



CHRIST CHURCH NOTES

LEVITICUS

ROBERT S. KINNEY

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LEVITICUS

PART 1—INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Laws. Restrictions. Maybe something about priests. Most people who have heard of the book of Leviticus in the Old Testament view it as an overbearing set of rules that ranges from antiquated and irrelevant (it was only for the people of Israel in the Bible) to bigoted and misogynistic commandments that somehow infringe on the lives of people today.

But is that what Leviticus really is? Why would we dedicate so many pages of our Bibles to this if that is all it has to offer? And if not, what is the point of this book?

Some of the most famous quotations of the New Testament—Jesus’s second law: “Love your neighbour as yourself,”¹ “Be holy, as I am holy,”² and others—all find their origin in Leviticus. Indeed, these sessions and notes will argue that Leviticus has a central role to play in the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament, the books of Moses) and in the life of God’s people, past and present.

LEVITICUS: BASIC DATA

The traditional view of authorship is that Leviticus, like much of the Pentateuch was written by Moses. As much of these five books are presented as speeches from God (some of which only Moses could have recorded) and stories involving him, traditionalist view much of the source material of the Pentateuch as having originated with Moses, while not denying the probability that later editors put it together and filled in some gaps. Leviticus itself, as we shall see, is presented as a series of discourses from God to Moses. Assuming it is Moses, then many would place its composition—especially chapters 1-16—in the late bronze age (1550-1200 BCE). But of course, the traditional view is accompanied by more recent perspectives.

From the late 19th century, a German scholar named Julius Wellhausen has dominated scholarship on the composition of the Pentateuch with his Documentary Hypothesis. Jay Sklar, a Leviticus scholar, has summarized it this way:

He argued that the Pentateuch consists of four main sources that were edited together: the ‘J’ source, characterized by reference to God as Yahweh (in German, ‘Jahve’); the ‘E’ source, characterized by reference to God as Elohim; the ‘D’ source, which consists of most of Deuteronomy; and the ‘P’ source, which concerns priestly matters (Leviticus was attributed to the P source). He also followed others in arguing that the P source included an earlier source, found mostly in Leviticus 17 – 26. Scholars labelled this the ‘H’ source (‘holiness’ source), due to the frequent mention of holiness in these chapters (19: 2; 20: 7, 26; 21: 6– 8, etc.). He further argued that these sources were combined in a certain order: JEDP (P incorporated H). And while Wellhausen himself did not have a firm position on the dates of J and E, those using his approach soon assigned the

¹ Leviticus 19:8. It is quoted by Jesus in Mark 12:31 and Matthew 22:39. See also Luke 10:27.

² Leviticus 11:44-45, 19:2, 20:7, 20:26, 21:8. See also Exodus 19:6. It is quoted by Jesus in Matthew 5:48.

following dates to the sources: J – c. 840 BC; E – c. 700 BC; D – c. 623 BC; P – c. 500– 450 BC (with H coming after D, but before P).³

In this scenario, Leviticus was composed (or edited or compiled) in large part some 1,000 years after Moses most likely lived. In this case, much of Leviticus's focus on the tabernacle was composed in an era in which the first Temple had been destroyed and the second Temple was being built or had just been built. This radically shifts the way one might read Leviticus. However, much of scholarship in North America and Europe has abandoned or modified aspects of Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis, pushing the average date back considerably. For the purpose of these sessions, let's assume the traditional view.

Finally, before we look at a few matters of structure, it is worth considering the opening lines.

The Lord summoned Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them...⁴

Again, we see that the book is presented as a divine discourse given to Moses to pass along to the people of Israel. But interestingly, there is very little historical context given (compared with even the other books of the Pentateuch). Moses seems to be simply situated in the tent of meeting (or tabernacle). Indeed, it gives the impression of being a separate document, yet continuing on from something. This might be a clue as to the role Leviticus plays in the Pentateuch or, possibly, the whole of the Old Testament.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE PENTATEUCH

Leviticus is, in several ways, the conceptual centre of the Pentateuch. In the simplest of terms, it is the third of the five books:

1. Genesis (Hebrew: *Bəreshit* or בְּרֵאשִׁית, "In the beginning..."—Greek: Γένεσις or "Creation")
2. Exodus (Hebrew: *Shəmot* or שְׁמוֹת, "Names"—Greek: Ἔξοδος or "Exit")
3. Leviticus (Hebrew: *Vayikra* or וַיִּקְרָא, "And He called..."—Greek: Λευιτικόν or "Relating to the Levites")
4. Numbers (Hebrew: *Bəmidbar* or בְּמִדְבָּר, "In the desert...")—Greek: Ἀριθμοί or "Numbers")
5. Deuteronomy (Hebrew: *Dəvarim* or דְּבָרִים, "Things" or "Words"—Greek: Δευτερονόμιον or "Second Law")

But it is not merely the numerical centre. It is in the centre in terms of geography (sacred space), chronology (sacred time), and literarily (sacred literature).⁵ Indeed, it seems that numerous aspects of these five books are carefully organized and constructed in order to bring the reader's focus to Leviticus.

³ Jay Sklar, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2014), 32.

⁴ Leviticus 1:1-2a.

⁵ Much of this section is based on the work of L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 23-27.

Sacred Space

The second and fourth books of the Pentateuch relay journeys. Exodus is the journey from Egypt through the wilderness to Sinai. Numbers relays the journey from Sinai to the entrance of Canaan, the Promised Land (with Deuteronomy serving as a set of extended speeches from that last step before entering). This is made especially clear when looking at the geographical markers that show the journey. From Egypt to Rephidim (the last stop before Sinai and the place where Moses is given water from a rock by God—there is also an important defeat of the Amalekites there), there are six geographical markers: Exodus 12:37; 13:20; 14:1-2; 15:22; 16:1; and 17:1. With 19:2, a seventh marker, the Israelites find themselves at Sinai. In Numbers, there are five additional geographical markers that trace the journey of God’s people from Sinai to Moab (the last stop before the Promised Land): Numbers 10:12; 20:1, 20:22, 21:10-11 and 22:1. But as we have seen, there are no geographical markers in Leviticus except that it is taking place in the tent of meeting (or tabernacle). In short:

| | |
|-----------|--|
| Exodus | 1:1-15:21: God’s people in slavery in Egypt and escaping 15:22-18:26: God’s people wandering in the wilderness 19:1-40:38: God’s people at Mount Sinai |
| Leviticus | 1:1-27:34: God’s people at Sinai |
| Numbers | 1:1-10:10: God’s people at Mount Sinai 10:11-21:35: God’s people wandering in the wilderness 22:1-36: God’s people arrive beyond the Jordan ⁶ |

Leviticus is the substantive and immovable center of the journey of God’s people from Egypt to the Promised Land in the middle three books of the Pentateuch.

Sacred Time

In the chapter before the beginning of Leviticus in the Pentateuch—Exodus 40—there is a very particular time marker. Exodus 40:17:

In the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was set up.

In the chapter following the end of Leviticus—Numbers 1—there is another time marker. Numbers 1:1:

The LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying...

It seems from these markers, that the entirety of Leviticus takes place over a single month. But interestingly, that this time is emphasized is made even clearer by noting the measurements of time. Michael Morales, a Leviticus scholar, notes the shifts in measuring time from years to days to years.

⁶ This chart is adapted from Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord*, 35.

...while Genesis 1 to Exodus 12 and Numbers 10 to Deuteronomy 34 are reckoned by years, Exodus 12 to Numbers 10 is counted by months, evoking the liturgical year through the feasts of Passover, Weeks and Booths.⁷

Again, in the period of time that Moses and Israel are at Sinai, they shift to marking time by months rather than years. It is as if time slows down for this divine encounter at Sinai. And at the centre of it is a month-long period of time set apart as the book of Leviticus.

Sacred Literature

Beyond the geographic and chronological markers, the construction of the Pentateuch itself also puts Leviticus at the centre. Simply looking at the major sections of both Exodus and Numbers indicates that Leviticus and its focus on the tabernacle are at the centre:

- Exodus 1–18: exodus and journey to Mount Sinai
- Exodus 19–24: God teaches His laws and Covenant
- Exodus 25–31: instructions for building the tabernacle
- Exodus 32–34: golden calf
- Exodus 35–40: construction of the tabernacle

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- Numbers 1:48–54 – the Levites appointed to take down the tabernacle
- Numbers 2:17 – tabernacle at the centre of camp
- Numbers 3 – Levites
- Numbers 4:5ff – deconstructing the tabernacle
- Numbers 8 – lamps and Levites
- Numbers 10:17 – the tabernacle was taken down

Morales has catalogued the work of several scholars on the organization of the five books that likewise confirms this focus, particularly using chiasmic (or ring) structures:⁸

Outline #1: A.C. Leder

Genesis: separation from the nations/blessing/seeing the land/descendants and the land
Exodus: Israel's desert journeys/apostasy and plagues/Pharaoh and magicians/first-born/Levites
LEVITICUS: sacrifices/cleanliness/holiness
Numbers: Israel's desert journeys/apostasy and plagues/Balak and Balaam/first-born/Levites
Deuteronomy: separation from the nations/blessing/seeing the land/descendants and the land

Outline #2: M. Kline

Genesis: prologue
Exodus: leaving Egypt and building the tabernacle

⁷ Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, 35–36.

⁸ Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, 24–25.

LEVITICUS: the tabernacle service
Numbers: dedicating the tabernacle and preparing to enter Canaan
Deuteronomy: epilogue

Outline #3: A. Scharf

Exodus 15:22-25 – transformation of water from bitter to sweet

17:1-7 – water from the rock

17:8-16 – Amalekite-Israel war

18 – leadership relief for Moses

18:27 – the Midianite Hobab, Moses' father-in-law

19:1-2 – arrival at Sinai

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Numbers 10:11-23 – departure from Sinai

10:29-32 – the Midian Hobab, Moses' father-in-law

11 – leadership relief for Moses

14:39-45 – Amalekite-Israel war

20:1-13 – water from the rock

21:16-18 – at the spring

Morales concludes his study of the structure of the Pentateuch citing several others:

That the tabernacle structure coincides with the book of Leviticus supports Mary Douglas's reading of Leviticus as something of a literary tour of the tabernacle. C. R. Smith also points out how the second half of Exodus deals primarily with setting up the tabernacle, while the first half of Numbers is concerned with taking it down. Leviticus itself comprises God's speeches from the tabernacle. He notes, along with Knierim, that Leviticus 1:1 ('YHWH summoned Moses, and spoke to him from the tent of meeting') signals the highest level in the macrostructure of the Sinai pericope, and is bookended by Numbers 1:1 ('YHWH spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting'), betraying a deliberate effort to seclude Leviticus as a distinct section. Rendtorff likewise points out the intentional nature of its composition, being 'the only book in the Pentateuch that takes place completely and exclusively at Sinai – and which at the same time takes place at and in the tent of meeting, the sanctum'. With relative confidence, then, we may affirm Damrosch's statement that Leviticus is the very heart of the Pentateuch's narrative.⁹

It is clear from the various literary structures of the Pentateuch that Leviticus is intentionally the centre of these five books, holding a particular place of focus.

THE STRUCTURE OF LEVITICUS

If Leviticus's position at the centre of the Pentateuch is so significant, it would likewise make sense that the book itself is organized in a way to bring attention to the centre. Leviticus also has, interestingly, something of a chiasmic (or ring) structure. The individual chapters indicate as much when divided by topic:

⁹ Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, 26-27.

1-7—sacrifice regulations (1-5 from point of view of people, 6-7 from point of view of priests)
8-10 – priestly duties (ordination, etc.)
11-15 – purity (cleansing, ritual purity)
16-17 – atonement and reconciliation
18-20 – holiness (sex, neighbour, crimes)
21-22 – priestly duties (rules for priests and eating sacrifices)
23-27 – sacrifice and festival regulations

In this scheme, the very centre of the book is the Day of Atonement (or Yom Kippur). It is considered the holiest day of the year in Judaism, both ancient and modern.

Another way of looking at the structure of Leviticus is to consider the *divine speech* markers. Again, Leviticus is a lengthy discourse—God’s speech to Moses which Moses is to convey to God’s people. Accordingly, each section of the book is introduced with markers of *divine speech*. For example, consider 1:1: “The LORD summoned Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying...” or 4:1 “The LORD spoke to Moses, saying...”

According to Wilfried Warning, another Leviticus scholar, there are 37 distinct speeches or discourses. The 17th discourse, or the one in the centre (with 16 on each side) is chapter 16.¹⁰ This also indicates a particular focus on the Day of Atonement.

Seeing the Day of Atonement as the centre of the book also makes sense when considering what comes on either side. Chapters 1-15 are very much concerned with blood and aspects of liturgical worship leading to atonement. Chapters 17-27 (or 18-27) are focused on communion with God, not so much through sacrifice, but worship through holy living. See, for example, the common phrase throughout: “Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (19:2).¹¹ Morales summarizes it clearly:

The first half deals primarily with the approach to God through blood, while the second half is taken up with life in God’s Presence through increasing holiness, the overall goal being fellowship and union with God... For this reason, though Leviticus is often characterized thematically by holiness, it is preferable to discern holiness not as an end in itself but rather as a means to an end, which is the real theme, the abundant life of joy with God in the house of God.¹²

The reader of Leviticus is prepared for this pairing of notions because liturgical devotion (the acts of praising God through corporate ritual) and holy service to God are two sides of the same coin of *worship*. The previous book, Exodus, makes this point very clearly. The word for *hard service* (or *work* or *slavery*) in Hebrew throughout the book is the same word translated as *worship* in reference to ritual veneration.¹³

¹⁰ See his massive work on the subject: Wilfried Warning, *Literary Artistry in Leviticus* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

¹¹ See also 11:44-45, 20:7, 21:8 and other variations.

¹² Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, 30.

¹³ See Exodus 1:13, 1:14, 5:18, 6:5 etc., and compare with 3:12, 4:23, etc. Or, simply compare 20:5 and 20:9 within the Ten Commandments.

LEVITICUS FOR US

Given that Leviticus is so central to the Pentateuch (and even the Old Testament in general) and the Day of Atonement is so central to Leviticus, the question for the modern reader becomes one of contemporary value. Why should we want to study Leviticus today? What, if any, is its enduring value? Are the ritual codes and holiness codes of ancient Jews still relevant to modern Christians?

At least for Paul, this intersection of worship through ritual and holy living has enduring value. He indicates as much in Romans 12:1-2:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Over the next two sessions, we will dig deeper into these two sides of Leviticus—the influence of its expressions of liturgical worship on the modern Christian Church and the relevance of its notions of holiness for Christian obedience.

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PART 2—WORSHIP AS RITUAL

Having seen the centrality and significance of Leviticus in the Pentateuch, as well as the climactic position of the Day of Atonement in the book, we now turn to the first of the major two themes found throughout the book. Both themes concern the concept of *worship*.

In the book of Exodus—the book leading right into God’s speeches to his people from the Tabernacle in Leviticus—the word translated as *worship* (built from the עָבַד root in Hebrew) is consistently translated two ways. It is translated as *worship* and seems to refer to ceremonial acts of piety (see Exodus 3:12, 7:16, 7:26, 20:5, 23:24, et al.). But, it is also translated as *service*, *hard service*, and even *slavery* (see Exodus 1:13-14, 6:5, 20:9, et al.). These two ideas are the two sides of the same coin. Worship always entails both ritual acts, and acts of service—both ceremony and an obedient way of life. Leviticus’s two major themes fall along these lines. In chapters 1-7, Leviticus explains the regular ritual sacrifice scheme of the people of God. In chapters 8-9 and 21-22, Leviticus explains the requirements for the ritual leaders, the priests. And in chapters 23-27, we find the liturgical seasons and ways of thinking about ritual time. These chapters all concern the ritual aspects of worship. We will look in the next session at the way of life and required obedience aspects of worship captured in the holiness codes of Leviticus (chapters 11-15 and 17-20).

REGULATIVE AND NORMATIVE PRINCIPLES OF WORSHIP

In the 16th century, the Church experienced a re-evaluation of and wide-ranging debate about some of its core beliefs in the Reformation. The new emphasis on the (sole) authority of Scripture caused some proponents of *Sola Scriptura* to reconsider aspects of liturgical worship.¹ Some Anabaptists and Calvinist became strict adherents to what was known as the *ius divinum* (“divine law”) and is now known as the *regulative principle of worship*.

The *regulative principle* suggests that whatever is done in conducting corporate worship must be derived explicitly from Scripture. Any other innovations, however edifying in their function, would ultimately be brought into conflict with Scripture. As such, some adherents refused to allow anything other than Psalms to be sung and eschewed musical instruments (as there is no explicit command to use them in the New Testament, despite references to both music in worship contexts and musical instruments in other contexts).

By contrast, the *normative principle* suggests that whatever is not prohibited in Scripture is acceptable in conducting corporate worship. In other words, where the *regulative principle* sees the Bible as a strict and restrictive code for corporate worship, the *normative principle* views Scripture as a source and guide for corporate worship, but one that can still be informed by tradition and more practical concerns. The Anglican Tradition, from the beginning, has

¹ *Sola Scriptura* (“by Scripture alone”) was a central doctrine of the Protestants in the Reformation, suggesting that Scripture, and not the Church, was the sole authority in interpreting Scripture and tradition for the purpose of deriving practice. See Matthew Barrett, *God’s Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

followed the *normative principle*, captured especially in the final sentence of Article 34 of the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*.

Every particular or national Church hath authority to ordain, change, and abolish, ceremonies or rites of the Church ordained only by man's authority, so that all things be done to edifying.²

So long as it is not something ordained by Scripture, the Church is free to change and adapt any aspect of corporate worship. The goal is the edification of the people of the Church. Unsurprisingly, then, the Anglican Tradition is able to draw on sources of worship from places like the Old Testament in general—and Leviticus in particular—without having to run the ideas through a restrictive filter.

THE USE OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY IN INTERPRETING LEVITICUS

Of course, if we are going to be merely influenced in our reading of the Scriptures as it relates to worship, challenges still arise. For example, on what day should we meet for worship? In Exodus 20:8-11, in the fourth commandment, the reader is told to honour the Sabbath (which then, by tradition, becomes the time for honouring and worshipping God). This much is confirmed in the reference to observing a “holy convocation” on the Sabbath in Leviticus 23:3. The Sabbath, in the Jewish system, is from sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday. In the New Testament, however, the standard practice seems to be meeting on the first day of the week, or Sunday (see Luke's reference to the church in Troas meeting on Sunday in Acts 20:7 or Paul's indication that the Corinthian church should meet and take offerings on Sunday in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). So, which is the best day on which to gather for corporate worship?

As we saw in previous sessions on *Typology* and the *Covenants*, we intend to read the Scriptures—particularly books like Leviticus—as Christians, not merely as the first (Jewish) audience would read them. This comes, in part, from our understanding of what Jesus is doing in relationship to the Old Testament. Consider Matthew 5:17-18:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

Jesus is clear that the Law (including Leviticus) is still valid and normative. It has not been abolished. Yet, it has been *fulfilled* by Jesus. He has fundamentally shifted it. He has become the one who perfectly interprets (or reinterprets) and authoritatively mediates it. And when it comes to Leviticus, the best place to see how the sacrificial laws and ritualistic worship of the Jewish people are fulfilled in Christ Jesus is the Epistle to the Hebrews, especially chapters 7-10. Leviticus scholar, Jay Sklar, succinctly noted this connection:

For example, it's only when we understand the sacrificial system of Leviticus that we can understand what it means that Jesus came and “made purification for sins” (Heb 1:3; cf. Lev 4). It's only when we understand Leviticus that we can understand his

² Article 34, *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*.

atonement sacrifice wipes away every vestige of sin and impurity so powerfully that we can walk “with confidence into the holy place by the blood of Jesus” (Heb 10:19; cf. Lev 16 and esp. 10:1-3!). And it’s only when we understand Leviticus that we can understand that the sinlessness and purity and power of Jesus the Great High Priest is immeasurably beyond that of any levitical priest that ever lived (Heb 7:26-28; cf. Lev 9:7; 16:6)!³

LEVITICUS AND ANGLICAN WORSHIP TODAY

So, as (late) modern Anglican Christians, does Leviticus make its way into our corporate worship at all? If so, where? How? In what ways?

The Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16)

The first few chapters of Leviticus trace various sacrifices. Like all the sacrifices throughout the Pentateuch, there are elements in common. Each sacrifice, in some way, has to do with *atonement* (defined as reparation or expiation of sin, or the act of reconciling a person to God in acknowledgment of the person’s sin and the transference of the deserved punishment onto an underserving proxy). In most cases, an animal “without blemish” (and so perfect, or undeserving of punishment) is brought forward. The person or the priest touches the animal (as symbolic act of transferring the sin onto the animal). And then the animal is slaughtered. The act of violence against the animal represents the punishment and the person, as a result, is spared. This is the fundamental act of atonement through sacrifice and is at the heart of each of the sacrifices.

Atonement is, of course, most fully realized in the annual Day of Atonement sacrifice described in Leviticus 16. On this day, the High Priest (Aaron) makes a series of sacrifices (sin and burnt offerings). Leviticus 16:30 gives the reason:

For on this day atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins you shall be clean before the Lord.

As we saw in the first session, the Day of Atonement is the conceptual centre of the book of Leviticus. It is also the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ as understood by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. There, he indicates the ultimate fulfilment of this sacrifice in the cross and resurrection:

Thus it was necessary for the sketches of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own; for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself.⁴

³ Jay Sklar, “Daring to Delight in Leviticus” (an interview with Jay Sklar by Colin Hansen). April 1, 2011. See <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/daring-to-delight-in-leviticus/>.

⁴ Hebrews 9:23-26.

Christ's sacrifice of himself fulfils the function of the Day of Atonement. As such, we do not need to observe an annual Day of Atonement, but rather we acknowledge it in the Eucharist in our corporate worship services. The most explicit place this notion is referenced is the quotation of 1 John 2:1 in the *Comfortable Words* of the *Book of Common Prayer* liturgy.

If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father,
Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins.⁵

Propitiation is the precise notion of atonement. Of course, the notion of atonement is found throughout the Eucharistic liturgies of *Common Worship* as well, notably in the midst of Eucharist Prayers A and B:

Accept through him, our great high priest,
this our sacrifice of thanks and praise,
and as we eat and drink these holy gifts
in the presence of your divine majesty...⁶

And so, Father, calling to mind his death on the cross,
his perfect sacrifice made once for the sins of the whole world...⁷

And indeed, each of the Eucharistic Prayers includes some sense of atonement, typically using the language of sacrifice to describe Jesus's death on the cross (even though there are some theologians who want to move away from such biblical language).

Beyond the commonalities of atonement through all the sacrifices and the climax of this notion in the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16, there are other theological continuities between the ritual worship described in Leviticus and our present Anglican liturgies.

The Burnt Offering (Leviticus 1)

The first chapter of Leviticus describes what is known as *the burnt offering*. There are some important and unique features of this sacrifice. First, and foremost, it is for everyone. In fact, the three cyclical divisions of this chapter indicate that there are different categories of animals to be sacrificed, ostensibly dependent on a person's economic status. But that this sacrifice is made by everyone is significant.

Its purpose is also important. The burnt offering is the only offering which is completely burned. No portion is reserved to be eaten. Rather, the whole sacrifice is turned to smoke, so that it is a pleasing odour to God, symbolizing the notion of total surrender to God.⁸ And as such, it is what allows a person to come into the presence of God in the place of worship. This made clearer in Deuteronomy 12:13-14.⁹ As such it is theologically similar to how someone today might approach worshipping God by initially coming into his presence and

⁵ Thomas Cranmer, *Book of Common Prayer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1662), 310.

⁶ The Archbishop's Council 2000, *Common Worship* (London: Church House Publishing, 2000), 187.

⁷ Archbishop's Council, *Common Worship*, 190.

⁸ Leviticus 1:9, 1:13, and 1:17.

⁹ It later becomes apparent that these sacrifices are made twice daily in Numbers 28:7.

surrendering completely so that subsequent worship (or sacrifices in Leviticus) might be considered. That is, it is very much like the *Prayer of Preparation* (formerly called the *Collect for Purity* in the *Book of Common Prayer*).

This prayer may be said

**All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.¹⁰**

The Meal Offering (Leviticus 2)

The meal (or grain) offering was not of an animal, yet it was burned on the altar in the same way. The language mirrors that of the Suzerain-vassal relationships of the time period (including the reference to salt, which was generally eaten as part of ratifying a Suzerain-vassal covenant), suggesting that offering is a kind of tribute. Allen Ross describes it this way:

It is fitting for those who have been accepted by God through sacrificial atonement to express their dedication to him. And this is the relationship between the meal and burnt offerings. The meal offering was an acknowledgment that everything the offerer had and was belonged to God; and now, a portion of that substance was given back to God as an expression of the belief that God was the source of and the provider for life.¹¹

The theological concepts established in this sacrifice include 1) a desire to please God through bringing him gifts, 2) a recognition that God deserves tribute, and 3) a recognition that all a person has is itself from God. These ideas are articulated in the *Prayers at the Preparation of Table* after the collection (offering) is taken in an Anglican corporate worship service:

Yours, Lord, is the greatness, the power,
the glory, the splendour, and the majesty;
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours.
**All All things come from you,
and of your own do we give you.¹²**

The Peace Offering

The peace offering, or offering of well-being, returns the reader to the category of animal sacrifices. The purpose and unique qualities of this sacrifice, however, are a bit more

¹⁰ Archbishop's Council, *Common Worship*, 168.

¹¹ Allen P. Ross, *Holiness to the Lord: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 98.

¹² The *Prayers at the Preparation of the Table* are found in the President's Edition of *Common Worship*. The Archbishop's Council 2000, *Common Worship (President's Edition)* (London: Church House Publishing, 2000).

challenging to discern. In this case, the progression from the previous sacrifice continues. Now, just the fat and a few internal organs (kidneys and liver) are offered to God. The rest, by implication is eaten (as Leviticus 3:17 places a restriction on what can and cannot be eaten). The reasons for making a peace offering are not introduced until chapter 7.

With your thanksgiving sacrifice of well-being you shall bring your offering with cakes of leavened bread. From this you shall offer one cake from each offering, as a gift to the Lord; it shall belong to the priest who dashes the blood of the offering of well-being. And the flesh of your thanksgiving sacrifice of well-being shall be eaten on the day it is offered; you shall not leave any of it until morning.¹³

This description is significant. Cakes and meat are consumed. The peace offering appears to be a kind of community meal, signifying not only peace with God, but peace with each other.¹⁴ In Anglican services of corporate worship, then, the parallel act of worship would be one that incorporates both a notion of peace with God (through Jesus Christ) and a sign of peace shared among the people.

Introductions to the Peace

1

Christ is our peace.
He has reconciled us to God
in one body by the cross.
We meet in his name and share his peace.¹⁵

The peace of the Lord be always with you
All **and also with you.**¹⁶

Guilt and Sin Offering (Leviticus 4:1–5:13)

The next set of sacrifices are introduced in chapter 4. These are the guilt offerings (chapter 4) and the sin offerings (chapter 5). It is worth noting that scholarship is divided on whether these are the same set of offerings or whether some distinction between them is important.¹⁷

¹³ Leviticus 7:13-15.

¹⁴ "The main emphasis of the peace offering must be on celebrating all the benefits of being at peace with God; it indicates that all is well between the worshiper and God. The law of the peace offering does not elaborate on the point and so a good deal of material will have to be introduced from parallel discussions. But all the occasions for the peace offering are connected to the blessings of God on the righteous. Such a celebration, then, was the high point of Israelite worship." Ross, *Holiness to the Lord*, 111.

¹⁵ Archbishop's Council, *Common Worship (President's Edition)*.

¹⁶ Archbishop's Council, *Common Worship*, 175.

¹⁷ "To a certain degree both observations are valid. That this is a part of the purification offering is clear from the continuity of the ritual between Lev. 4 and Lev. 5, but that this is a separate section can be seen from the differences between the chapters: 1) The qualification in Lev. 4 of the sins as being inadvertent is not included in Lev. 5. Whereas Lev. 4 gave a general description of the type of sin covered, Lev. 5 lists specific sins—and these sins could hardly be judged as inadvertent. 2) In Lev. 5 the sins bring guilt ('āšām) and require confession (hitwaddâ). Neither of these terms is used in Lev. 4. 3) The sins in Lev. 4 seem to be committed alone, but the sins in Lev. 5 affect another person. 4) No distinction is made in Lev. 5 about the type of person making the offering: it could be any person (nepeš)—common or highborn, male or female. 5) The summary statement "any of these things" in 5:13 must refer to the specific sins listed in 5:1–4 and not in Lev. 4." Ross, *Holiness to the Lord*, 139.

For our purposes, we will take this set of sacrifices together. It is clear that by Leviticus 5:14, a new sacrifice is being introduced, one where the offering includes mandatory restitution to the party against whom the sin was committed. Unlike the burnt offering, the atonement made in the guilt and sin offerings is not in order for the worshipper to be able to approach God or come into his presence, but rather it is to repair an impaired relationship. Sin (or guilt) has separated the worshipper from God. It has broken the relationship. This set of sacrifices is making things right again.

Importantly, it includes an acknowledgment of unintentional sin (Leviticus 4:13, 4:22, 4:27), as well as seemingly intentional sins (Leviticus 5:1-6). It requires becoming aware of the sin committed (Leviticus 4:14, 4:23, 4:28). It also requires confession of the sin (Leviticus 5:5). Reconciliation with God requires an acknowledgment and confession of sins, both unintended and intended, a full accounting of our own sins and a desire to repent (or turn away) from them. This theological notion is articulated, of course, in the *General Confession* of the *Book of Common Prayer* as well as the *Prayers of Penitence* in *Common Worship*, both essential elements of an Anglican corporate worship service.

Almighty God, Father of our Lord
Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, Judge of
all men; We acknowledge and bewail our
manifold sins and wickedness, Which we, from
time to time, most grievously have committed,
By thought, word, and deed, Against thy Divine
Majesty, Provoking most justly thy wrath
and indignation against us. We do earnestly
repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings;
The remembrance of them is grievous
unto us; The burden of them is intolerable.
Have mercy upon us, Have mercy upon us,
most merciful Father; For thy Son our Lord
Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past;
And grant that we may ever hereafter serve and
please thee in newness of life, To the honour
and glory of thy Name; Through Jesus Christ
our Lord. Amen.¹⁸

Prayers of Penitence

***All* Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.**

¹⁸ Cranmer, *Book of Common Prayer*, 309.

**For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.¹⁹**

Other Continuities Between Leviticus and Anglican Worship Today

Of course, we have only scratched the surface of connections between the ritualistic aspects of worship described in Leviticus and how Anglicans worship today. Indeed, we have only looked at the sacrifices in chapters 1-5 and 16. There are other significant continuities worth considering:

- *Leviticus 7:28-38*: Priests should make their living by the offerings of the people of God. This is realized in the notion of stipendiary vocational priests in the Church.
- *Leviticus 8*: Priests should be set apart (ordained) for particular service and dressed in a specific way that signifies this service.²⁰ Anglican priests, accordingly, are ordained to particular ministries and wear vestments accordingly (though Anglican vestments today are more inspired by Greco-Roman liturgical dress than Levitical).
- *Leviticus 23:1-3*: A Sabbath day (see above on the particular day) should be set apart for intentional, corporate worship. Indeed, we still gather each Sunday (and other days!) for times of corporate worship in our churches.
- *Leviticus 23:4-44*: Annual feasts and seasons should be designated for intentional times of particular focus. The Anglican liturgical calendar and schedule of feasts function in a similar way.

There are, of course, several points of continuity beyond even these. As is hopefully quite clear at this point, Anglican worship today is richly inspired by the theological concepts behind the practices of Levitical ritualistic worship. Understanding these worship practices, as such, will deepen our understanding and appreciation for how we worship today.

¹⁹ The Archbishop's Council 2000, *Common Worship*, 169.

²⁰ Jerome was poignant on this notion: "We, too, ought not to enter the Holy of Holies in our everyday garments ... when they have become defiled from the use of ordinary life, but with a clean conscience, and in clean garments, hold in our hands the Sacrament of the Lord." Jerome, *Comm. Ezech.*, xlv.19, as quoted in Walter Alison Phillips, "Vestments," in Hugh Chisholm, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (Vol. 27; 11th Ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 1056–1062.

LEVITICUS

PART 3—WORSHIP AS BEING HOLY

Having seen the surprising significance of Leviticus to the Pentateuch and the Old Testament in the first session, and the continuing relevance of Leviticus to the ritualist practices of worship today, we now turn to some of the most challenging bits of Leviticus: the holiness code.¹ We saw in the structure that Leviticus was not only concerned with the worship practices in the Tabernacle, but also with the worship (in the sense of service and how one lives) outside of the Tabernacle. The book was organized along these themes by way of a ring structure, with ritual sacrifice and priestly functions on the exterior (chapters 1-10, 21-27) and the Day of Atonement (chapter 16) at the centre. The interior ring, then, concerns purity and holiness (chapters 11-15 and 17-20).

- 1-7—sacrifice regulations
 - 8-10 – priestly duties
 - 11-15 – purity (cleansing, ritual purity)
 - 16 – atonement and reconciliation
 - 17-20 – holiness (sex, neighbour, crimes)
 - 21-22 – priestly duties
 - 23-27 – sacrifice and festival regulations²

But as with many parts of the Old Testament, the purity laws found in the holiness code seem to be from a foreign world and foreign time. Indeed, they seem antiquated and, from a very practical perspective, irrelevant. Indeed, some of them seem uncharitable and make Christians uncomfortable as the laws are very specific and the punishments are comparatively extreme. Yet, these laws are part of the Holy Scriptures, our most sacred document(s) guiding our faith and practice. What are we to do with the holiness code or Old Testament laws in general?

FIVE WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING THE OLD TESTAMENT LAWS

Unsurprisingly, there are just about as many perspectives on how Christians today should understand the Old Testament laws as there are scholars asking the question. Let us consider five major categories (realizing that they will inevitably overlap and there are significant variations within them).

1. *Nothing Applies*

This categorical position is a very simple one. In short, those who hold this position view the Old Testament as not binding on the Christian. That is, the *time* and *means* of the Old

¹ Two points of terminology are important here. First, the *holiness code* of Leviticus is a specific set of laws within a broader category of *Old Testament laws*. Part of these notes will address the broader category of *Old Testament laws*, part of these notes will address the specific *holiness code*. Second, much of scholarship uses the term *holiness code* to refer to Leviticus 17-26 because of the repeated use of the word *holy*. For our study, we are referring specifically to the practical holiness laws found in chapters 11-15 and 17-20. It is worth noting, according to scholars like Christine Hayes, that in Leviticus 1-16, it is generally the priests who are to be holy, but in 17-26, it is all of God's people. See Christine Hayes, Lecture 9, RLST 145, in *Yale Open Courses*.

² This structure of Leviticus is slightly different from that presented in the first set of notes, as the role of chapter 17 remains debated. In considering holiness code, it is probably better to take it with chapters 18-20.

Testament are completed with the coming of Christ. The Old Covenant has ceased to have any relevance as the New Covenant has replaced it. This position is common amongst major theological traditions like Dispensationalism.³ Importantly, many theological traditions would not consciously hold to this perspective, but functionally operate as though they do. This, of course, reflects profound discomfort with the foreignness of some of these laws. At the same time, it is a difficult position to hold as the New Testament itself seems to indicate ongoing usefulness and applicability of the Old Testament laws. For example, Paul argues in Romans 7:7-25 that the Old Testament laws still functions to reveal sinfulness to an individual. Likewise, Jesus indicates that the Law is 'not being abolished,' but fulfilled in him (Matthew 5:17-18).⁴

2. *Everything Applies, As It Appears in the Old Testament*

This categorical position is almost the precise opposite of the previous perspective. Everything is binding on the Christian. There are a couple major variations. Some hold the position that all of the commandments still hold as they are presented in the Old Testament, including sacrifices and other ritualistic acts. This relatively rare position is a practice held by Armenian Orthodox Church, in part, as well as some Christian churches in Israel.⁵ A slightly more common variation is that the laws are binding, except for when the New Testament has specifically set them aside. So, sacrifices are not necessary, as the Epistle to the Hebrews makes it clear that sacrifices are unnecessary for the Christian. However, the prohibition against linen/wool mixed fabrics (Leviticus 19:19) has not been set aside or transformed in the New Testament, and so remains binding on the Christian.⁶

3. *Some Things Apply, Some Things Don't*

Most Christians, it seems, hold to one of the three categories of intermediary positions (or some combination thereof). The first category simply takes a piecemeal approach, dividing the Old Testament laws into various categories that are then treated independently. For example, Article 7 of the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*, states:

The Old Testament is not contrary to the New: for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to Mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and Man, being both God and Man. Wherefore they are not to be heard, which feign that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the Law given from God by Moses, as touching Ceremonies and Rites, do not bind Christian men,

³ "At the heart of dispensationalism is the dividing of all time into distinguishable economies (or dispensations) which are seen as different stages in God's progressive revelation." Timothy P. Weber, "Dispensationalism," in Daniel G. Reid, et al., *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990),

⁴ Jesus uses the term *the Law* as a shorthand reference to the Pentateuch, which includes the laws we have been discussing.

⁵ On the Armenian Orthodox practices, see Fred C. Conybeare, "The Survival of Animal Sacrifices Inside the Christian Church," in *The American Journal of Theology*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (January 1903), 62-90. For more about the practices of certain churches in Israel, see Jill Hamilton, "There Is No Role for Animal Sacrifice in Christianity," in *The Guardian* (International Online Edition), (December 15, 2011). The online version of the article is available here: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2011/dec/15/no-role-animal-sacrifice-christianity>

⁶ If you know much about certain Anabaptist communities (such as the Amish or various Hutterite groups), it might be tempting to think that they hold this position. And in part, they appear to hold it in practice. However, their theological position is not as much concerned with keeping Old Testament laws as it is with 'not conforming to the world,' a New Testament injunction (Romans 12:2).

nor the Civil precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet notwithstanding, no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral.⁷

This major articulation of doctrine of the Church of England states (as do the doctrinal statements of most other Reformation-era groups) that the laws divide into ceremonial/ritual laws, civil laws, and moral laws. The ceremonial/ritual laws and civil laws are not binding on the Christian, whereas the moral laws are binding. The difficulty with this perspective is the persistent question: Which laws are moral, civil, or ceremonial? Is there some biblical means of determining which are which?

4. *It All Applies, But Only as Fulfilled in Jesus Christ*

This category of intermediary positions relies on an area of theology called *biblical theology* (a discipline that focuses on the relationships of the Old Testament to the New Testament and seeing the Scriptures as a single, progressively revealed Truth from God—the discipline includes *typology* and the theme of *covenants*, both of which we have looked at in some depth in the last couple years). As we saw before, Jesus has a specific relationship to the Old Testament laws:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.⁸

Jesus becomes the interpretive fulfilment of all the Old Testament laws. That is, the laws all remain relevant and binding, but how they function might be different because of how Jesus has fulfilled them. So, for example, the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16) is still binding—it has not been set aside, as in the first and third positions. But the keeping of the sacrifice was and is fulfilled in Christ's death on the cross (c.f., Hebrews 10:1-10). Likewise, the requirement to eat particular foods (Leviticus 11) remains binding, but as fulfilled through Christ's declaration that all foods are clean (c.f., Mark 7:19). The difficulty with this position is that it is not always clear how a law is fulfilled in Christ Jesus. What does it even mean for Jesus to have fulfilled the law prohibiting mixed fabrics? What does it mean for the Christian when it comes to deciding what kind of clothing to wear?

5. *It All Applies, But Along a Historical Trajectory*

This last category of intermediary positions takes a similar approach to the previous one, defaulting to the relevance and binding of the laws. But instead of interpreting them through the theological lens of fulfilment in Christ Jesus, they are interpreted through a much more pragmatic lens of historical trajectory. The assumption is that science, technology, and knowledge in general have increased and evolved over the many centuries since these laws were first enacted. Advances in our scientific understanding have possibly rendered some of these laws obsolete. For example, the laws concerning the purity of women after childbirth (Leviticus 12) have important benefits for the health of everyone in the community. Modern hygiene and science, however, have developed better ways of dealing with health and

⁷ Article 7, *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*.

⁸ Matthew 5:17-18.

cleanliness that don't require separation in the same way. As such, the law remains binding, but according to contemporary hygienic standards, not according to ancient scientific standards. Likewise, the food laws (Leviticus 11) certainly have particular health benefits over that of other ancient civilizations. Yet, our modern understanding of nutrition has significantly improved, and today's experts have slightly different suggestions. As such, the laws remain applicable, but according to modern nutritional standards, not ancient standards. There are, of course, two difficulties with this position. The first is that the laws in Leviticus, such as these last two examples, are not presented as being concerned with pragmatic value. The ritual cleanliness of chapter 12 and the food requirements of chapter 11 are not presented as being for the purposes of promoting health. The other, more significant difficulty is that the historical trajectory argument is a slippery slope that puts the interpretive authority in the hands of the reader rather than in the intent of the author. This same hermeneutic (method or theory of interpretation) could be applied to the New Testament with problematic results. This *trajectory* perspective could be used, for example, to argue that the reality of Christ's resurrection in history is not nearly as important as the concept of it and so, it doesn't matter whether he actually rose again from the dead, the idea that he did is all that matters. This approach may be satisfying on some philosophical level, but it departs from historic Christianity. So, the difficulty here is how and when to use this perspective.

THE POINT OF THE LAWS IN LEVITICUS

One solution to the difficulties of the fourth perspective above—what to do when it is unclear in the New Testament how Jesus Christ fulfilled a particular law from Leviticus—is to suggest that he fulfilled the point of the laws in Leviticus. Indeed, some of the difficulties of the second, third, and fifth positions above are clarified and possibly answered in understanding what is the point of the laws in Leviticus. So, what is the point of these laws?

Leviticus offers a few important answers to this question, or at least a few dimensions to the answer to this question. The first place to look is chapter 10:

You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean; and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the Lord has spoken to them through Moses.⁹

With these simple words, it becomes clear that the whole span of laws being studied here comes down to classifying as holy or common, clean or unclean. This helps us make sense, then, of the various topics being legislated:

Leviticus 11: clean and unclean foods
Leviticus 12: cleanliness of women after childbirth
Leviticus 13: leprosy (cleanliness and disease)
Leviticus 14: lepers (cleanliness and disease)
Leviticus 15: bodily discharges
Leviticus 17: sacrifices outside of the tabernacle
Leviticus 18: sexual relations
Leviticus 19: agriculture, labour, family

⁹ Leviticus 10:10-11.

Leviticus 20: additional requirements and punishments

But why is ritual cleanliness so important? Why is holiness (being set apart) rather than commonness so significant to God? The answer comes in chapter 11:

For I am the Lord your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming creature that moves on the earth. For I am the Lord who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall be holy, for I am holy.¹⁰

Cleanliness and holiness are so important because God is holy. His people, in order to be identified with him, are likewise to be holy. This is the dominant theme throughout the remainder of the book, with this *be holy* phrasing occurring at least ten more times and the Hebrew root word for *holy* appearing in the book 152 times (more than any other book in the Bible).¹¹ God's holiness and the requirement of holiness of his people are the primary reason behind these laws.

This reasoning is further explained in contrast to the people of the land. Remembering that from their departure from Egypt in Exodus 13, the Pentateuch is the story of the journey of God's people to the Promised Land (Canaan), which they only arrive at in the first chapter of Joshua (the next book after the Pentateuch). God's people are to be different from or set apart from (holy) the people who occupy the land when they arrive:

Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: I am the LORD your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not follow their statutes.¹²

You shall keep all my statutes and all my ordinances, and observe them, so that the land to which I bring you to settle in may not vomit you out. You shall not follow the practices of the nation that I am driving out before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them.¹³

As such, God's people are to be holy, to be set apart, to be clean—just as God is and directly in contrast to the people inhabiting the land they are about to possess.

One great challenge in this point, according to Leviticus, is that perfect holiness is difficult to maintain, especially when God's holiness is the standard. The requirements of Leviticus and its multitude of laws in chapters 11-15 and 17-20, interspersed with chapters on sacrifice, is no accident. There is a very particular rhetorical effect to these laws that are both numerous and extensive in their scope that not unlike a *litany*. The Oxford Living Dictionary defines *litany* as 1) "a series of petitions for use in church services or processions, usually recited by the clergy and responded to in a recurring formula by the people," or 2) "a tedious recital or repetitive

¹⁰ Leviticus 11:44-45.

¹¹ Leviticus 11:44, 11:45, 19:2, 20:7, 20:26, 21:6, 21:8, 23:20, 25:12, 27:9, 27:10, 27:21, 27:32, and 27:33.

¹² Leviticus 18:2-3.

¹³ Leviticus 20:22-23.

series.”¹⁴ The Cambridge Dictionary adds the slightly more poignant: “a long list of unpleasant things.”¹⁵ The laws of Leviticus function this way. They drive the reader to consider their own holiness—in reality, their lack of holiness—raising the standard higher and higher, making it impossible to even imagine keeping all of these laws. The reader feels alone, separated from God by the unreachd standard of holiness. In fact, the reader is driven to guilt-ridden frustration, comforted only in that this elaborate and extensive ritual sacrifice system is there to provide reconciliation with an otherwise unreachable God.

The Apostle Paul picks up on this purpose of the laws here. In his Epistle to the Romans, he indicates as much:

What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’ But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good. Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.¹⁶

This notoriously complex bit of theology from Paul makes an important case: a primary function of the laws was to reveal sinfulness (or falling short of God’s holiness). The laws themselves are a good thing—so good that they demonstrates how sinful humankind is in its inability to maintain these laws. And the sinful nature of humankind is unavoidable. Nobody can be righteous with regard to the laws (a point Paul made back in Romans 3:10-18).

¹⁴ *Oxford Living Dictionary*. See en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/litany.

¹⁵ *Cambridge Dictionary*. See dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/litany.

¹⁶ Romans 7:7-25. Please note: As Jesus in Matthew 5, Paul is using *the Law* to refer to a particular part of the Hebrew Scriptures, which includes the law we are considering in Leviticus.

So again, the point is this. These laws in Leviticus 11-15 and 17-20 are there to call God's people to God's standard of holiness, a standard that is unattainable. Thanks be to God that he provided a way to make things right when we inevitably fail—the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16 and that to which it points, the atonement made manifest to us in the sacrificial death of Jesus.

HOW DOES JESUS HANDLE THE LAWS OF LEVITICUS?

With the point of the laws now stated, we must ask another question if we are to take some aspect of the fourth perspective on a Christian's approach to the Old Testament laws. If these laws are binding on the Christian as they are fulfilled in Christ, how does Jesus handle these laws? We have the Epistle to the Hebrews and its perspective on the ritual sacrifice laws. What about the laws found here in the holiness code?

A careful reader of the Gospels will note that Jesus frequently cites the Pentateuch (e.g., Matthew 4:1-11, 19:1-9). But when considering the holiness code we find in Leviticus, two places come to the surface immediately. In fact, the very next section after Jesus's 'fulfilment of the law' statement in Matthew 5 has particular significance. Matthew 5:21-48 includes six sections with very similar rhetorical structure, often called the (six) *antitheses*:

You have heard that it was said... But I say to you...¹⁷

In these antithetical statements, Jesus cites some Old Testament law or tradition (e.g., you shall not commit murder, you shall not commit adultery).¹⁸ And in each case, he heightens or intensifies the requirement. He also brings something very visible and behaviour-oriented into the abstract realm of the mind. 'You shall not murder' becomes 'you shall not hate.' 'You shall not commit adultery' becomes 'you shall not lust.' Like Leviticus, he also frequently states severe penalties for these amplified requirements. In other words, Jesus reinforces and even increases the last purpose of the laws we saw: revealing sin to the reader and so frustrating him/her. If the Levitical laws were already impossible to keep and so a sacrificial system was needed, the laws as Jesus has fulfilled them are even more impossible to keep. A much greater sacrifice than that of the Day of Atonement is necessary.

The other very significant passage that shows how Jesus handles the Levitical laws is when he offers his summary of the whole of the Law and the Prophets.

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'" This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'¹⁹

¹⁷ Matthew 5:21-22, 5:27-28, 5:31-32, 5:33-34, 5:38-39, and 5:43-44.

¹⁸ Jesus cites, in order: Exodus 20:13, Deuteronomy 5:17, Exodus 20:14, Deuteronomy 5:18, Deuteronomy 24:1, Leviticus 19:12 or Numbers 30:2 or Deuteronomy 23:21, Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, Deuteronomy 19:21, and Leviticus 19:18.

¹⁹ Matthew 22:34-40.

Jesus distils the whole of the Old Testament down to two verses: Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. And with the citation of Leviticus 19, Jesus picks up on and endorses a purpose of the laws we have not yet considered in depth. The laws (especially the so-called *civil* laws) functioned to keep society at peace. This function of keeping God's people at peace with one another is summarized as 'love your neighbour as yourself.' Indeed, Jesus's summary of the law and prophets beautifully mirrors the major poetically parallel theme of Leviticus we already identified: 'God is holy, his people must be holy' and 'love God, love neighbour.' But even if Jesus did not intend this imitative parallelism, he certainly understood the Old Testament laws (including these Levitical laws) as serving the community of God's people. Unlike much of contemporary Christianity, there was and remains (with Jesus) a corporate aspect to the living out of faith in practical worship and holiness. It is a set of requirements for the community and for the good of the community.

CONCLUSION

With the holiness code of Leviticus now somewhat explored, we bring this study to a close. Hopefully we have seen that Leviticus not only holds a central place in the Pentateuch, but a rather important place in the sacrificial and legal systems as presented in the Old Testament – both literarily and theologically. And so, while it is easy to dismiss it as antiquated or write it off as intolerant, its clear significance should give us pause. Hopefully we have also seen that the seemingly obsolete sacrificial system and ritual laws are, in fact, inform on our corporate worship today. And likewise, hopefully we have seen that the restrictive laws of Leviticus have enduring theological value for our worship in how we live towards God – our holiness – as understood through Christ's fulfilment of the laws. So, let us seek to be holy as he is holy. Let us love one another as we love ourselves or, in Jesus's words: let us 'love one another as he has loved us.'²⁰ Let us meditate on how Christ has fulfilled the sacrificial system once and for all, shedding his blood as a lamb on the altar, that we may be found sinless by God. And let us come to God in worship, with humble minds and thankful hearts.

O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
For he is our God.²¹

²⁰ See Jesus's *New Commandment* in John 13:33-35.

²¹ Psalm 95:6-7a.

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