

Course Study Guide

OT216 *Genesis-Leviticus: God Builds A People For Himself*

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Updated 2014



Our Daily Bread
Christian University

Lesson 1 Study Guide

OT216 *Genesis-Leviticus: God Builds A People For Himself*

Genesis: Book of Beginnings

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Objectives

In this lesson you will study the story of creation, the introduction of sin into God's creation, and the plan God designed to build a community of people to love and serve Him.

When you complete this lesson, "Genesis: Book of Beginnings," you should be able to:

- Describe how Genesis addresses the question of creation.
- Explain the origin of human sin and its destructive consequences.
- Appreciate God's commitment to saving humanity from sin's destruction.
- Describe how God used Abraham and Sarah to shape the course of world history.
- Trace the development of Abraham's family from its origin to its foundation for Israel's twelve tribes.

Scripture Reading

Read Genesis.

Transcript

Course Title: Genesis-Leviticus: God Builds a People for Himself

Lesson One: Genesis: The Book of Beginnings

I. Introduction

Our course starts with Genesis. The word “genesis” means “beginnings,” which comes from the Greek title for the book. This is a story about beginnings. Moses is the writer of the book, and he has organized the book in a very careful way. It starts first with what we call the prologue, the story that many of us think of as the beginning of the Creation story—on the first day this, on the second day that, and so on—the story of how God created the world that we know, starting with light and ending up with human beings and their important role in taking care of this world.

Then there follows ten sections. When you read through Genesis you might not at first notice how these ten sections are labeled, but they are there. They indicate how Moses thought of the stories that make up the book of Genesis. We will talk about those ten sections. They come under the category of what is translated in some Bibles as “generations,” in other Bibles as “origins,” or in other Bibles as “lineage.”

II. Prologue: Story of Creation (1:1-2:4a)

A. Day One and Day Four

When we begin looking at the book of Genesis we observe that there is an overview. The overview starts with the very first words, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” And it ends in chapter 2 with the simple words in verse 3 of that chapter; it just says, “He rested from all the work of creating that He had done.”

What is in this overview? There is a pattern that Moses has organized this material in. If you look at your Bible where it says day one, it says that on that day God created light, “Let there be light.” If you will skip down to where the description of what was created on day four, you will find that the verses devoted to day four describe the creation of the sun and the moon and the stars. In other words, light was created on the first day and then the things that give light from our point of view on the fourth day—the sun, moon, and stars.

B. Day Two and Day Five

Look what was created on the second day: the sky and the seas. That is what the firmament language refers to in some of the translations: a space or barrier between all kinds of atmospheric water—and the waters that cover the sea, what we call the sky and the sea. This corresponds to what gets created on day five. On day five is the creation of the fish, all

creatures that live in the sea, and then birds—in other words, the sky and the sea animals. So again, there is a correspondence.

C. Day Three and Day Six

Then finally, we start with day three on which was created dry land and plant life. We observe that it corresponds to day six, because on day six we have the description of the land animals eating those plants. Of course, the last of the land animals is human; we are at the end of the story. This is kind of interesting because it might well be that if a human had thought this up, as many humans did many creation stories in our world, the human might have said, “Well, I will put man at the beginning of the story. Men and women will be created first, not last.”

But, God did it in the manner that much of science suggests and that Scripture makes very clear, progressing to a recent point in the whole story, from the whole big picture, where human beings are at the end of the entire process. This is quite interesting in terms of modern genetic study, where geneticists are fairly well-united in concluding that the people that we call human beings, that is, modern man, was created very recently. All human beings come from one woman many thousands of years ago, but certainly not anywhere near as old as the creation of many other forms of life.

D. Day Seven

It is also important even before we get to our description of the seventh day, which ends this account, to mention the fact that “day” is used here in a somewhat specialized way. Note that these days appear to be chunks of time. The Bible can use “day” that way. It does structure the story with evening and morning, day one; and evening and morning, day two; and so on. But, it does that in correspondence to the usual normal system that the Israelites favor—thinking of the day as beginning with the conclusion of the prior day so that as the sun sets, at twilight the new day is beginning. This then becomes a framework for understanding the seventh day.

E. God Rested

We read that on the seventh day God had finished the work that He had been doing. And so on the seventh day, He rested from all His work and blessed the seventh day and made it holy. In other words, this story has been told not just to give an overview of the entire creation of things right through our own creation, but also to set the scene for a teaching about the Sabbath.

God Himself rested on the seventh day. Did He need to? Of course not. He is the last person who would need to rest, but He did it as an example for us. The story is told in such a way as to not merely give coverage to the general sense of things, but also provides the first kind of instruction about how humans are to behave. Human beings need rest. They need sleep at night and they need a day off once a week. God has ordained that it should be so. And if we believe the Bible, then we ought to be following it as one of the procedures that God has revealed to us.

III. Origin Stories of the Heavens and the Earth (2:4-4:26)

After the material that goes from 1:1 to 2:4, we start with the so-called “generations,” or “origin stories,” or as one of the versions calls it, just “the account.” This is the account of the heavens and the earth, when they were created. There are ten of these: this is the account, this is the origin story, or this is the genealogy of. We are going to look at each of these ten divisions very briefly.

A. Garden of Eden

The first one is called the account of the heavens and the earth. This includes the story of the Garden of Eden and also of the first family. It goes to the end of chapter 4. The story of the Garden of Eden very obviously to any reader refocuses the way that the Creation story is told. The concern is not to give you a full picture of everything that happened, but to concentrate on humans and their relationship to God. Here is where Adam and Eve come in and where we read about the garden into which God placed them. A beautiful place. Everything was provided for them, but with one big prohibition: “Don’t eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”

B. Good and Evil

Why would God do that? Isn’t that the tree that He should have said, “. . . be sure to eat”? Does He not want them to know good and evil? Isn’t the difference between good and evil an ideal for people to have? Isn’t that exactly the tree that God would send them to eat first? Now the answer comes in the meaning of the phrase “good and evil” in Hebrew. It has a little bit different sense. It is intended to be what is called in language study a “merism.” A merism is a category of speech in which totality is expressed by polarity. So if you want to indicate the totality of something you might say, “It is as big as the east is from the west.” Or if you want to say God is everywhere you can say, “He is in the highest heaven or in the lowest hell.” So “good and evil” means everything.

What God is forbidding is that human beings should know everything. And of course, that is exactly what Satan tries to get them to know. He says, “Hey, if you eat from that tree you will be like God (or like the gods).” It can be translated either way. In other words, he tempts Adam and Eve to want to know everything.

C. The Fall

Adam and Eve do eat of that tree eventually, and there comes the fall from God’s grace and the entrance of sin into this world. Sin is disobedience of what God wants done. They really do get a knowledge of everything, not of course all knowledge, but knowledge of everything in the sense that human beings are characterized by knowing more than they can handle. This is the dilemma in which every human being lives. We know more than we can handle. We have the ability with our knowledge to do good things or horrible, evil things. The same skill that can create some kind of machine to do good can create some kind of machine to kill. The

same ability to speak so as to encourage people is used so as to hurt them. The same interest level that gets us into art and creativity can get us into pornography and all kinds of other debauchery. We have more knowledge than we know how to handle.

D. You Will Surely Die

The other part of the prohibition says, “. . . for when you will eat of it, you will surely die,” means that human beings after the Fall live with mortality. And an awareness of that mortality. We live in a condition knowing that we are headed for death, and we have got to have some means to escape from death if we are going to continue in our relationship with God. In other words, the story points the way for the need for a Savior who can rescue from death—sin and death—sin producing more knowledge than we can handle and also mortality. This is the human condition described in that first origin story.

IV. Origin Stories of the Family of Adam (5:1-6:8)

Then in chapters 5, 6, and part of 7, we have the stories about Adam. These are called origin stories of Adam but go on to talk about Cain and Abel and what they do. It is noteworthy that they carry on the sin that Adam and Eve started. Cain kills Abel in jealousy. He kills him because his attitude toward worship was wrong. God did not accept it but did accept Abel’s attitude toward worship. And from the beginning we see the sinfulness of the Garden of Eden manifest, carried on, through the lineage of the children.

V. Origin Stories of Noah (6:9-9:29)

A. Noah

Then as time goes by, we come to the origin stories of Noah in chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9. These stories bring us to an account of how the earth had become largely inhabited, a lot more than it was in the very beginning in the Garden of Eden. We find, among all of the people living on the earth at that time, one righteous individual and his family. Imagine you have all this population, and people are doing things, and there is the beginning of technology and commerce as described in some of these chapters. And yet, God finds the wickedness of the earth so great that He determines to eliminate almost all its people. However, there is one man who is good and that is Noah.

Noah has always reminded people of the need to live righteously no matter what everybody else is doing. Noah is a character that many of us may have to identify with when it seems like our culture and the people we know are headed in directions other than pleasing God. Noah reminds us that one lone individual makes a difference, one lone person and his family can take a stand and please God.

B. The Flood

The Flood is the means that God chose to eliminate all but that first group: Noah and his wife and his three sons and their wives. Noah, by means of a huge boat-like box, preserved animal life and human life. Naturally, the fish did not have to be preserved, birds will do fine, and vegetation grows back rather easily. Yet, it is a story that is one of real faith—faith of a man who is the new representative of life on the earth, a man from whom the rest of us are descended. Noah's job was to please God by being faithful. He does this up until the time of the Flood, yet we should not think that because the Flood occurred, eliminating all those bad people, that humanity is then going to be just fine; everybody is going to be good because they are all descended from a good guy and his good family.

C. After the Flood

Noah, after the flood, gets drunk and his son Ham in some way debauches him. Though it is not exactly clear what that story means in every way, the fact that it says he saw his father's nakedness usually indicates something sexual. So human beings are back on the track of sinning and displeasing God. Again, the need for a Savior who can rescue from sin is evident in these stories.

VI. Origin Stories of Shem, Ham, Japheth (10:1-11:9)

In chapters 10 and 11, we find the origin stories of Shem, Ham, and Japheth. We get a feel for the way that the nations of the world are becoming increasingly pagan and working away from God, and in that section of the book we have the story of the Tower of Babel, a story of people getting together to do their best to see if they can get up to heaven by building a tower to reach it. It seems to us a bit funny, but that is because in our age we know that by getting up somewhere high you do not automatically get to heaven. But for these people living on a plain the thought that you might somehow be able to do it, get up in the clouds and see the gods and live among them, was an idea that fascinated them and they tried it. There was no real threat to God in this, but there was a need to keep people from doing that. God in His grace did confuse the languages of the earth. God actually separated us one from another by linguistic barriers as one means of suppressing that kind of tendency, as foolish as it was and as it ought to be seen.

VII. Origin Stories of Shem (11:10-26)

When you move on from there, you come to a very short section in chapter 11 called the origin stories of Shem, just focusing on his lineage compared to those of his brothers. It is that lineage from which will come then the people involved in the next group of stories that start with the end of chapter 11 and goes all the way to chapter 25.

VIII. Origin Stories of Terah (11:27-25:11)

These are called the origin stories, accounts, or genealogies of Terah. Now Terah is not a big character in the book, but he starts something because he is the father of Abraham. It is

interesting to note in chapters 1-11 the whole history of the world as we know it, from its very origins down to about 2000 B.C., is covered. And then, it is as if the Bible story slows down, almost comes to a screeching halt, and goes in a more normal pace. We actually have more chapters devoted to the story of Abraham than we have to the whole history of our universe up until Abraham.

A. Abraham

Moses has designed this as God had inspired him, to give a rapid coverage with a certain sampling of the material and to really start the story with Abraham. The story of God's people begins with Abraham and, because it goes from chapters 11-25, it actually covers more space than everything prior to that point. Abraham is a crucial figure. He is very important to the story, the story of the Bible, the story of Genesis as Moses has written it. The story especially concentrates in the early chapters on his call. Abraham is a person who responds to God and in that way is an example for every generation thereafter. God called him and he responded. Paul reminds us in the New Testament that Abraham believed God or trusted God, and that was what was accounted to him as righteousness.

B. Abraham's Faith

Was Abraham a perfect individual? Certainly not. Even though God had made His covenant with him in chapter 12 and given him promises in 12, 13, 15, and 17, Abraham was also a person whose faith wavered. He had strong faith, but, like all of us, his faith wavered. In chapter 12 and in chapter 20 we read about him being afraid when he is in a foreign land. Afraid maybe he will get into trouble because of his attractive wife, and maybe they will kill him and take her, so he lies about her and alleges that she is his sister. You can see his son, Isaac, did the same thing in Genesis 26. Nervous about what they will do to him because of his wife, Rebecca, he figures "well, if it worked for my dad twice, maybe it will work for me once." These patriarchs, as we call them, were able people. They were powerful, they were strong in their determination, and they were strong in their faith. But their faith was not perfect. Like us, they were a mixture of faith and lack of faith.

IX. Origin Stories of Ishmael (25:12-18)

After that we have in chapter 25 a very brief account of the story of Ishmael. He is the father, as it were, of the Arabs. And we should remember that from Abraham came not only the Jews but also the Arab nations.

X. Origin Stories of Isaac (25:19-35:29)

Then we come to the stories of Isaac in chapters 25-35, which include stories about Jacob. There are interesting accounts of Jacob's travels, of his relationship to God, of his relationship to twelve sons—those we call the sons of "Israel" as his name was changed to, and thus the Israelites.

XI. Origin Stories of Esau (36:1-37:1)

This leads then to a brief account in chapter 36 of the origins of Esau. Jacob's brother Esau is the father of the Edomites. This again is another little instance in the book of Genesis, concern is shown not just for the Israelites but also for other people—Moses has paid attention to the Arabs and the Edomites, because God is a God of all peoples. Even in these ways the book of Genesis begins pointing us in the Bible story toward God's plan for all the world, not just for one particular people.

XII. Origin Stories of Jacob with Special Reference to Joseph (37:2-50:26)

It is true God is going to work through one people, and He is especially going to do that in the remaining chapters of the book, starting in chapter 37 and going right to the end, chapter 50, with the stories of Joseph. Joseph is the key figure and the key statement is "God was with Joseph." He first was sold as a slave, then rose first in family service as a household servant. By God's grace, Joseph moved to civil service, finally coming into the position of being, in effect, the prime minister of Egypt. Joseph represents God's protection, benefit, provision, care, and the outworking of everything that started in the beginning of the book of Genesis.

God has a people. Now they are going to be cared for, protected, and placed in a situation where they can grow to be a huge nation. At the end of the book of Genesis we see thousands upon thousands of Israelites ready to go in a story that the book of Exodus will tell us about.

Discussion Questions

What does the book of Genesis reveal about human nature?

What does the book of Genesis reveal about God's Nature?

What does the book of Genesis tell us about creation?

Further Study

Suggested reading for this lesson:

Stedman, Ray C. *Adventuring Through the Bible: A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible*.

Discovery House Publishers: 1997.

Read Chapter 5: “The Story of Faith Begins” (Genesis)

Glossary

Covenant — (Hebrew, *berit*) In biblical use, a covenant differed from a contract in two ways. First, a covenant had no termination date, whereas a contract always did. Second, a covenant applied to the whole of a person, whereas a contract involved only a part, especially a skill, possessed by a person.

Merism — A literary device that appears in both prose and poetry. Merism occurs when a writer mentions the extremes of some category in order to portray it as a totality, e.g., those opposites and everything in between them. One common form of merism is the use of polar word pairs in a single phrase; e.g., from the least of them to the greatest (Jer 31:34b). “Good and evil” is a merism meaning “everything” (Ge 2:17).

Palestine — The land of Palestine took its name from the Philistines (the *Pelishtim* in Hebrew) who settled along the Mediterranean Coast from Joppa to Gaza about 1300 - 1200 B. C. The land area measures approximately 150 miles from Dan to Beersheba (north-south) and 100 miles from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River (east-west) or roughly the size of New Jersey.

Pentateuch — A name derived from Greek for the first five books of the Old Testament. It is the first of three divisions of the Jewish Scriptures and is also called the Law or the Torah or the Books of Moses.

Toledot — (Hebrew “generations,” “story,” “history,” “developments”) - It is derived from the verb “give birth.” A narrative section introduced by a toledot formula typically elaborates the outgrowth of the specified figure.

Torah — (Hebrew, “instruction,” “law,” “The law”) - Torah basically means “teaching,” whether it is the wise woman instructing her son or God instructing Israel. Through the law, God showed His interest in all aspects of human life, which is to be lived under His direction and care. Torah, defined as “law,” refers to the first five books of the Old Testament (Pentateuch); but more broadly it may refer to the whole Old Testament.

Yom — (Hebrew “day,” “time,” “year”) - It can denote: (a) the period of light (as contrasted with the period of darkness), (b) the period of 24 hours, (c) a general vague “time,” (d) a point of time, (e) a year.

Quiz

1. According to Dr. Stuart, chapters 1-11 of Genesis cover human history from:
 - A. Its origins to about 3000 B.C.
 - B. Its origins to about 2000 B.C.
 - C. Its origins to about 1000 B.C.
 - D. About 4000 to 2000 B.C.
2. Dr. Stuart states that the author of the book of Genesis is:
 - A. Abraham
 - B. Moses
 - C. Ezra
 - D. None of the above
3. Genesis is often called a book of:
 - A. Beginnings
 - B. Endings
 - C. Prophecy
 - D. Wisdom
4. Palestine took its name from the:
 - A. Canaanites who lived in the central portion of the area
 - B. Philistines who settled along the Mediterranean Coast
 - C. Israelites who settled in the hill country after their exodus from Egypt
 - D. None of the above
5. The accounts of these two individuals show that God is a God of all peoples:
 - A. Jacob and Esau
 - B. Isaac and Ishmael
 - C. Esau and Ishmael
 - D. Noah and Abraham
6. The book of Genesis switches to focusing on the story of God's people with the account of:
 - A. The Flood
 - B. The Tower of Babel
 - C. Abraham
 - D. Jacob
7. The Hebrew word "yom" found in the creation account can denote:
 - A. The period of light (in contrast to the period of darkness)
 - B. A period of 24 hours
 - C. General, vague "time"
 - D. All of the above

8. Which character in Genesis has always reminded people of the need to live righteously no matter what everybody else is doing?
 - A. Noah
 - B. Abraham
 - C. Jacob
 - D. Joseph
9. Whose name was changed to Israel?
 - A. Abraham
 - B. Isaac
 - C. Jacob
 - D. Joseph
10. Why did God prohibit Adam and Eve from eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil?
 - A. He didn't want them to know good and evil.
 - B. He didn't want them to know everything.
 - C. He didn't want them to be wise.
 - D. He wanted to test them.

Answers: 1. B 2. B 3. A 4. B 5. C 6. C 7. D 8. A 9. C 10. B

Lesson 2 Study Guide

OT216 *Genesis-Leviticus: God Builds A People For Himself*

Exodus: A Nation is Born

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Objectives

This lesson focuses on how God delivered Abraham's family from slavery and established them as His covenant nation—a people through whom He would minister to the world. Exodus demonstrates God's loyal love in protecting His new nation from their own rebellion.

When you complete this lesson, "Exodus: A Nation is Born," you should be able to:

- Describe how God used Moses to accomplish an impossible task.
- Explain how and why Israel became God's chosen nation.
- Explain how God made a sacred covenant with His people.
- Understand the crucial roles of obedience and worship in a person's life.

Scripture Reading

Read Exodus.

Transcript

Course Title: Genesis-Leviticus: God Builds a People for Himself

Lesson Two: Exodus: A Nation is Born

I. Introduction

Exodus is the story of getting out of Egypt on the part of the Israelites, but also becoming a people united under God's covenant. Those are the two big themes. The first part of the book, up through chapter 19, is the story of God's deliverance, taking people who had grown into a huge nation with a very substantial population as a big ethnic group within Egypt and delivering them from Egypt by miraculous means and bringing them to, of all places, a very isolated mountain in the Sinai Peninsula wilderness. Then at that mountain, where they continue right through the end of the book of Exodus, they begin to learn what it is to be God's people, because He gives them His covenant. We will talk about two things—the Exodus and about covenant when we talk about the book of Exodus, the leaving of Egypt and the uniting as a people under God's law in connection with this book.

II. The Growth and Oppression of the Israelites in Egypt (1:1-2:25)

The book opens with a story about how the Israelites had grown enormously but also become progressively oppressed as a people in Egypt.

A. Growth of the Israelites

For a long time, the lineage of pharaohs that Joseph was familiar with and had worked for was prominent. During that time the Israelites enjoyed a very nice status in Egypt. They were foreigners, resident aliens, but they were protected and benefited by the government. Then there came a time when that particular group of pharaohs, that dynasty, was out of favor and a new group was in, and the "pharaoh who knew not Joseph" began to realize that a very large group of foreigners was living in his midst. Pharaoh was afraid that a group like this might well join with the enemies of the Egyptians if there was war.

B. Egyptian Oppression

Egyptians were a very xenophobic people—they were a people who tended to be extremely afraid of outsiders and particularly nervous about those that came from Asia. This is part of the background of the story. The Egyptian people went along with the pharaoh in feeling that the best way to handle the situation was to oppress and suppress the Israelites, because they were basically Asians. These were people from Asia Minor as opposed to North Africa, which Egypt was part of.

III. God's Miraculous Deliverance of Israel from Egypt via Moses (3:1-15:21)

A. Moses' Birth and Call

Along comes Moses. The stories about his birth are interesting, how God protected him and caused it to be possible for him to grow up as a person who was sort of adopted as the son of one of the daughters of the pharaoh. He was kind of a princeling in Egypt. Thus Moses knew Egypt from the point of view of the Israelites, who by this time were slaves, and also from the point of view of the Egyptians, their overlords.

God called Moses in an unusual way. Moses ended up having to flee Egypt because, in anger over the way that Israelites were being mistreated, he killed an Egyptian. He was an outlaw. From age 40 to age 80, he lived in the Sinai wilderness. He married there; he was a shepherd. Then at age 80, God called him to go back to Egypt to link up with his older brother, Aaron, and to lead the Israelites out of the nation. This was no easy task. Egypt was a great superpower. It was the most powerful nation of that time.

B. Ten Plagues

God made sure that the process would work by a series of ten plagues. These plagues dominate the first part of the book. The story starts with some very simple plagues, plagues like frogs and flies and blood, and so on. We might say these things were kind of annoying for a time, but eventually went away and did not bother the Egyptians. Then it builds with plagues that get worse: plagues like hail and locusts, things that can really devastate the agricultural economy, as any economy in those days was. The plagues progressed until one comes to the tenth plague in which God actually kills the firstborn son in any family that did not have the protection of blood.

C. Preparation of the Israelites

What Moses tells the people, as God tells it to him, is that they must involve themselves in a very careful ceremony. To get out of Egypt, without this horrible destruction that God is going to bring as a punishment on that nation that had enslaved them and so cruelly treated them, they were going to have to have the protection of blood on their houses by sacrificing a lamb or a goat and taking some of that blood and smearing it around the doors of their houses. Here is an early instance of the protection of blood, of the need for God to see blood.

The writer of Hebrews comments on this and says that this is the sort of thing that had to be done. The writer of Hebrews says there is practically no case where you can have atonement for sins without the shedding of blood. So the Israelites begin to learn about the way that God will protect them by the shedding of blood. From our perspective, we can realize this points to Christ's shedding of blood. All sacrifices do that; they eventually lead to Christ. They prime the people for an awareness of Christ's sacrifice, which is the central sacrifice, the pinnacle of the whole idea of substitutionary sacrifice in the Bible.

D. Good-bye Egypt

With the tenth plague, the pharaoh has obviously had enough. Some of his advisors and some of the people had been urging him to let the Israelites go by earlier plagues, but he sends them forth. They leave quickly and they move quickly, because just after the pharaoh gives them this indication, as God knew he would, the pharaoh changes his mind and sends troops after them. We read in chapters 13 and 14 about the troops chasing the Israelites and how the Israelites were protected by God during that time. God gave them the protection of a pillar of cloud that was a protection of shade and also guidance for them in the daytime. That pillar turned to a glowing fire at night, which gave them light and also protection during the evening. Following the pillar, the Israelites moved to one end of the Red Sea. What were they going to do? Behind them were the pharaoh's troops (read about this in chapters 14 and 15). In front of them was the water; they were trapped, so it would seem.

E. Crossing of the Red Sea

Then came an event that is noted in the Bible as one of the great miracles. Every miracle is special, and if the miracle involves you or me, the miracle is special to you or me; but this was a miracle of deliverance that the prophets of Israel would look back upon and mention many times, a miracle of deliverance that people identified with, as creating them as a nation. Indeed when Moses sings the musical poem that we find in chapter 15, he speaks about the people "You oh God created," bringing them over and through the water. God allowed Moses to have the sign that would part the waves: just holding out his hands with his staff in them and the waters of the Red Sea separating, and the Israelites heading right into it on dry land, coming across part of it to the other side. The Egyptians rushed in after them in their excellent chariots and their horsemen and their horses and their troops as well; and the whole army drowned as the waters then rolled back over the pursuers.

IV. On the Way to Mount Sinai (15:22-18:27)

We have, by chapter 15 of the book of Exodus, a people who were a gang of slaves; who did not have any particular military prowess to deliver themselves with; who have left the only land any of them has ever lived in except for Moses; and who were now out of Egypt. They have been protected from a powerful pursuing army and they are heading to a mountain in the wilderness of Sinai. By chapter 19, they get to that mountain. They have had some hardships in between. There has been some grumbling on the part of the people, and they have shown themselves to be just what you might expect a huge crowd of thousands upon thousands of people to be like. To have in them some people of faith, and some people of doubt, and some people who, once the hardships of travel in the wilderness come to their attention as they obviously did on those sore feet and dry mouths, tend to wonder if they made the right decision, and so on.

V. Receiving of the Law (19:1-24:11)

A. Presence of God

By chapter 19, various dangers having been passed, they are now at a place called Sinai, and there they are told to encamp. God gives them an interesting warning; His warning is they must not go up the mountain. They have come to this mountain as a place where God tells them to camp so they will encounter Him, but they cannot go up the mountain themselves lest they die. Moses only can be accepted. Why is that?

The answer is something that the Bible tells us about in many different ways, called the notion of the presence of God. God's presence is a wonderful thing if you are righteous; but if you are not righteous, His presence is very dangerous. We live in a world where, mercifully, He is actually somewhat withdrawn from us. We are not in His very presence as we will be in heaven if we know Christ as Savior and Lord. We are more distant from God than that. If we have accepted Christ as Savior, we have God's Spirit in us; that is a presence of God that is very special. But these Israelites were far from being a righteous people. There were plenty of flaws and faults, plenty of doubters among them, and there had been episodes already of uncertainty and lack of faith. So one representative, Moses, goes up to the mountain. What does he get there? He gets laws—that is what he gets.

B. Receiving the Torah

Starting with chapter 20, we have the laws of Israel. We are out of the material that we describe as the Exodus, per se. And now with chapter 20, we are into the remaining half of the book, chapter 40, with the descriptions of laws that God gave to His people. All the laws together of the first five books of the Old Testament, the books of Moses, constitute 613 commandments. That is a lot of commandments. But even so, it is important to understand that that does not cover everything. In other words, there is a distinction between the kinds of laws that you find in the Old Testament and the way that we think of modern law as functioning.

In modern law, there is an attempt to be exhaustive, to be complete. You make a law for everything that you want to prohibit, and thus modern societies have thousands upon thousands of laws. There are federal laws, state laws, and local laws in a country like the United States adding into the thousands and tens of thousands, depending on where one lives. But ancient Israel had only 613. That is because people viewed laws in ancient times as paradigms—that is, models—rather than as technical statements of pure prohibition or injunction of action. In modern times, a criminal can get off sometimes in a court case by noting that the law does not quite cover his situation—in other words, getting off on a technicality (you could not do that in Bible times). Sure there might be a law about what to do if your ox gores somebody else's sheep, but it does not happen to mention what to do if your goat gores somebody else's sheep. This did not bother anybody in Old Testament times; they extrapolated from the laws they did have. They understood that the laws were indications of the kind of behavior and they followed from those indications to any other particular circumstances. It did not have to be mentioned in the exact form of the court case for the court case to go forward.

C. Ten Commandments

That is an important thing to keep in mind because the greatest paradigms of the group are right in the Ten Commandments that begin the laws in Exodus 20. There we have these wonderful statements of principle, “. . . have no other gods before me.” That is briefly stated, but it is intended to mean that God really is the only God. Moses does not have to say to the Israelites, “What God means by this is that He is the only God.” No, you can say it that way and it covers all the implications, all the extrapolations.

“Make no graven images”—in other words, the prohibition against idolatry. This does not have to specify every kind of image, or every kind of artwork, or everything that people might worship. The point is: worshipping anything other than God, trusting in anything other than God for your salvation, for the important things of your life, is wrong.

Moving on to the statement of “keeping the Sabbath holy,” not all the details of how one does this are spelled out. In the New Testament, we see the Pharisees overdoing it by far, criticizing Jesus because of the way His disciples plucked a bit of food to be eaten from plants that they would pass. The Pharisees, having figured this out on their own how this law should be applied, take it into technical realms in which it was never intended. They legalized it; instead of seeing as Jesus did that the Sabbath was made for humans, not humans for the Sabbath.

The Ten Commandments are organized by four laws that refer to our responsibility to God, and the remaining six refer to our responsibility to others. Don’t steal, don’t give false testimony, don’t covet, and so on. We have a balance shown right away in those first ten that we also find in the other laws as well—a balance of responsibility to God and a responsibility to our neighbor. Jesus said that we can take two of the laws, neither of which is in the Ten Commandments but which are such wonderful summaries, and understand that the whole Law and the Prophets really hang on them—kind of like explanations of them. One is that wonderful statement in Deuteronomy that we are to love the Lord our God with all our strength, all our heart, mind, and soul. And the other, He says, is like it; it is parallel to it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” That is from the book of Leviticus.

Why bring in Deuteronomy and Leviticus when we are talking about Exodus? The answer is: though the Law starts in Exodus 20 and keeps going through the end of Exodus 40, it has not at all come to a conclusion. This is just the beginning. The Law is going to continue with Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy, which we will talk about further.

D. Basic Laws of the Covenant

What do we have going on in Exodus? First, we have a whole section of laws that are basic laws that the people need to know. Sometimes these laws found in chapters 20-24, for the most part, are called the “covenant code.” It is a term scholars use just to describe the fact that these laws get you going, get you started on the covenant.

What is the covenant? The covenant is a relationship. It is a contractual relationship. It is a legal relationship. It is a deal between God and His people. God promises to protect His people and benefit them, to watch over and save them. They promise, in turn, to honor Him, to keep His laws, and to do the things that He says constitute righteousness.

E. Features of the Covenant

We observe in the covenant that there is usually a preamble that just identifies who the makers of the covenant are; that is, God and Israel. Then we observe there is a prologue: the story of how the Israelites got to know God and how He rescued them from Egypt. As it were, they owed Him something, and they are His people who He has redeemed and has provided safety for.

Then we find the stipulations. Most any law code, any covenant, has stipulations. Those are the rules, the actual individual laws by which you live. There are also places where one finds what are called “document clauses.” These are prescriptions for preserving that law. Some of these are found in Exodus and other books of the Pentateuch, as well. We also find sanctions, that is, blessings and curses. God will reward those who are faithful to His law, who keep His covenant; but He will punish those who do not, because they have signed on to a covenant relationship. And if they break it, they certainly ought to be punished.

Finally, a sixth element in the covenant is witnesses. God calls heaven and earth as His witnesses—a way of saying everything is to be a witness to this. His people are to keep His law. This is of significance, because you know many ancient peoples did not have covenants. As long as they just worshiped their idols they thought they were doing fine. They could live any way they wanted. They could misuse and abuse people for their own personal profit or power. They could have ethical standards or not have ethical standards and figure they could get away with it because all the gods needed from them was worship and the bringing of their sacrifices. This was not so for the Israelites. God wanted them to be a holy people. So He gave them His law; He gave them His models for behavior, from which they had to extrapolate, out of which they could not squeeze by with technicalities.

VI. Directions for Worship and the Building of the Tabernacle (24:12-40:38)

After that material up through chapter 24 or so, called the covenant code, we begin with a lot of directions about building the tabernacle. This sure can seem kind of like dull reading. You start reading at Exodus 24 and keep reading 25, 26, and 27, and so on. It can get slow. You are reading about making this tabernacle, and about how the priests are to be dressed, and about certain ritual procedures that take place, the three annual festivals described, and how you are to come as a people to a central place of worship together, and so on.

A. Worship

We need to appreciate the fact that worship is very important to God. God’s people should be worshipers. Also, we need to appreciate the fact that there is a difference between the sacred

and the profane—something that in modern times, in our culture, has been diminished greatly. God caused His people to understand that difference. There is the profane, the common, the trivial, the everyday; but there is also the sacred. God wants to be worshiped and He wants all His people who belong to Him to be worshipers of His. He gives elaborate instructions for the building of the tabernacle, the center place for worship, where the people will gather, where the sacrifices that symbolize the need for something else to die on your behalf, where the procedures of worship will all be undertaken.

B. Building of the Tabernacle

Much of the end of the book of Exodus is devoted to describing chapter after chapter how the Israelites, in fact, made that tabernacle and did all the things that went with it, just as they had been instructed to do. You have the command for several chapters, and you have the fulfillment. The command and the fulfillment go together—not exciting reading but very important information.

C. Conclusion

As you read the book of Exodus, remember that this is instruction in holiness, this is instruction for people who need to know they belong to God, and the first thing that anybody does who belongs to God is to worship Him. In modern times, a person who says, “Well, I do believe in God and yet I don’t enjoy going to church,” is really denying the most basic responsibility of the believer: to be a worshiper of the God who has rescued you, and who saved you, and has brought you into His people.

Discussion Questions

In what ways do the stories and themes of the book of Exodus anticipate and foreshadow the New Testament and the Christian life?

How does Moses demonstrate righteousness in the book of Exodus?

Explain, in your own words, how the laws that God gave to the Israelites differ from modern law.

Further Study

Suggested reading for this lesson:

Stedman, Ray C. *Adventuring Through the Bible: A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible*.

Discovery House Publishers: 1997.

Read Chapter 6: “The Design for Deliverance” (Exodus)

Glossary

Atonement — The meaning of the word is simply at-one-ment; i.e., the state of being at one or being reconciled, so that atonement is reconciliation. Thus, it is used to denote the effect that flows from the death of Jesus Christ.

Covenant — (Hebrew, *berit*) In biblical use, a covenant differed from a contract in two ways. First, a covenant had no termination date, whereas a contract always did. Second, a covenant applied to the whole of a person, whereas a contract involved only a part, especially a skill, possessed by a person.

Mount Sinai — The name of the mountain district, which was reached by the Israelites in the third month after the Exodus. In many instances “Sinai” and “Horeb” are used synonymously; where a distinction appears, the mountain itself is Sinai and the neighboring wilderness area bears the wider designation Horeb. Traditional Mt. Sinai has been associated with Mt. Musa at the apex of the Sinai Peninsula.

Pentateuch — A name derived from Greek for the first five books of the Old Testament. It is the first of three divisions of the Jewish Scriptures and is also called the Law or the Torah or the Books of Moses.

Pharisees — (Hebrew “separated ones”) - A Jewish religious party. The name occurs in Josephus and in rabbinic sources, as well as in the New Testament. Unlike the Sadducees, who tried to apply the Mosaic Law precisely as it was given, the Pharisees allowed some interpretation of it to make it more applicable to different situations, and they regarded these oral interpretations on the same level of importance as the Law itself.

Sabbath — The seventh day of the week observed from Friday evening to Saturday evening as a day of rest and worship by Jews and some Christians.

Torah — (Hebrew, “instruction,” “law,” “The law”) - Torah basically means “teaching,” whether it is the wise woman instructing her son or God instructing Israel. Through the law, God showed His interest in all aspects of human life, which is to be lived under His direction and care. Torah, defined as “law,” refers to the first five books of the Old Testament (Pentateuch); but more broadly it may refer to the whole Old Testament.

Quiz

1. God called Moses to go back to Egypt and lead the Israelites out of bondage when he was:
 - A. 20 years old
 - B. 40 years old
 - C. 60 years old
 - D. 80 years old

2. In respect to a termination date, how do a contract and a biblical covenant compare?
 - A. Only a contract has a termination date.
 - B. Only a covenant has a termination date.
 - C. Both a contract and a covenant have a termination date.
 - D. Neither a contract nor a covenant has a termination date.

3. The book of Exodus is about:
 - A. Receiving God's law
 - B. Deliverance
 - C. The birthing of a nation
 - D. All of the above

4. The Hebrew word *torah* does **not** mean:
 - A. Teaching
 - B. Law
 - C. At-one-ment
 - D. The Law

5. The lengthy last section of Exodus, which pertains to building the tabernacle, teaches that we must first of all be:
 - A. Hard workers
 - B. Worshipers of God
 - C. Obedient to our leaders
 - D. Faithful to use our gifts

6. Where did Moses receive the Ten Commandments?
 - A. At the edge of the Red Sea
 - B. In Pharaoh's court
 - C. Mt. Sinai
 - D. None of the above

7. What is the final element of a covenant?
 - A. Stipulations
 - B. Preamble
 - C. Sanctions (blessings and curses)
 - D. Witnesses

8. What miracle did the Jewish people come to identify with God creating them as a nation?
 - A. Escaping death at the Passover
 - B. Crossing the Red Sea
 - C. Receiving the daily provision of manna
 - D. Receiving the Ten Commandments
9. Where did the Pharisees go wrong in relation to God's commandments?
 - A. They ignored them.
 - B. They took them too seriously.
 - C. They took them legalistically.
 - D. They spiritualized them.
10. Why did the Egyptians oppress the Israelites who lived in their midst?
 - A. They hated foreigners.
 - B. They needed slaves for their massive building projects.
 - C. They were afraid the Israelites would join against them in war.
 - D. They were jealous of their success and population growth.

Answers: 1. D 2. A 3. D 4. C 5. B 6. C 7. D 8. B 9. C 10. C

Lesson 3 Study Guide

OT216 *Genesis-Leviticus: God Builds A People For Himself*

Leviticus: Living God's Way

Updated 2014



Our Daily Bread
Christian University

Objectives

This lesson shows how Leviticus—as an extension of the Exodus story—describes how a holy people should live. The emphasis on a life of holiness and worship teaches God’s people what it means—day-to-day—to live in personal relationship with God.

When you complete this lesson, “Leviticus: Living God’s Way,” you should be able to:

- Describe how God’s people should live.
- Explain the essential role of holiness in worship.
- Explain how God redeems people from sin.
- Develop a deeper commitment to holiness and worship.

Scripture Reading

Read Leviticus.

Transcript

Course Title: Genesis-Leviticus: God Builds a People for Himself

Lesson Three: Leviticus: Living God's Way

I. Introduction

Leviticus is a book about holiness. When you think about Leviticus, think holiness and you will be oriented to this part of the Law of God. It is important to appreciate the fact that the book of Exodus is not really self-contained. In other words, when you come to Exodus 40, you do not come to the end of something that leaves you with a complete sense of having finished a topic, and now moving on to something totally different; but rather, Leviticus is simply a continuation of Exodus. In some ways, these books are arbitrarily divided from one another because they really do go together as the books of Moses.

A. Holiness

But as we said, Leviticus emphasizes holiness. The laws found in Leviticus are all in one way or another about the topic of holiness. Here is the situation. The Israelites are still at Mt. Sinai. They have been there receiving the information that is contained in what we call Exodus, starting with Exodus 20; and now all through the book of Leviticus, they are still there. The book of Leviticus is a long series of laws that the Israelites received during the year that they spent at that mountain. They camped there for a solid year. They learned what God wanted them to do and be; they practiced doing his laws, particularly the ceremonies. They built the tabernacle during that time, which was a portable tent shrine at which they would worship ever after. They began using it to worship, and they ordained the various priests and consecrated them by special ceremonies. And in particular, they began to learn how to sacrifice to God.

B. Sacrifice

Sacrifice is not something that most of us are used to. We are not used to the idea that you worship by bringing the materials for a meal, including an animal, and preparing those materials into a meal, including killing an animal, and butchering it, and cooking it, and then eating that meal together. But in fact we do have, all of us who are Christians, a very important symbolic remnant of that in Communion. That is, we do not worship without eating either. In the full sequence of Christian worship, there is from time to time the taking of Communion, gathering at the Lord's Table and eating of the sacrifice. We don't actually eat of the body of Christ, but we do symbolically eat of the body of Christ. We take bread that symbolizes His body; and we take wine that symbolizes His blood. He says, "Eat of me," in Scripture. We know that having given us this ceremony, He is inviting us whenever we do it, to do it in remembrance of Him. He died for us, and symbolically we partake of His sacrifice.

II. The Five Offerings (1:1-7:38)

The Israelites had to learn how it was that they worshiped God. One of the key features was the sacrifices. The early chapters of the book of Leviticus are about those sacrifices. That is what you find in chapters 1-7.

A. Whole Burnt Offering

There is the burnt offering sacrifice that describes how you take the animal and, with minimal preparation, place it upon an altar and burn it up totally, sort of cremates the animal. The purpose of this was to symbolize giving to God what belongs to Him. That was not the only way that animals were sacrificed.

There were also sacrifices, the more common kind, in which the animal was actually cooked: a small portion of it being burnt on the altar as a symbolic gift to God, sort of the smoke carrying the offering to God in a symbolic way. Then most parts of the animal were shared in eating. A portion went to the priests and Levites, who ate theirs, and the rest of it would go to the worshiper. You and your family would sit down around the tabernacle, later around the temple that Solomon built, and you would eat the covenant meal; because it was understood that every time you ate in worship, you were reminding yourself that you belonged to God, and that you were related to Him through His covenant. That is why Jesus in the New Testament can say that this is the New Covenant in my blood when He talks about drinking the wine of Communion.

B. Grain Offering

There were other types of offerings. One category was the grain offering, because in fact, these meals sacrificed to God and then shared by priests and worshipers were balanced meals—they were not just meat. They consisted of all kinds of ingredients that we would typically think of as constituting a meal, and they are described in the early chapters of Leviticus.

C. Fellowship Offering

There is also a type of offering called a fellowship offering. You do not have to offer that because you are in big trouble or because you have obviously or unconsciously sinned against God. It is just an offering that indicates you remain in fellowship with Him. That is the way it is with Communion. We do not take Communion more frequently because we have sinned more. Communion is a fellowship meal, along with all the other categories and overtones that it has.

D. Sin Offering

There was, however, an actual sin offering. The sin offering was specifically offered when a person had sinned, and was aware of it. It's design was to provide atonement for sin. Something dies so that you do not have to, because the ultimate penalty for sin is always death.

There may have been lesser penalties for lesser types of sins, but ultimately the sinner deserves to die; that is the way God has structured things. The sinner does not deserve eternal life in the presence of God. A substitution is made by which something else dies for the sinner, and the sinner can keep living; not only can the sinner live in this life, but also in the life to come as we eventually learn much better and more clearly in the New Testament. The sin offering is what an ancient Israelite would offer when he or she came with a sense of guilt, needing forgiveness, and seeking to be restored to God's favor and fellowship.

E. Guilt Offering

There was also a guilt offering. This is very similar to the sin offering, but it was yet another means of focusing upon God's forgiveness, another way, another angle of coming at what the sacrifices ultimately were designed to do; that is, to get people right with God and bring them closer to Him.

In chapters 1-5, the basic types of offerings are mentioned—the burnt offering, the grain offering, the fellowship offering, the sin offering, the guilt offering. Then in chapters 6 and 7 of the book of Leviticus, these five offerings are gone through again, both as a summary and also with some additional minor details about how they are to be handled from the point of view of the priests.

III. Priestly Holiness (8:1-17:16)

This brings us to the topic of the priests. The first part of the book of Leviticus is about priests. You can think of the book, chapters 1 through 17, as having the category of priestly holiness because God called His whole nation to be a kingdom of priests. The Israelites as a group were a priesthood. When Martin Luther speaks about the “priesthood of all believers,” he does not mean the priesthood of each individual believer as his own priest; he is just referring to the Old Testament concept that all the believers together are God's priests.

A. Beginning of the Priesthood (8:1-10:20)

But then here were, in particular, actual individuals from the tribe of Levi and members in that tribe, descended from Aaron, who were to serve as priests, intermediaries between God and the people, who helped with the rituals, who helped to be sure that the people understood the Law, and to help interpret holiness for those who had questions about what it was and how it was to be manifested. In chapters 8-10 of Leviticus, we find all sorts of instructions about the beginning of the priesthood: how priests were to be ordained, how they were to be consecrated, the limitation of the priesthood (just to those who were descended from Aaron), and so on.

B. Cleanness and Uncleanness (11:1-17:16)

After chapter 10 there is a section of material that finishes off the first part of the book in chapters 11-17. It is all about cleanness and uncleanness; cleanness as referring to the types of

animals one could eat; cleanness as referring to what constituted one worthy for worship if one were an ancient Israelite; cleanness as referring to how to get clean if one was unclean; what kinds of things made you unclean.

What we learn from these things help us a lot with New Testament stories and issues. For example, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan and describes how a priest and a Levite pass by on the other side of the road, not stopping to help the man who had been attacked and left for dead by robbers, because they are nervous about the possibility of becoming unclean.

Contact with a dead body was one way of becoming unclean. If anyone had gone to check that body to see if it was alive and it was not, just touching a dead body would make them unclean. Of course, they were not justified in what they did by the Law. Their problem was that they were putting their need to be ritually clean so as to participate in certain worship practices above the life of a human. That is certainly backwards. But at least it gives you a sense of how they might have viewed their situation and how they might have rationalized their decision not to help.

Why is cleanness and uncleanness so important though? What is the big issue? Why did God spend all those chapters getting His people to think in terms of clean food, clean action, clean clothing, clean processes, and likewise unclean things. It is because cleanliness is a very important and a useful metaphor for holiness. What God wants for His people is for them to be holy.

C. Be Holy

We benefit from the emphasis upon being holy. It is not being physically clean that is our issue; it is not that you have to have washed your clothes before you go to church. But what we can see from examining these laws, even though they are not commandments for us, they certainly are inspired knowledge that we can benefit from. We can see how important it was for God to teach His people how to be pure, how to care about being pure, how to be concerned that they measure up to His standards, how to take seriously the fact that His standards are very high, that they could not meet them in and of themselves. They needed even purification rituals to become pure.

IV. How to Be a Holy Nation (18:1-27:34)

For Christians, baptism corresponds to some of these rituals. Baptism is a way of symbolizing that we are pure, that our sins are washed away in Christ. The second half of the book of Leviticus is about how to be a holy nation. We find that in the material from the beginning of chapter 18 to the end of chapter 27 where the book ends. This is the part of the book that most Christians more easily identify with. The laws here are a little bit less related to ritual and a little more related to what we might just call holy living, especially living in community; living as a holy people, relating to one another in a holy way.

A. Poor and Aliens

To give you an example of one of the laws from Leviticus 19: “Do not turn to idols or make gods of cast metal for yourselves. I am the Lord your God.” That is very similar to what we find in the Ten Commandments, indicating that idolatry corrupts a person. Or, how about this law, again from Leviticus 19: “When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God.” There is a law that says a pure people, a holy people, a holy nation, must be made up of somewhat sloppy farmers. By that we mean that you do not really do a spick and span job of harvesting because there are poor people. There are those who do not have any land themselves. There are those who may have been too sick during the harvest to farm their own land and need to gather something for themselves for the winter. There are the resident aliens who have come into the nation but do not yet own a plot of land. These people God cares about, and so should you if you are a righteous Israelite. And so you actually do a sloppy job of gathering up your grain, of picking your figs or your grapes; you leave the stuff on the ground that fell there. As you have cut down the stalks of grain, you do not go to the very edge. You let them come in and you let them get for themselves whatever they can pick up or glean; that is, do the second kind of run through the harvest. This is a way of showing your love and kindness for them because you belong to God and are His holy people.

B. Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

One of the most important laws related to holiness is of course Leviticus 19:18, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” This is a law to keep for a lifetime; it is a challenge for anybody, in terms of holiness, to actually love your neighbor as yourself. Some people have tried to argue that this means that proper love for others has to start with self-love. But it does not say that. The Bible never urges us to self-love. It just says in an elliptical fashion, a kind of abbreviated fashion, love others as you would have them love you. Jesus said the two greatest commandments in the Old Testament were to love your neighbor as yourself from the human point of view and to love God with your whole heart.

In the ancient world, and particularly in the Hebrew language, the word “love” does not refer only to emotion. It is not a matter of feeling, so that you feel love for someone all that much; it is a matter of action that you take. We have letters from ancient kings, one to another, saying, “King so and so no longer loves me. He used to love me, but now he hates me. He now loves king such and such.” By that they do not mean that they had romantic relationships one with another. They are using love in the sense of being allied with, being responsive to, caring about, doing acts of love for. In other words, the language of love was even used in diplomacy to speak of alliances, friendships, and relationships. That is the way that God uses love in a book like Leviticus. “Love your neighbor as yourself” is not a question of primarily how you feel about your neighbor, what your emotional response might be to him or her; it is question of how you treat your neighbor. Are you a friend to your neighbor? Are you an ally to your neighbor? Are you a person who does caring things for your neighbor?

Now of course, who is your neighbor? Really, that question is answered simply by the language of the Old Testament—it is any fellow citizen. It is even the non-citizen, the resident alien who is your neighbor. It is the other person who you are in contact with. Jesus specifies that in His wonderful parable about the Good Samaritan when a legalist tries to challenge Him on the point. The neighbor is a complete stranger, perhaps, who needs your help. That is what the parable tells us.

C. Slander

Here is another law from Leviticus 19: “Do not go about spreading slander among your people.” God’s holy people have to be careful about the way they speak to one another and about one another. Slander hurts. False criticism of people is powerful and this comports with teachings in the New Testament in several places, notably the book of James, about how harmful an influence can come from just the use of one’s tongue in one’s mouth.

D. Blessings and Curses (26:3-39)

There are also a number of blessings and curses in this part of the book. The next to last chapter, Leviticus 26, contains in it what we would call the sanctions of the Sinai covenant. If you start back with Exodus 20 with the laws, the stipulations, they go right past the end of Exodus and on into Leviticus and right through chapter 26, where then come the blessings and curses of the covenant. So Exodus and Leviticus are united in that way as one section of material, the covenant law that the Israelites received on Mt. Sinai. Toward the end of that year that the Israelites were there at Mt. Sinai, they received then from God, through Moses, blessings and curses. One might call these the carrot and the stick of God’s covenant. The blessings are the descriptions of the wonderful things that He will do for His people if they will only be faithful to Him. He reminds them that this is part of His covenant in the beginning of chapter 26 of Leviticus, which says, “Do not make idols or set up an image and so on, and worship them. I am the Lord your God. Observe my Sabbaths . . .”

And then He says, “If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit. Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting.” It is a way of saying, “You will have abundance of food. I will bless you. I will take care of you. I will give you the things you need.” It is a lot like Jesus’ statement, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you.” He also says, “I will grant you peace in the land.” He says, “I will remove savage beasts from the land.”—protections of all kinds and benefits. He says, “I will look on you with favor, and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you.”

But there is also the other side of the coin. If they disobey, God will be faithful to His promises; and His promises are that He will not allow people who enter into covenant with Him and who promised Him that they are His people to act like they are not His people. He is not going to allow people who are called to be pure to be impure. He is not going to let people who

are called to be righteous flaunt their unrighteousness before Him. He says, “If you will not listen to me, if you do not carry out all these commands, if you reject my decrees, then I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases, fever . . . you will plant seed in vain because your enemies will eat it . . . I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your enemies, and those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee even when no one is pursuing you.” In other words, God would cause His people to be in big trouble with their enemies. He caused them to have trouble in terms of their agricultural prosperity, even send psychological terrors among them, and so on.

The blessing is held before them like the carrot before the horse. But there is also the stick as a prod: remember the dangers, the harms, the unpleasant activities that they will experience if they do not trust Him and do His will. The book of Leviticus then ends on that kind of note. It ends with a word, however, that gives some encouragement to the reader. It can seem after you have read the curses that it is kind of a downer ending to a book, but then you come to chapter 27 with one particular prescription, and that is about redemption.

V. Conclusion: Redemption

Redemption is buying back. God describes for the Israelites how to do that as a symbol of what we know finally as Christ’s buying us back. Everything belongs to God—the first born of every human, every animal. But God does not actually want people to bring their children and leave them off at the tabernacle. He says, “You bring them, you dedicate them, but then you pay a small payment and you buy them back.” Thus, He taught every Israelite in every generation the principle of buying back what was precious to them. Now, Jesus did that. He bought us back from the penalty that we would be under in sin. He paid a tremendous price and thereby shows us how precious we were to Him. The book of Leviticus ends with that theme that leads us so well into the New Testament, the theme of redemption, buying back.

Discussion Questions

What did “holiness” mean to the Israelites in the context of the book of Leviticus?

In what ways does the concept of redemption in the book of Leviticus anticipate and foreshadow the work of Jesus Christ?

How did the sin offering provide atonement for sin and how does this foreshadow the work of Jesus Christ?

Further Study

Suggested reading for this lesson:

Stedman, Ray C. *Adventuring Through the Bible: A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible*.

Discovery House Publishers: 1997.

Read Chapter 7: “The Way to Wholeness” (Leviticus)

Glossary

Burnt Offering — (Hebrew “’olah”; i.e., “ascending”) - The burnt offering is discussed in Leviticus 1:3-17; 6:8-13. The whole being is consumed by fire and regarded as ascending to God while being consumed. Part of every offering was burnt in the sacred fire, but this was wholly burnt—a whole burnt offering.

Communion — Fellowship with God. The Lord’s Supper is so called (1 Cor 10:16), because in it there is fellowship between Christ and His disciples, and of the disciples with one another.

Guilt Offering — The guilt offering or trespass offering is described in Leviticus 5:14-6:7. It is different from the sin offering chiefly in the restitution requirement. This offering also atones for the sacrificer and he or she is forgiven.

Holiness — In the highest sense, holiness belongs to God (Isa 6:3) and to Christians as consecrated to God’s service, insofar as they are conformed in all things to the will of God (Rom 6:19). Personal holiness is a work of gradual development.

Levite — A descendant of the tribe of Levi. This name is generally used as a title for a portion of the tribal members, who were set apart for the subordinate offices of the sanctuary service, as assistants to the priests.

Meal Offering — The meal offering or cereal offering that was presented to the Lord is described in Leviticus 2:1-16; 6:14-23. It was burned in part on the altar. The part burned memorialized the worshiper before the Lord; the part that remained was eaten by the priests. Cereal offerings accompanied animal sacrifices, but mostly in the case of the burnt offering.

Peace Offering — The peace offering is discussed in Leviticus 3:1-17; 7:11-34. There were three kinds: (a) eucharistic or thanksgiving offerings, expressive of gratitude for blessings received; (b) fulfillment of a vow offerings, but expressive also of thanks for benefits received; and (c) freewill offerings, something spontaneously devoted to God.

Priest — Under the Levitical arrangements the office of the priesthood was limited to the tribe of Levi, and to only one family of that tribe, the family of Aaron. They represented the people before God and offered the various sacrifices prescribed in the Law.

Redemption — The purchase back of something that had been lost, by the payment of a ransom.

Sacrifice — The offering up of sacrifice is to be regarded as a divine institution. Sacrifices were of two kinds: (1) Unbloody - such as (a) firstfruits and tithes, (b) meal and drink offerings, and (c) incense; and (2) Bloody - such as (a) burnt offerings, (b) peace offerings, and (c) sin and trespass offerings.

Sin Offering — Individual members of the congregation, as well as the congregation at large, and the high priest were obligated, on being convicted by their conscience of any particular sin, to come with a sin offering (Lev 4:1-5:13; 6:24-30). On the Day of Atonement it was made with special solemnity (Lev 16:5, 11, 15).

Quiz

1. Dr. Stuart identifies this rite as corresponding to the rituals of purification found in Leviticus:
 - A. Circumcision
 - B. Communion
 - C. Baptism
 - D. Ordination
2. In this type of sacrifice the animal was totally consumed by the fire:
 - A. Fellowship offering
 - B. Sin offering
 - C. Burnt offering
 - D. Guilt offering
3. Sacrifices were ultimately designed to:
 - A. Show people how distant God was
 - B. Get people right with God
 - C. Prepare the Israelites for entering the Promised Land
 - D. Be solely performed by the high priest
4. The book of Leviticus ends with this theme, which would ultimately be fulfilled by Christ:
 - A. Atonement
 - B. Redemption
 - C. Deliverance
 - D. Sanctification
5. The Levites:
 - A. Were descendants of Levi
 - B. Served as priests
 - C. Offered the various sacrifices prescribed in the Law
 - D. All of the above
6. The priests:
 - A. Were descendants of Aaron
 - B. Were descendants of Levi
 - C. Represented the people before God
 - D. All of the above
7. The primary theme of Leviticus is:
 - A. Leaving Egypt
 - B. Camping at Mt. Sinai
 - C. Holiness
 - D. Beginnings

8. The setting of the book of Leviticus is:
 - A. Egypt
 - B. The Promised Land
 - C. The wilderness
 - D. Mt. Sinai
9. The sin offering was specifically designed to:
 - A. Provide atonement for sin
 - B. Bring peace to the sacrificer
 - C. Be the primary offering of the priests
 - D. Be a one-time offering
10. What is the big issue behind the emphasis on cleanness and uncleanness in Leviticus?
 - A. Holiness
 - B. Salvation
 - C. Health and healing
 - D. Witness

Answers: 1. C 2. C 3. B 4. B 5. D 6. D 7. C 8. D 9. A 10. A