

January 23, 2022

“An Introduction to Leviticus”  
Leviticus 1:1-2; 27:34

FCF: The need for a greater view of Jesus

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) The Lord has given us the Scriptures as an integrated gift.  
(magnet) We need to read it with that in mind.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Years ago, I was on the Leadership Development Committee of one of our presbyteries. The job of this particular committee was to be the gatekeeper as men came into the presbytery as pastors, assessing not only the state of their theological convictions but their hearts. With that in mind, I remember the question being pointedly asked of one man, “What will keep you out of the bed of another man’s wife?” That got the guy’s attention. The answer? “Treasuring your own.”

I say this to serve as an analogy for the church as a whole. “What will keep us mindful of our mission, committed to our calling, and attentive to first things?” The answer? “A devotion to Jesus and a high view of His finished work.” Which brings us to our new series - Leviticus.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [Leviticus 1:1-2; 27:34](#)

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

As a kid, I enjoyed restaurant buffets, especially when my parents made the mistake of letting me go through the line on my own. It wasn’t often, I can assure you, for they knew me all too well. They knew that I would pick what I wanted and my personal preferences would then rule the plate. No squash! Which, of course, is fine for the occasional meal. But you don’t want to make a habit of it. For we need balance in our diet, a bit of maturity accompanying our meals.

The same applies to spiritual nutrition. For our soul’s sake, we can’t afford to approach this buffet style - not in our beliefs or in our approach to the Bible. Shallow personal preferences mean we will opt only for what’s easiest and most comfortable. We will not grow, mature, or be challenged and stretched in the ways we need to be. Our greater need is balance. Which is exactly what we have in the sixty-six books of the Bible. For the Lord has given us the Scriptures as an integrated gift - united and unified, an interrelated whole. The Lord has given us the Scriptures as an integrated gift. We need to read it with that in mind. Including Leviticus.

This morning we’re just doing something of an introduction to the book as a whole, setting the table for what’s coming over the next several weeks as we hit the major high points of this much needed but neglected book. So we’re going to consider three simple points. First, the value of Leviticus. Second, the question of Leviticus. And then, third, the gospel in Leviticus.

**I. THE VALUE OF LEVITICUS**

First, the value of Leviticus. What makes this book so hard? Why is it the butt of all the jokes when we talk about reading through the Bible? Why so hard? And why should we bother?

*A) Struggles with Reading Leviticus*

Let’s face, name, and consider the common struggles we have with reading Leviticus.

### 1. Literary genre

First, the literary genre. Leviticus is almost entirely made up of laws and commands. There is very little narrative. Which, frankly, makes it hard to enjoy, to sit for long stretches and take in.

### 2. Cultural distance

The cultural distance. It was written 3,500 years ago to a people wandering in the wilderness on the outskirts of Canaan. It's concerned with purity and impurity, animal sacrifices of all kinds. The only animals we might see here would be a service dog. Candles at Advent push our limits.

### 3. Focus on ritual

The focus on ritual. We are suspicious of such an emphasis. It's tied to dead religion in a culture interested in spirituality. We have rituals (weddings and funerals) but it still makes us nervous.

### 4. Other

Other reasons Leviticus is a struggle. Many of the commands and penalties seem odd if not just offensive to us. And we can't see how it's tied to the larger narrative and the work of Jesus.

### *B) Reasons for Reading Leviticus*

So those are our struggles with Leviticus. Which takes us to some reasons for reading it.

#### 1. General

Broadly speaking, there are three and I mentioned these in our recent newsletter. The psalms speak of a love for the Law, including this book. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus says that all the Scriptures are about Him, including this book. Then there's the larger purpose for the Scriptures we read of 2 Timothy 3, including this book. So a mark of maturity is hardly a dismissive stance.

#### 2. Specific

So those are general reasons. A specific reason could be given in a summary from Jay Sklar, professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary. He puts it this way ([READ](#)):

(Leviticus is about) a holy God living in the midst of a sinful impure people, making a way for them to be in relationship with himself and reflect his kingdom and character and glory into the world.

Note the relational and missional elements - present not only in New Testament but also the Old.

Struggles but also reasons for reading Leviticus - this tells us something of its value.

### *Application:*

Let me make one point before we move on. There are a lot of straw man arguments out there intent on mocking and belittling the Christian faith that are tied to a poor and shallow view of this book. The formula is simple. "It's so ridiculous. So the whole thing must be worthless." But what if it's ridiculous only because it's misunderstood? What does that do to the formula?

God has given us the Bible as an integrated gift. May we read it all with that in mind.

## **II. THE QUESTION OF LEVITICUS**

That brings us to the question of Leviticus, the point it raises that we all need to consider.

### *A) The Big Picture*

This begins with seeing the big picture, the historical context of these events.

## 1. Out of Egypt

Israel had been enslaved in Egypt for 400 years. The people cried out to the Lord for deliverance and He raised up Moses who then led them out. That's the history found in the book of Exodus.

## 2. Stopping at Sinai

Along the way, they stop at Mt. Sinai. The Lord enters into a covenant relationship with them as His people. He gives them the Ten Commandments. "This is how you are to live in response to my love." He also gives them the plans for the Tabernacle. "I will be your God. You will be my people. And I will dwell with you and live in your midst." And then ([READ Exodus 40:34-38](#)).

### *B) The Great Dilemma*

That big picture brings us to the great dilemma. And it is a dilemma of the worst sorts.

#### 1. Their history

Consider what we know of this people, their history thus far. They have been complaining all along the way, whining and pining for how things were, even falling into the crass worship of a golden calf. This is not the A-Team. These were folks as messy and hard of heart as any of us.

#### 2. The problem

Which brings us to the problem. How can such a God live with such a people? The distance between his holiness and our sinfulness is infinite. How then can this be? God gives an answer. And it's the book of Leviticus. There He shows how He will deal with our sin. And there He shows what it means to live in relationship with Him. Leviticus is the answer to the question.

Again, this is the greatest question that could be asked. And we're all asking it.

#### *Illustration:*

Many of us know what it is to have problems with neighbors - barking dogs, ugly lawns, loud parties. They are causing problems. But what if God moves into the neighborhood? Now the problem is with us. How do we live when God is living next door, when He is our neighbor?

#### *Application:*

Leviticus touches on the greatest question we could ask. What is our purpose? What is life to be about? Are we part of a greater story? What is the hope for human flourishing? And how can we as sinful people live in relationship with our holy Creator? That's quite a question!

God has given us the Bible as an integrated gift. And Leviticus is part of that.

### **III. THE GOSPEL IN LEVITICUS**

So we have the value and the question of Leviticus. Let's look at the gospel in Leviticus. Augustine wrote ([READ](#)), "The new is in the old concealed; the old is in the new revealed."

#### *A) The Bad News*

The gospel is in the Old and the New - both the bad news and the good. First, the bad.

##### 1. God's holiness

We begin with God's character, His holiness. This is clearly set forth in Leviticus - the worship and offerings, laws on purity and impurity, the priests and sacrifices ([READ Leviticus 11:44a](#)).

## 2. Our sinfulness

Our sinfulness collides with His holiness. That is made clear in the emphasis on ritual status, the treatments for skin diseases, the consequences for illicit sexual and spiritual practices, judgment upon unfaithful priests, and the strong warnings given to abide by these laws and commands.

### *B) The Good News*

That's the bad news. But then there's the good news. And this comes out clearly as well.

#### 1. Forgiveness and repentance

The Lord has made a way for forgiveness and repentance. He has provided sacrifices meant to point towards this - the purification offering, the grain offering. We'll look into all this later.

#### 2. Atonement and mission

There is hope of atonement. Think of the burnt offering and the Day of Atonement ([READ Leviticus 16:29-31; 17:11](#)). Atonement and then life's mission ([READ Leviticus 19:1-2, 37](#)).

All these themes are present, laying a foundation for what, how, and who was to come.

### *Application:*

What a gift we have in this book. What a demonstration of the kindness of God to us, the provision of God for us, the longing of God for us. He wants us to know - not only the facts of what we find but Himself. He wants His people to know Him. Look at the lengths He has gone.

Do you know this is how He sees you? I know it's hard to believe at times. Especially if we stare too long at how others have treated us - the disappointment, the hurt, the abandonment, the betrayal. But He will surely never leave or forsake us. And He is the one place we have to go when others do. How do we know this? We see His care for us written on every page.

God has given us the Bible as an integrated gift. May we read it all with that in mind.

## **CONCLUSION:**

As we begin to move into this series, let me say two things. First, we need to be prepared to be challenged. And second, coupled with that, we need to enter into this with an open mind. Some of you may be familiar with the book and movies, *The Stepford Wives*. It's something of a dark comedy. The original plot centers on Joanna Eberhart, a photographer, wife, and young mother who suspects the submissive housewives in her new idyllic neighborhood may be robots created by their husbands. Tim Keller taps into this Stepford storyline in talking about God's authority and our need to not be so quick to assert and insist on our own perspective ([READ](#)):

If you don't trust the Bible enough to let it challenge and correct your thinking, how could you ever have a personal relationship with God? In any truly personal relationship, the other person has to be able to contradict you. For example, if a wife is not allowed to contradict her husband, they won't have an intimate relationship. Remember the *Stepford Wives* movies? The husbands of Stepford, Connecticut, decide to have their wives turned into robots who never cross the wills of their husbands. A Stepford wife was wonderfully compliant and beautiful, but no one would describe such a marriage as intimate or

personal. Now, what happens, if you eliminate anything from the Bible that offends your sensibility and crosses your will? If you pick and choose what you want to believe and reject the rest, how will you ever have a God who can contradict you? You won't! You'll have a Stepford God! A God, essentially, of your own making, and not a God with whom you can have a relationship and genuine interaction. Only if your God can say things that outrage you and make you struggle (as in a real friendship or marriage!) will you know that you have gotten hold of a real God and not a figment of your imagination. So an authoritative Bible is not the enemy of a personal relationship with God. It is the precondition for it.

Surely, none of us would say we could actually want such a thing as a Stepford God. Right?

But that requires an open mind and a willingness to be challenged. The Lord has given us the Scriptures as an integrated gift. We need to read it with that in mind - including Leviticus.

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