

# Leviticus ויקרא

an Exegetical Commentary by Nate Wilson

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## Introduction to Leviticus

Leviticus was written by Moses (Unger notes that Mosaic authorship is confirmed 56 times throughout the book), under God's inspiration primarily as a guidebook to the priestly class of the Israelites, the Levites. It shows how sinful man can relate to the holy God. Different commentators state the purpose of the book differently. I'll let some of them speak for themselves:

- to show that God is holy and that man is sinful. However, if man will recognize this fact and obey, he is permitted to approach God (Zodhiates).
- As Exodus is the book of redemption, Leviticus is the book of the cleansing, worship, and service of the redeemed people--Hebrews is the N.T. commentary on Leviticus (Unger).
- "law-keeping did not figure...as the meritorious ground of life-inheritance. The latter is based on grace alone, no less emphatically than Paul himself places salvation on that ground. The law was given after the redemption from Egypt had been accomplished, and the people had already entered upon the enjoyment of many of the blessings of the *berith* [covenant]. That the keeping of the law will be rewarded is stated once and again. Israel's retention of the privileges of the *berith* is made dependent on obedience... That which we call the 'legal system' is shot through with strands of gospel and grace and faith. Especially the ritual law is rich in them. Every sacrifice and every lustration proclaimed the principle of grace... The Gospel was preached under the constraint of law..." (Vos).
- Leviticus "carries to completion the giving of the law at Sinai, which commenced at Ex. xxv, and by which the covenant constitution was firmly established. It contains more particularly the laws regulating the relation of Israel to its God, including both the fundamental principles upon which its covenant fellowship with the Lord depended, and the directions for the sanctification of the covenant people in that communion. Consequently the laws contained in this book might justly be described as the "spiritual statute-book of Israel as the congregation of Jehovah." God had fulfilled half of the covenant that He would be their God and dwell among them, by the building of the temple and the presence of His glory there, but the other half needed to be fulfilled, that of Israel becoming His people. The institutions and legal regulations of Leviticus served, "on the one hand to sharpen the consciousness of sin in the hearts of the people, and thereby to awaken the desire for mercy and for reconciliation with the holy God, and on the other hand furnished them with the means of expiating their sins and sanctifying their walk before God according to the standard of His holy commandments... All the laws and regulations of Leviticus ...aim at the restoration of an inward fellowship on the part of the nation as a whole and the individual members with Jehovah their God through the expiation or forgiveness of sin and the removal of all natural uncleanness, and at the strengthening and deepening of this fellowship by the sanctification of every relation of life" (Keil & Delitzsch).

### DATE:

Leviticus was written after the Exodus and the giving of the law, c. 1439 BC. Higher critics assert that it was post-exilic, but this is absurd primarily because it would be totally hypocritical to teach such standards of holiness while passing off a forgery! There is also the historical absurdity of getting so late a concoction of laws accepted at all, or what is even more incredible, approved as directly mediated by God to Moses. In addition, there is the legal inanity that is manifested in foisting the code in its Mosaic dress and wilderness framework on a post-exilic economy (K&D).

## OUTLINE

Keil & Delitzsch see two basic parts to the book:

- I. Ch. 1-16 outlines the sacrifices and purification leading up to the day of atonement, and
- II. Ch. 17-27 relating to the sanctification of life, culminating in the sabbatical and jubilee years.

I think these are valid, but would break it up further:

1. The sacrificial system (Ch. 1-7)
2. Consecration and ordination of the priests (Ch. 8-10)
3. How the priests should judge the Israelites in practical matters (Ch. 11-27)
  - a. food
  - b. health
  - c. business
  - d. social justice
  - e. holidays.
4. Litany of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (Ch. 26).

## TYPES AND SYMBOLS OF THE GOSPEL

In pages 143-182 of his book, *Biblical Theology*, Vos elaborates on the Ritual aspects of the Mosaic Law. I so much appreciate Vos' writing, that I want to provide a condensation of his chapter below: "it is precisely in the ritual institutions that the greater part of the gospel of Moses is enshrined... In determining the function of the ceremonial law we must take into consideration its two large aspects, the symbolical and typical... A symbol is in its religious significance something that profoundly portrays a certain fact of principle or relationship of a spiritual nature in a visible form. The things it pictures are... in force at the time in which the symbol operates. With the same thing, regarded as a type, it is different. A typical thing is prospective; it relates to what will become real or applicable in the future." There are three major categories of types and symbols in the ritual law:

- 1. The TABERNACLE "embodies the... idea of the dwelling of God with His people... God's desire to have a mutual identification of lot between Himself and them." This was a place where God spoke with man, where God's law was kept, and where the people worshipped and prayed to God. It was His house, and the people "were received into [it] as His guests."  
" [W]here do these religious principle and realities, which the tabernacle served to teach and communicate, reappear in the subsequent history of redemption, lifted to their consummate stage? ...the indwelling of God in Christ serves the same ends which the Mosaic tabernacle provisionally served. He as the antitypical tabernacle is revelatory and sacramental in the highest degree." (John 1:14 "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" John 2:19ff "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up' ... But he spake of the temple of his body." Col 2:9 "in Him the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily".)  
"But what is true of the Christ is likewise true of the Church. Of that, the tabernacle was also a type. This could not be otherwise, because the Church is the body of the risen Christ. For this reason, the Church is called the 'house of God' [Eph.2.21, I Tim. 3.15, Heb. 3.6; 10.21, I Pet. 2.5]"
- 2. "The SACRIFICIAL RITUAL forms the center of the rites of the tabernacle... The idea of sacrifice has an intimate connection with the fact of sin... The two main ends [served by sacrifice] are expiation and consecration... The exclusive use of animal sacrifice for expiation is due to the presence of blood in it. Without blood there is no sacrificial expiation under the law... Vegetable, bloodless sacrifices [are dedicated] to the purpose of consecration alone... What distinguishes the sacrifice from all the other [offerings], however sacred these may be, is that part or the whole of its substance comes upon the altar. Without the altar there would be no sacrifice... In anthropomorphic language, the law expresses the principle of assimilation of the sacrifice by Jehovah when it speaks of it as 'food for Jehovah' or 'a [pleasant aroma] for Jehovah' [not in the sense that God needs food like men do, but] that there might be a never ceasing supply of praise and consecration for Him."  
The sacrifice [which always consisted of plants and animals used for food] must be taken from what constitutes the sustenance of the life of the offerer and from what forms the product of his life... they characterize sacrifice as the gift of life to God... God is not satisfied... with anything short of the consecration of life it-

self.”

The animal was supposed to be free of all defects - “substitut[ing] for the imperfect offerer the perfect animal-substitute” and the offerer was to lay his hands on the sacrificial animal, symbolizing a “transfer from one person to another... the transferred thing was nothing else but the sin, i.e., the liability to death-punishment on the part of the offerer... In the ritual of the Day of Atonement, which we may consider the culminating occasion of the whole ritual system, Aaron is told to lay his hands on the head of the second goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the people. This second goat was... sent away in to the wilderness for the purpose of symbolically removing the sin. Yet it formed with the other goat in reality one sacrificial object; the distribution of suffering death and dismissal into a remote place simply serving the purpose of clearer expression, in visible form, of the removal of sin after expiation had been made...” Then the animal is slain by the hands of the offerer. This is to “signify that death is the penalty of sin, vicariously inflicted in sacrifice... (Lev. 17.11 ‘For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make covering for your souls; for it is the blood that makes covering by reason of the life.’) ...the sacrificial animal in its death takes the place of the death due the offerer. It is forfeit for forfeit. Christ, not merely in His positive service, but through His suffering and death made up for... our sin. He satisfied the justice of God... God, the offended Person, procures the covering [obliterating our sins], and it is applied to the sinner... ‘the priest shall cover upon him on account of his sin’ [Lev. 4.35]”

”The trespass-offering is... the only one to which a sum of money must be added... it forms the complement of the sin-offering in giving to God the positive thing withheld from Him through sin. Every sin offers to God what ought not to be offered, an offence, and at the same time it withholds from God what ought to have been given to Him, obedience. If the sin-offering rectifies the former, the trespass-offering would then make restitution for the latter. The trespass-offering... is the only class of sacrifice with which the sacrificial death of Christ is directly connected in the Old Testament. In Isa. 53.10, the self-surrender of the Servant of Jehovah is designated an ‘*asham*, a trespass-offering... that the Servant not merely atones for the sins of the people, but gives to God what by their disobedience they have withheld.”

“The next step in the ritual after the covering is the burning of certain parts upon the altar... as yielding a sweet odour of delight to Jehovah... that which is represented as yielding delight to Jehovah is the surrender of man’s life in consecration of obedience... ‘Christ also loved us, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for an odour of a sweet smell’ [Eph. 5.2]” K&D reference Kahn in seeing a symbolic meaning in the fire as the Holy Spirit and the work of sanctification: “the burning of the flesh of the sacrifice upon the altar ‘represented the purification of the man, who had been reconciled to God, through the fire of the Holy Spirit, which consumes what is flesh, to pervade what is spirit with light and life, and thus to transmute it into the blessedness of fellowship with God. It follows from this, that the relation which the sprinkling of the blood and burning of the flesh of the sacrifice upon the altar bore to one another was that of justification and sanctification... But as the sinner could neither justify himself before God nor sanctify himself by his own power, the sprinkling of blood and the burning of the portions of the sacrifice upon the altar were to be effected, not by the offerer himself, but only by the priest...”

“The final stage in the ritual of sacrifice consisted in the sacrificial meal. This was peculiar to the peace-offerings.... The peace-offering accordingly symbolizes the state of positive favour and blessedness enjoyed in the religion of Jehovah, which at all times includes more than the sacrificial relief obtained from sin... Paul in I Cor. 10, by implication calls the meal the table of Jehovah, for he compares the Lord’s supper, where Christ is the host, and the pagan sacrificial meals, where the ‘demons’ give the feast at their table, with the practice of the ancient Israelites, who have ‘communion with the altar’.”

- 3. UNCLEANLINESS & PURIFICATION. It is not primarily a distinction of hygiene or sanitation; “‘Clean’ means qualified for the worship of Jehovah in the tabernacle, ‘unclean’ the opposite... There are processes and acts absolutely unavoidable, which nevertheless render unclean. The law rather seems to have multiplied the occasions for contracting uncleanness, that thus it might increase the material on which to operate the distinction and teach its lesson... It creates a bisection of the entire congregation to apply to it this ritual test. The people at each moment divide themselves into two halves, one composed of the clean, the other of the unclean...”

“The interdict on unclean animals is, in Lev. 20.22ff, significantly brought into connection with the difference between the Israelites and the Canaanites. This indicates that the latter did not treat the animals tabooed in Israel as unclean. On the contrary, these very animals must have played a rather prominent role in their re-

ligion. It further suggests that on that very account they were debarred from the ritual of the true religion.

“The uncleanness of leprosy occupies a place by itself. This cannot be explained from sanitary motives, [for] other equally serious, and obviously contagious diseases did not render a person unclean, notably the pestilence. It has been suggested that leprosy was ascribed to a special stroke from Jehovah... the two names for leprosy, both come from roots meaning ‘to strike’ ... Possibly leprosy may have been associated with uncleanness, because of its being, as it were, a living death. In that case the uncleanness of the leprosy would have to be classified with that of death... [Num. 12.12]...

“But why does death with all that accompanies it render unclean? On the principle that both birth and death cause uncleanness, it has been plausibly suggested that through the uncleanness of these two termini of life, the entire natural life as such is declared unclean... The law gives this whole distinction a religious aspect... the matter is brought into relation with the holiness of God [Lev.11.44,45; Deut 14.21]. Hence also the process of cleansing is called a ‘sanctifying’. The unclean are debarred from the sanctuary and from the feasts... The removal of uncleanness is in part accomplished by ritual ‘covering’ [Lev. 12.7,8; 14; 16.29,30; 15.14,15]... The uncleanness, thus related to the service of Jehovah is associated with ethical sin. This is done in two ways, On the one hand, the ritual uncleanness is treated as sin. On the other hand the ethical abnormality is made to borrow its vocabulary from the ritual law... God teaches people to feel about sin as they are accustomed to feel about an ignominious and uncomfortable exclusion from the ritual service...”

## Introduction to this Commentary

I believe that it is important to see the source of the text of our Bible, so I have chosen to base this commentary on the Hebrew text of Leviticus rather than upon a translation. For those not familiar with Hebrew, it is a fairly simple language. Let me begin with a simplified pronunciation guide:

Hebrew Consonants:

א a	ו v/w	כ/ך k	ע u	ש sh
ב b/v	ז z	ל l	פ/ף p/f	שׁ s
ג g	ח ch	מ/ם m	צ/ץ ts	ת t
ד d	ט t	נ/ן n	ק q	NOTE: a dot in a consonant means it is doubled
ה h	י y	ס s	ר r	

Hebrew Vowels are placed under the consonants they follow:

ַ / ֱ – ah	ֶ – ě	ֹ or ֺ – oh	ִ – abbreviates
ֲ – ay	ֻ – ĭ	ִ or ֶ – u	vowel sound

So, for example, וַיִּקְרָא אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר would be pronounced (remember, Hebrew reads backwards from English - Right-to-Left)“vay-yiq-ra el-mo-sheh va-y-dab-bayr.”

I have put a number in superscript next to every verb or participle in the Hebrew text, also marking my translation of that verbal in my English translation with the corresponding number. In the "VERBALS" section, I give the morphology of the verbal, using the same numbering. So as not to be cumbered with three-digit numbers, I start over at one (1) with each new chapter. In the morphology, I give the verb stem, its aspect, its formatives, and then the root word. This is followed by the root meaning and then the syntax label of how the verbal is used in the sentence. Following are some abbreviations and nomenclature I used. The BHS which starts each section is the Masoretic-tradition text printed in the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.

### VERB STEMS:

Qal = Simple verb where the subject is acting

Niphal = Simple verb where the subject is acted upon

Piel = Intensive action where the subject is acting (May not always be intense action, though)

Pual = Intensive action where the subject is being acted upon

Hitpael = Reflexive action, where the subject is acting on itself

Hiphil = Causal verb where the subject is causing an action to happen (May not always be by indirect action)

Hophil = Causal verb where a third party has caused an action to happen to the subject

### VERB ASPECTS:

Perf. = Perfect (completed action usually in past time)

Impf. = Imperfect (Incomplete action usually in future time unless prefixed by a vav, in which case it is a narrative/consecutive past-tense.)

Inf. = Infinitive (noun form of an action)

Ptc. = Participle (adjective form of an action, often translated as an English Gerund - "ing")

Imptv. = Imperative (Command)

### VERB FORMATIVES

This would include prefixes (such as prepositions) and suffixes (such as indicators of the subject or object of the verb).

3ms/fs, etc. = If there is a number in the combination, it is speaking of first, second, or third person. The m/f indicates male or female. And the s/pl indicates singular or plural.

Const. = Construct form (the word is linked to a preposition - "to" - or to the next word as a genitive - "of")

Abs. = Absolute (the word stands by itself without a construct link)

v.c. or consec. = Vav Consecutive (When a series of Imperfect verbs are prefixed with a Vav, I take it as a consecutive sequence of events in the past. When a Perfect is prefixed by a Vav, it is considered in the future.)

### WEAKNESSES

This has to do with the spelling of the Hebrew word. Hebrew verbs generally have three root letters, but certain letters of the Hebrew alphabet are "weak" and either change or disappear. The first word in parenthesis gives the place of the weakness: "Pe" designates the first letter of the Hebrew root word, "Ayin" designates the second letter of the word, and "Lamed," the third letter of the word. The second word in parenthesis indicates the actual letter of the alphabet in that place - the letters corresponding to our English "A," "H," "ch," and "ʿ" are lumped together as Gutturals.

### SYNTAX

The use of the verbal in the context of the sentence:

M.V. = Main Verb

Adj. = Adjectival use of a verb

Cause. = Causal (A circumstance which caused the action)

Compl. = Complimentary verb (dependent on another - usually volitional - verb)

Cond. = Conditional

D.O. = Direct Object

Dir. Disc. = Direct Discourse or Quote

Explan. = Explanatory

Hort./Cohort. = Hortatory/Cohortative "let us"

Id. Act. = Identical Action as previous verb

Juss. = Jussive "let them"

Pred. Nom. = Predicate Nominative (Usually with a verb of being)

Purp. = Purpose (The end which the subject had in mind when he did the action)

Rel. Cl. = Relative Clause (beginning with "who," "which," etc.)

Res. = Result (The result of an action)

Temp. = Temporal (time of action)

### TRANSLATIONS

NAW = My translation (Nathan A. Wilson)

KJV = King James Version

NASV (NAS) = New American Standard Version

ASV = American Standard Version of 1901

NIV = New International Version

From my study, the NASV is the best popularly-available translation, but every one of the English translations has strengths, so I believe that there is real value in considering them all so as to see the range of meaning of the Hebrew text and understand it more fully.

#### COMMENTARIES

I used a variety of study aids, including lexicons, atlases, dictionaries, classical exegetical commentaries, a Jewish commentary, and regular modern commentaries. Next to any thought that wasn't my own, I reference the source by an abbreviation of the author's name. This may not be the thought's original source, but it is where I first came across it. When I came up with an idea on my own that I wasn't sure about and later saw it confirmed in another commentary, I give the cross-reference in the other commentary with a "cf...". Almost all of my verbal parsing comes from Davidson's Analytical Lexicon, and the rest of the entomological work in the verb lists comes from lexicons by Brown-Driver-Briggs and Holladay. Harris, Archer, and Waltke's Theological Wordbook (which I reference as "HAW") was also helpful in word meanings. The classic Keil and Delitzsch commentary (which I reference as "K&D") was helpful in exegesis and background, and Cohen's *Soncino Chumash* (which I reference as "Soncino") was particularly helpful in understanding the Jewish perspective on translation.

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