished the evening with two dramatic scenes: the first was the ordination of the priests, Aaron and his sons, and after their cleansing, anointing and the offering of their sacrifices - atoning for their sins, and symbolic of their total surrender to God's work, fire came down from heaven as God's "amen" on the ceremony. The second drama concerned two of those priests, Nadab and Abihu, who used "unauthorized fire," and were punished by God with death.

The five offerings-the whole burnt offering, the grain/meal offering, the peace or fellowship offering, the sin and guilt offerings, have been instituted. But we also saw that the human priests are just that-human. They yield to temptation and do other things which show God that they aren't taking their responsibilities seriously. God says "you must be holy; you are a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," and people who are holy-set apart for God-obey God and want to please him. But those human vessels in which God places responsibility are weak. That's why God gave us his son and instituted a New Covenant at Jesus death. And we learn in Hebrews 7:11-16, 22: "If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people) why was there still need for another priest to come-one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? . . . For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. And what we have said is even more clear if another priests like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest not on the basis of regulation as to his ancestry, but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. . . . Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

We met Melchizedek in Genesis 14; Abraham met him, Melchizedek blessed Abraham and Abraham gave him tithes. Hebrews 7:1, 3: tells us "Melchizedek was a priest of God Most High. . . without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, *like the son of God, he remains a priest forever.*" This is the kind of priest Jesus is: an eternal priest forever in the heavens making intercession for us.

And in Hebrews 9 we see very clearly that this new and better covenant had to be based on Jesus' death and sacrifice, not on the blood of animals, an atonement for sin that was offered once and for all:

Hebrews 9:1-7, 11-15, 18-28

1Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. 2A tabernacle was set up. . . .6When everything had been arranged. . . the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. 7But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. . . .

The Blood of Christ

11When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. 12He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. 13The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 14How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we

may serve the living God! 15For this reason *Christ is the mediator of a new covenant*, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance -- now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. . . 18This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. 19When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. 20He said, "This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep." 21In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. 22In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. 23It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24*For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. 25Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. 26Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 28so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.* (italics mine)

This is what Leviticus points to, speaks of, symbolizes: The OT sacrificial system was a way to cover sin, but it pointed to, foreshadowed the coming of Jesus. It typifies all that Jesus did for us on the cross. Sin, which entered human life in Gen. 3, cannot be "covered" by our efforts; it takes the sinless Son of God to take away the sins of the world. But remember that in Leviticus, we see a very real world: these are real people, and their lives are part of history-our history. They had the law; they had sacrifices, and they also had an entire system of regulations concerning every day life. Their ceremonial fitness was a large part of the way they lived their lives.

Leviticus 11: As we reviewed the sin and guilt offerings, the non-sweet savor offerings, we noted that these were to cover "unintentional sins," some of which were listed in chapters 5 and 6. Lev. 5:2 says touching an unclean thing is a sin, and requires confession and an atoning sacrifice. What is an "unclean thing"? In Lev. 11, we begin to learn about clean/unclean which related not to physical cleanliness, but to ceremonial fitness. The person who is "clean" can participate in community worship; a person who is "unclean" is excluded. Clean and unclean also apply to certain animals, and these constitute the Kosher laws. Notice how clean animals are described: animals that chew the cud and have completely divided hooves. Any not in that category are unclean, off limits. That's why Jews then and now do not eat pork. They also cannot eat seafood unless it has both fins and scales-shellfish is off limits, but perch is OK; a dolphin is off limits, but a trout is OK. Certain birds and insects are also put off limits. In addition, God says don't eat "road kill," and don't even touch those carcasses because it will make you unclean.

Why does God prescribe such laws regarding food? Some have surmised that it had to do with health, and in some respects it does. But it's also a way to keep the Israelites "fenced off" culturally. If you keep Kosher today, you can't go have meals at other people's homes. If you keep Kosher, you have to

shop in certain places, and you have to avoid restaurants. No orthodox Jew can, for example, have a McDonald's cheeseburger because it's meat and dairy; God says don't do that. It preserves them as a people just as slavery kept them unassimilated in Egypt.

Leviticus 12: Childbirth excluded a woman from community activities for a period of time: 7 days plus 30 days for a male child and double that for a female child. When this time is completed, she is to bring a lamb-or a dove or pigeon if she cannot afford a lamb-as a purification offering. We see Mary (and Joseph) doing this in Luke 2:22. This is done to allow the woman to have time with this new baby; she's free from ceremonial duties all the time of waiting to be allowed to enter the community's worship again.

Leprosy: Now we get into leprosy, which, as we noted earlier, is a type of sin. Leprosy is not caused by sin; please be clear about that. The NIV calls this an "infectious skin disease," but leprosy is a better translation. The priest was the screener. In the OT there are several instances of leprosy. For example, when God calls Moses, one of the miracles God does to convince Moses is to return to Egypt as his spokesman. He tells him to put his hand in his robe and when Moses withdraws it, it's covered with leprosy. He puts his hand back in his robe and this time, when withdrawn, it's clean. Only God can cure leprosy; only God can cure sin. In Numbers 10, Miriam is affected with leprosy as God's punishment; Moses prays for her and she recovers. Naaman (II Kings 5) comes to Elisha the prophet asking to be cured of leprosy; Elisha tells him to dip 7 times in the Jordan River and Naaman is furious; he wants Elisha to pray, wave his hand and make him well. But Naaman is convinced by his servant to do what he's told; he does and he's made well. In the New Testament, Jesus heals lepers, and one of these instances is particularly poignant. It occurs in all three of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) but let's look at Luke 5:12. Jesus touches the man; the man comes right up to Jesus. Both were forbidden by the law. A leper had to live outside the town; he had to shout "unclean, unclean" when anyone came near. He could not be touched by anyone, but Jesus, seeing him and feeling pity, touches him and heals him. Only God can cure leprosy; only God can cure us of sin.

Leprosy pictures sin in five ways: sin begins small; it spreads; it affects our own life and the lives of others; it separates us from God; if not dealt with, sin is permanent and therefore a permanent separation from God.

Leviticus 13: We see that the priest diagnoses leprosy (vv. 1-46). The person with the rash or skin condition goes to the priest to be examined; the priest decides, based on what God has said leprosy is. We see all through this chapter the various stages of leprosy, the ways the priest deals with it, and then, in v. 45, we see the results: "The person with such an infectious disease-leprosy-must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out 'Unclean! Unclean!' As long as he has the infection, he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp." He's excluded from his home and the community; he lives outside the camp. He's ceremonially unclean, and he is isolated in the strictest sense.

Leviticus 13:47: Here we discover that clothing can be contaminated with leprosy and it, too, must be examined, and if it meets certain definitions, must be burned.

Leviticus 14:33-58: Houses can also become contaminated, and these regulations pertain to their entering the Promised Land and building houses of timber, stone and stucco. In the case of a house with leprosy, it must be scraped and cleansed, but if that doesn't rid the house of the condition, it must be torn down, the materials taken outside the town, and the house rebuilt with new material. Sin affects every part of our lives.

Leviticus 14:1-32: First the priest goes outside the camp to the place the leper lives to see if he leprosy is gone. If it is, the leper may return to camp for this ceremony which will once again make him a part of the community. Here is a fascinating ritual: the person to be cleansed so that he is ceremonially fit takes to the priest two live birds, cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop. The birds were alternative burnt offerings for those too poor for a bull, sheep or goat (Lev. 1), and they speak of Jesus' humility; the cedar wood is resistant to disease and speaks of the cross which is incorruptible. The hyssop, used in the Passover (Ex. 12) to place the blood above the doorpost and on the sides of the door, speaks of faith in the cleansing Jesus offers us. So this pictures Jesus' work in a very real way. The details of what the priest does with the birds and other materials is described in Lev. 14:4-7. Then the person is bathed, shaved, and waits 7 days until he repeats this bodily cleansing; then he returns to the priest, this time with two male lambs and one ewe lamb without defect (or if these are too expensive for the person, birds can be substituted), fine flour mixed with oil, and a separate container of oil. Now he's making his guilt offering and a sin offering; oil and blood are placed on the altar but also on the person's ear lobe, right thumb and right big toe—just as we saw at the sanctification of the priests in Lev. 8. This is to symbolize the cleansing and re-entry into the community as a person whose sins have been forgiven and who is now sanctified—set apart—for God's service.

Leviticus 15: This chapter concerns bodily discharges, both normal and abnormal, for men and women, and the ceremonies through which they must go to be cleansed and made ceremonially fit again.

Let's close in prayer.

Bible 101 - Leviticus - Chapters 16-20

Recap: Last week, in reading through Leviticus 11-15, we found lists of clean and unclean animals, the ways priests determined who did and who did not have leprosy (and other infectious skin diseases), the effect of having been diagnosed with leprosy, cleansing after healing from leprosy, and the effects of bodily discharges on ceremonial fitness. We discovered that God commands his people to live up to their covenant promise to become a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation," (Ex. 19:6), and "I am the Lord your God. You must be holy because I am holy. . . I, the Lord, am the one who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God. You must therefore be holy because I am holy." (Lev. 11:44-45). God's purpose in all the sacrifices, the food laws, the clean and unclean distinctions, is to emphasize the need to be holy - distinct, separate, set apart for God's use.

The Day of Atonement: The 16th chapter of Leviticus shows in detail how grievous sin is to God and the lengths to which he goes to provide his children a way to atone for sin. Sin separates us from God; we saw that with leprosy. Sin puts us out of fellowship with God. Each day, the Israelites had an opportunity to atone for sin by bringing a sin offering and a guilt offering to the Tabernacle where the priest would shed the animals' blood as a substitute for the individual's blood. But once a year, God commanded a day of atonement for the entire nation - the sins of the community at large. The regulations for that day are in Lev. 16.

Leviticus 16: This is a most important chapter because not only do we see the means of atonement on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, but we see typified the work of Jesus Christ who was our sin offering. This Day of Atonement is the one day of the year when the high priest entered the Holy of Holies where God's presence hovered over the Mercy Seat, the top of the Ark of the Covenant. This day, which is on the 10th of Tishri (Sept/Oct.) comes 10 days after Rosh Hoshana. It was to be a time of solemn fasting and of doing no work; it was a Sabbath of Sabbaths: distinct from all other Sabbath days - a day of rest and contemplation of sin and forgiveness. It is an intense chapter, and points repeatedly to what Jesus did for us on the cross. Significantly, it is observed now without the sacrifices and scapegoat, but taken very seriously by observant Jews.

Outline of Leviticus 16: The Day of Atonement instructions have six parts:

Lev. 16:1-3: Prologue

Lev. 16:4-5: Preparation

Lev. 16:5-19: Sacrifices to atone for Aaron's sins and for the people's sins

Lev. 16:20-22: The release of the scapegoat

Lev. 16:23: Further instruction

Lev. 16:34: Epilogue

In each of these sections, we see the high priest, Aaron at work, following God's instructions. We also see the blood offerings, the blood of bulls and goats, sprinkled and offered to God. But we see a most interesting ritual: the scapegoat. This is the only time in the Bible it is mentioned. The goat is the bearer of sins and is taken out into the wilderness, away from the community, and released. It's a clear demonstration of what occurs when people sin and are cut off from the community; it's also an illustration of Jesus taking our sins on himself. "God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor. 5:21) , and by whose blood we are redeemed. In 1

Peter 1:18-19 we read "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." Therefore, Christ's death and resurrection did away with the need for all the sacrifices including Yom Kippur. We have only to accept God's gift and claim the redemption Christ's blood provided.

When Aaron lays aside his garments of glory, we also see Jesus. In Phil 2, Paul tells us that Jesus "who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant." Jesus laid aside his heavenly glory to take on himself a human body, a body which felt pain, which felt emotions, which grew and changed from babyhood to adulthood, who knew temptation but who didn't yield to temptation. It is in his human body that Jesus suffers the death on the cross.

Atonement in the Old Testament vs. New Testament: In the OT, atoning sacrifices covered sin, and had to be repeated each time a person sinned. In the NT, Jesus blood takes away sin. John the Baptist tells us this in John 1:29: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." And in 1 John 1:9, the apostle John tells us "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us, [cleanse us, take away] all our sin." Hebrews tells us that the OT system demanded repeated sacrifices, and "those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. . . . [but] we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. . . . And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin." (Heb. 10: 3-5, 10, 18). Jesus gave himself once and for all and now he's at the right hand of the father interceding for us. We have been forgiven by God's grace-and by our acceptance of Jesus sacrifice, and it is cause for rejoicing.

Leviticus 17: Now after the Day of Atonement, and its institution as an annual and solemn occasion, God returns to his directions for day to day living. And in ch. 17, we read regulations for two areas of concern: the first is that sacrifices are to be offered ONLY in the sacred place God has made holy by his presence-The Tabernacle (later the Temple). No Israelite was to offer sacrifices in his own tent, on a high hill, or wherever else he chose. God tells Moses that "the people must no longer be unfaithful to the Lord by offering sacrifices to evil spirits out in the fields," by which we see that they had been doing this. God says not to. Then in the second portion of the chapter, God tells them to be very careful about blood. "It is the life of any creature," and of the 5 great sacrifices, 4 are blood sacrifices, the blood drained and sprinkled on the altar signifies that the life of the animal is substituted for the person to atone for sin. This blood is thereby made holy. And to dishonor the blood by eating or drinking it as pagan nations did was to profane it, make it unholy and dishonor God.

Leviticus 18: this chapter concerns sexual transgressions, abominations to God because of the behavior of pagan nations who would be displaced by the Israelites in Canaan. God tells them to demonstrate their faithfulness to him, to "be holy as I am holy," by keeping sex inside marriage between a man and a woman. Period. There was to be no incest, no bestiality in Israel as there was in Egypt and Canaan. God detested this and was punishing the people of Canaan for their acts against him by giving their land to his own chosen people. In Lev. 18:17-30, God summarizes his commands

by saying "be careful to obey my laws and do not practice any of these detestable activities Do not defile yourselves by doing any of them, for I, the Lord, am your God."

Leviticus 19: Now we come to a variety of social regulations reiterating and expanding the laws given in Exodus 20-24. For example, God reminds them not to slander, not to worship other gods or idols, not to steal or cheat. Others are added such as the law against mediums and psychics, or satanic practices. And God also tells them not to trim their hair or beards in ways that would mimic other nations. And at the summary of this chapter, in v. 37 "You must be careful to obey all my laws and regulations, for I am the Lord."

An interesting feature of Lev. 19 is forbidding fields to be completely harvested (vv. 9-10). In this way, God provided for the poor, and we see this in Ruth. Ruth "gleaned" remaining grain in Boaz's fields, a practice that God ordered to be a way of harvesting for Israel before they even entered the Promised Land.

Leviticus 20: Punishments are now prescribed for detestable acts such as worshiping Molech, a bronze idol popular with the Canaanites, to which infants were sacrificed. God says never to do this. But as early as Solomon (1 Kings 11:5), David's son, the third king of Israel who came to the throne in 970 B.C., Molech worship was introduced (just 500 years after this command was given). And for many other sins, punishments are listed in ch. 20, which ends with another statement that "I the Lord, am your God who has set you apart from all other peoples." God is serious about this and he repeats this as a drum beat, emphasizing that HIS people, those he chose to descend from Abraham as a unique, covenant people, are to be different from other nations. They are HIS and they are holy.

We'll conclude Lev. 20-27 next week, and then, we'll look at Hebrews in more depth than we have in the passing references I've made as we've studied Leviticus..

Let's close in prayer.

Bible 101 - Leviticus - Chapters 21-27

Recap of last week: Holy living - how to achieve holiness and maintain it - were the topics of Leviticus 16 through 20 which we studied last week, and they continue as themes for the rest of the book. God said over and over "I am the Lord" when giving commands for relationships in the family, in the neighborhood, and above all, with him. Leviticus 16 and the focus on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) most directly concerned us because it speaks of Jesus' sacrifice for our sins. We found cause to thank God once again that we are not bound to bring animal sacrifices to cover our sin because Jesus atonement took away our sins.

The Israelites had a complex worship liturgy, sacrificial system and civil code, all of which pointed to the ways by which God would create a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). Little by little, God is transforming the slaves he brought out of Egypt into a nation with different customs, different values and a different focus: they are **NOT** like other nations. They are not to behave as the Egyptians or as the Canaanites they'll observe in the land God is giving them. God is very specific about this throughout Leviticus, but especially in Lev. 18, 19 and 20.

An apparent contradiction from last week. Is Lev. 18:16 forbidding Levirate marriage? This is a custom we first encountered in Gen. 38 when Judah's eldest son was married to Tamar and died before she became pregnant. Judah then gave Tamar to his brother: he was to marry her and their children would be the descendants of his older brother, thus continuing his line. When the second son died, and there were still no children, Judah refused to give his third son - still too young to marry - to Tamar. She tricks him into a liaison which produces twin sons, and Judah admitted in Gen. 38:26 "She is more righteous than I since I wouldn't give her my son Shelah." Tamar's sons Perez and Zerah are mentioned in Jesus' genealogy Matt. 1, with Perez carrying on Judah's line, becoming an ancestor of Christ. The custom then, of obliging a brother to marry his brother's widow to carry on his line was established before God gave Moses the law in Exodus 20. However, in Deuteronomy 25, Moses in reiterating the law tells the Israelites "If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother in law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel." (Deut. 25:5-6) In succeeding verses we read provision for a time when a brother does not want to marry the woman. In Lev. 18, then, the command is: "Do not have sexual relations with your brother's wife; that would dishonor your brother." This would appear to be adultery, not marriage to the widow of a brother, but having sex with his wife. In Luke 20, Jesus is asked by Sadducees trying to trap him, whose wife a woman will be if she marries seven different brothers - all of whom die. Jesus tells them there is no marriage in heaven. This suggests that the levirate custom continued to the first century at least.

Tonight, we begin with Leviticus 21 and 22, instructions specifically to priests.

Leviticus 21: Here the priests are instructed in holy living. They are told whom they can marry, and because offerings must be without defect, God says his priests must also be without defect. The blind or deaf, lame or otherwise physically imperfect man born into a Levitical family was forbidden to

offer sacrifices, but there were other duties he could perform. And he remained part of the priests' family, sharing the food they were given.

Leviticus 22: Further instructions to priests about treating sacrifices with reverence, and putting off limits acts that will make priests unclean. At v. 17, God begins more instructions about sacrifices - reiterating previous instructions which were given in the first 7 chapters. Why? This is all for emphasis, further explanations in case God omitted a circumstance that might arise from the earlier instructions. In a sense, God paces their learning: you can absorb so much in this lesson; you've got it? Good, now here's another lesson. Then in v. 31-33, God once again tells the priests why he is being so particular about what they do and what they wear and how they behave at the altar: "You must faithfully keep all of my commands by obeying them, for I am the Lord. Do not treat my holy name as common and ordinary. I must be treated as holy by the people of Israel. It is I, the Lord, who makes you holy. It was I who rescued you from Egypt that I might be your very own God. I am the Lord."

Leviticus 23: The regulations for the weekly Sabbath observance are outlined along with a description and regulations for festivals which would bring all the people together. The Sabbath was a weekly occasion for reverencing God and for family worship. It was a holy, special time, and it still is to observant Jews. The festivals were spaced throughout the year, and once the people came into the Promised Land, and the land was allocated (see the map showing tribal divisions), God wanted them to remain unified and so he said three festivals would be held each year in Jerusalem; the three pilgrimage festivals are Passover (Jesus was crucified on Passover), First Fruits (Jesus rose from the dead on First Fruits, and Paul says was the first fruits of our redemption), Pentecost (in the OT this commemorated the giving of the law; in the NT it was the day on which the Holy Spirit came down, 50 days after Jesus' resurrection); these first three are spring festivals. An additional three were held in the fall: Tabernacles (commemorating their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness), Festival of Trumpets, which is now Rosh Hashanah, and the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur which we studied in Lev. 16. Each had specific sacrifices, food, and other requirements to make it holy and a celebration of God's provision for their needs, including atonement from sin. (There are two more festivals which commemorate later events: Purim and Hanukkah or the Festival of Lights). Lev. 23:22 reiterates Lev. 19:9 regulation for harvesting fields having left a margin for gleaners.

Leviticus 24: In this chapter, vv. 1-9, we see the way the people were involved in the Tabernacle - the ancestors of the Altar Guild. The people, God said, were to supply the oil for the lamp which was to be kept burning continually in the Tabernacle, and flour or bread was also to be supplied by the people. The bread, 12 loaves each representing a tribe of Israel, were placed fresh each week on the Table of the Presence near the golden lampstand.

Beginning at Lev. 24:10, we read of an incident involving a young man the son of a Jewish woman and an Egyptian father. In Ex. 12, we read of the Passover, and the actual exodus from Egypt. In v. 38, "And a mixed multitude went also with them." Meaning, along with the Israelites were other people related to the community, Egyptians and those of other nations, who decided to go along. Here is one of those "mixed multitude." He didn't know who he was: was he a displaced Egyptian or a half Israelite? He blasphemed God during a fight, and this breaking of the command not to take God's name in vain cost him his life.

Leviticus 25: In Lev. 19, God tells the people that when they are given land in Canaan, they are not to reap their fields completely but to save some of the grain or grapes for the poor to pick. Now in this chapter, Lev. 25, we read more of God's way of taking care of the poor. He provided the "Sabbatical" year as well as the Jubilee year which in part deal with the problem of poor management and falling into debt. The Sabbatical year is one that college and university faculty know well: it's a provision of time to refresh themselves by travel and study, a year without teaching and other daily college responsibilities. It's a great time to stand back and get new perspective. The Sabbath year was for the land - and a means of demonstrating faith in God's provision for their needs. The Jubilee year came every 50 years, or after 7 Sabbatical years. In God's math, 7 is important: 7th day is the day on which God rested after creation; the Sabbath is a gift he gave his people - rest; 7s are all through the Bible, and here are two examples. If a man from the tribe of Judah, for example, had a section of land in Canaan and mismanaged it, he might have to sell it to his neighbor. He could do this, and the neighbor would offer him the amount the land was worth based on the number of years until Jubilee. If it's three years, he's unlikely to take the deal because in the Year of Jubilee, the land reverted to the original family. But if there are 20 years until Jubilee, the neighbor might agree to buy/lease the land for that period, paying the owner for 20 years of crops. The original family might remain on the land as tenant farmers. God cancelled debt every 50 years. There's no proof that Israel followed this law, and they suffered for it. The years they had failed to allow the land to rest were added to their time in exile. (2 Chron 36:21)

Leviticus 26 and 27: Blessings and curses. God has given the people a full set of worship liturgies, a set of principles by which to live with each other and with him, and additional regulations which, if followed, will ensure that they live in communion with each other and with him. They will become the "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" which God said his covenant people would be (Ex. 19:6). Sin, as we've discovered has consequences; but likewise, obedience has rewards. In the new covenant, we are not under a system of working for salvation, but John says in 1 John that "if anyone obeys God's word, God's love is truly made complete in him." In other words, love and obedience go together. We are to obey out of our gratitude for what God has done for us and our love for him. But in the OT, the Old Covenant which God is revealing to the people, he's going to lay down the conditions for a full life in the Promised Land, and for curses should they fail to abide by his laws. That is the content of Lev. 26; then in Lev. 27, we read for the first time about the kinsman redeemer who can buy back land for a relative, in addition to other kinds of redemption for vows and dedications to God. The way this works out for the church today is in tithe of time and energy. Suppose you want to tithe but you don't have enough money to cover expenses. So you offer the church your talent: your design ability, your time to clean or to do clerical work. You give time so that if billed at the going rate for those tasks, it would equal the equivalent monetary tithe. We tend to think of stewardship sometimes in a limited way: 10 percent of our income. But it also involves time, energy and talent.

We'll conclude next week, by taking a longer look at Hebrews than we have in the passing references I've made as we've studied Leviticus.

Let's close in prayer.

Bible 101 - Leviticus - Hebrews Wrap-up

Recap: Last week we completed Leviticus, a book rich in liturgy and law, which concluded with dire promises of punishment - as well as a bright outlook if the children of Israel obeyed all God had commanded.

All through our Leviticus study, and in particular when we studied the five great offerings in chapters 1-7, and Yom Kippur in Lev. 16, we referred to Hebrews, the NT book which is a "gloss" on Leviticus. Tonight, we'll look at the first three chapters of Hebrews to relate them to what we've studied.

Hebrews: Hebrews' author is unknown, though traditionally it was attributed to the apostle Paul. However, several other names have also been advanced: Barnabus, Apollos, Priscilla. But there is no evidence to completely support any of them as the writer. But like the Shakespeare controversy, it's a moot point: we have the work, the letter, and it's a gem. It was written in the first century A.D., and most scholars put it in the late 60s prior to the Temple's destruction in 70 A.D. because the writer refers to the Temple in ways that imply its existence. In the book, the writer makes 82 references to the OT; notice in the first three chapters how often the Psalms are quoted.

The purpose of the book was to convince Jewish Christians to hang onto their faith in Jesus as the Messiah, the fulfillment of prophecy and completion of the law. The first century was a time of controversy and turmoil; it was also a time of persecution. (We know, for example, that Saul/Paul before his conversion was enthusiastic about rounding up Christians for punishment and even death). It would have been easy for Jewish Christians to return to the worship of their past - Temple liturgy, sacrifices, the law. But Hebrews 2:1 says "We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away." And the book is designed as an argument offering proof and reasoning to these Christians (and to us) that Jesus is the ONLY way to the Father; that Jesus is THE atoning sacrifice for sin, made once and for all. And in Heb. 2:3, the writer asks "how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" Why is it great? Because of Jesus, the sinless Son of God, who became a man to die for us - he was the sin offering, the burnt offering, the fellowship and peace offering.

Hebrews 1: In the first chapter, the writer wastes no time in building his case. The King James Version gets it just right here:

1 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; 3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high: 4 Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

Notice that the writer begins with God - God the creator of all things; God the one who spoke to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and many others, but who had been silent for 400 years before Jesus' birth. He doesn't try to prove that God exists; he assumes that we all know that God exists. He talks first of prophecy and prophets, angels and other means of

revelation through which God made his message known. In Genesis, how did God contact human beings? He walked with Adam and Eve; he spoke to Noah and told him to build an ark; he called Abraham, and appeared to Abraham in human and in angelic form. He spoke to Abraham on Mt. Moriah through The Angel of God, whom many believe is the pre-Incarnate Christ. He spoke to Joseph through dreams; in Exodus, we read about God calling Moses from a burning bush. Later, he passed by Moses after he put Moses into the cleft of a rock, so that Moses could see God's glory. Moses says he talked with God face to face, metaphorically speaking. Now, however, in the writer's time - and ours - God revealed his message through his Son, Jesus, whom John describes as the Word (John 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word.") Jesus, the living Word, embodies God's message; he IS the message. Paul says in Col. 1:15 that "Christ is the visible image of the invisible God." He is God - all that God is (mercy, compassion, goodness, love, grace) in a human body.. And the writer says, Jesus is greater than anyone else either created or divine: he is God's Son; he is God. He is greater than the angels in several ways: he has a greater name, greater honor, he is eternal, God anointed him, he is the creator, and he sits at God's right hand. The writer offers OT proof of Jesus relationship to God and man; in Heb. 1, he discusses what he knows about God and the Messiah through the OT; now in the second chapter, he begins to tell us about the New Covenant.

Hebrews 2: The writer continues his argument: If, he reasons, the message delivered through angels was true (and has been proven true), then how much more faith can we have in the message Jesus, God's son brought us? In v3, the writer reveals that he did not hear Jesus firsthand, but has heard the Gospel from those who DID hear Jesus. "It was passed on to us by those who heard him speak," eye (and ear-) witnesses. Peter, in his 2nd epistle, makes very clear that he and the disciples didn't make up the message: "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty." (2 Pet. 1:16). And the verses that follow said that "We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain." Peter, John and James heard God speak to Jesus at the Transfiguration. They were powerfully convinced first by Jesus himself and God's confirmation. So the writer of Hebrews heard these eyewitnesses and believed in Jesus. And in v. 4, he says that signs and wonders followed the message: Look at Matt. 4, the introduction of Jesus public ministry. In Matt.4:23, we read: "Jesus went throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness." Signs and wonders. This was Jesus' ministry: teaching, preaching and healing. The apostles, following the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, also taught, preached, and healed "in Jesus name." Jesus had told then before his death that "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." (John 14:12-14). And in Acts 3, we see Peter and John reach out in healing to a crippled man - a ministry of teaching and healing as Jesus had said they'd have. In Hebrews 2, the writer continues to present this kind of evidence to show that Jesus, though temporarily on earth in a human body, will reign with the Father in heaven for all eternity. He brings with him all of us who believe: we are his brothers, other children of God. And we're told that Jesus "shared in [our] humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is the devil - and free all those whose lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." (Heb. 2:14-15) And then he turns to one of the major themes of Hebrews that Jesus was our sacrifice, THE sacrifice for sin: he was a merciful high priest

and he also makes atonement for sin. He is both priest and sacrifice. And then he adds that Jesus "because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." (Heb. 2:18) One cannot be any more human than that.

Hebrews 3: Now the writer gets to the nitty gritty argument: Moses, whom the Jews revere as the giver of the law, is compared to Jesus and Jesus is superior. In the wilderness, the ancestors of the Jews to whom he is writing did not obey God and were punished for it. And so the writer updates it: don't be like your fathers. Don't harden your hearts against the truth Jesus brought us. We who have been given such a great salvation, a once-for-all sacrifice atoning for sins, cannot follow the path of those who were in the wilderness and failed to receive God's best because of their disbelief. (Lev. 26 God promises blessings and/or punishment; the people chose to disobey and were punished).

Hebrews is a book which, as we discovered in Leviticus, continues to argue for Jesus as the atoning sacrifice - a superior sacrifice to those Aaron and his sons offered year after year in the tabernacle. But as you know, we'll learn about Jesus coming, his ministry, his death and resurrection in the gospel Luke wrote. We'll begin next week.

Let's close in prayer.