

INTRODUCTION TO LEVITICUS

There is nothing historical in all this book of Leviticus except the account which it gives us of the consecration of the priesthood (Leviticus 8-9), of the punishment of Nadab and Abihu, by the hand of God, for offering strange fire (Leviticus 10), and of Shelomith's son, by the hand of the magistrate, for blasphemy (Leviticus 24). All the rest of the book is taken up with the laws, chiefly the ecclesiastical laws, which God gave to Israel by Moses, concerning their sacrifices and offerings, their meats and drinks, and divers washings, and the other peculiarities by which God set that people apart for himself, and distinguished them from other nations, all which were shadows of good things to come, which are realized and superseded by the gospel of Christ. We call the book *Leviticus*, from the Septuagint, because it contains the laws and ordinances of the *levitical priesthood* (as it is called, #Heb 7:11), and the ministrations of it. The Levites were principally charged with these institutions, both to do their part and to teach the people theirs. We read, in the close of the foregoing book, of the setting up of the tabernacle, which was to be the place of worship; and, as that was framed according to the pattern, so must the ordinances of worship be, which were there to be administered. In these the divine appointment was as particular as in the former, and must be as punctually observed. The remaining record of these abrogated laws is of use to us, for the strengthening of our faith in Jesus Christ, as *the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*, and for the increase of our thankfulness to God, that by him we are freed from the yoke of the ceremonial law, and live in the times of reformation.

INTRODUCTION TO LEVITICUS CHAPTER 1

This book begins with the laws concerning sacrifices, of which the most ancient were the burnt-offerings, about which God gives Moses instructions in this chapter. Orders are here given how that sort of sacrifice must be managed.

- I. If it was a bullock out of the herd, #Le 1:3-9.
- II. If it was a sheep or goat, a lamb or kid, out of the flock, #Le 1:10-13.
- III. If it was a turtle dove or a young pigeon, #Le 1:14-17.

And whether the offering was more or less valuable in itself, if it was offered with an upright heart, according to these laws, it was accepted of God.

Ver. 1. thru Ver. 2.

Observe here,

1. It is taken for granted that people would be inclined to bring offerings to the Lord. The very light of nature directs man, some way or other, to do honour to his Maker, and pay him homage as his Lord. Revealed religion supposes natural religion to be an ancient and early institution, since the fall had directed men to glorify God by sacrifice, which was an implicit acknowledgment of their having received all from God as creatures, and their having forfeited all to him as sinners. A conscience thoroughly convinced of dependence and guilt would be willing to come before God with *thousands of rams*, #Mic 6:6-7.
2. Provision is made that men should not indulge their own fancies, nor become vain in their imaginations and inventions about their sacrifices, lest, while they pretended to honour God, they should really dishonour him, and do that which was unworthy of

him. Every thing therefore is directed to be done with due decorum, by a certain rule, and so as that the sacrifices might be most significant both of the great sacrifice of atonement which Christ was to offer in the fulness of time and of the spiritual sacrifices of acknowledgment which believers should offer daily.

3. God gave those laws to Israel by Moses; nothing is more frequently repeated than this, *The Lord spoke unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel.* God could have spoken it to the children of Israel himself, as he did the ten commandments; but he chose to deliver it to them by Moses, because they had desired he would no more speak to them himself, and he had designed that Moses should, above all the prophets, be a type of Christ, by whom God would in these last days speak to us, **#Heb 1:2**. By other prophets God sent messages to his people, but by Moses he gave them laws; and therefore he was fit to typify him to whom the Father has given all judgment. And, besides, the treasure of divine revelation was always to be put into earthen vessels, that our faith might be tried, and that the excellency of the power might be of God.
4. God spoke to him out of the tabernacle. As soon as ever the shechinah had taken possession of its new habitation, in token of the acceptance of what was done, God talked with Moses from the mercy-seat, while he attended without the veil, or rather at the door, hearing a voice only; and it is probable that he wrote what he heard at that time, to prevent any mistake, or a slip of memory, in the rehearsal of it. The tabernacle was set up to be a place of communion between God and Israel; there, where they performed their services to God, God revealed his will to them. Thus, by the word and by prayer, we now have fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, **#Ac 6:4**. When we speak to God we must desire to hear from him, and reckon it a great favour that he is pleased to speak to us. The Lord called to Moses, not to come near (under that dispensation, even Moses must keep his distance), but to attend and hearken to what should be said. A letter less than ordinary in the Hebrew word for *called*, the Jewish critics tell us, intimates that God spoke in a still small voice. The moral law was given with terror from a burning mountain in thunder and lightning; but the remedial law of sacrifice was given more gently from a mercy-seat, because that was typical of the grace of the gospel, which is the ministration of life and peace.

Ver. 3. thru Ver. 9.

If a man were rich and could afford it, it is supposed that he would bring his burnt-sacrifice, with which he designed to honour God, out of his herd of larger cattle. He that considers that God is the best that is will resolve to give him the best he has, else he gives him not the glory due unto his name. Now if a man determined to kill a bullock, not for an entertainment for his family and friends, but for a sacrifice to his God, these rules must be religiously observed:--

1. The beast to be offered must be a male, and without blemish, and the best he had in his pasture. Being designed purely for the honour of him that is infinitely perfect, it ought to be the most perfect in its kind. This signified the complete strength and purity that were in Christ the dying sacrifice, and the sincerity of heart and blamelessness of life that should be in Christians, who are presented to God as living sacrifices. But, literally, in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female; nor is any natural blemish in the body a bar to our acceptance with God, but only the moral defects and deformities introduced by sin into the soul.
2. The owner must offer it voluntarily. What is done in religion, so as to please God, must be done by no other constraint than that of love. God accepts the willing people

and the cheerful giver. Ainsworth and others read it, not as the principle, but as the end of offering:

"Let him offer it *for his favourable acceptance before the Lord*. Let him propose this to himself as his end in bringing his sacrifice, and let his eye be fixed steadily upon that end--that he may be accepted of the Lord."

Those only shall find acceptance who sincerely desire and design it in all their religious services, [#2Co 5:9](#).

3. It must be offered at the door of the tabernacle, where the brazen altar of burnt-offerings stood, which sanctified the gift, and not elsewhere. He must offer it at the door, as one unworthy to enter, and acknowledging that there is no admission for a sinner into covenant and communion with God, but by sacrifice; but he must offer it at the tabernacle of the congregation, in token of his communion with the whole church of Israel even in this personal service.

4. The offerer must put his hand upon the head of his offering, [#Le 1:4](#).

"He must put both his hands," say the Jewish doctors, "with all his might, between the horns of the beast,"

signifying thereby,

(1.) The transfer of all his right to, and interest in, the beast, to God, actually, and by a manual delivery, resigning it to his service.

(2.) An acknowledgment that he deserved to die, and would have been willing to die if God had required it, for the serving of his honour, and the obtaining of his favour.

(3.) A dependence upon the sacrifice, as an instituted type of the great sacrifice on which the iniquity of us all was to be laid. The mystical signification of the sacrifices, and especially this rite, some think the apostle means by the doctrine of *laying on of hands* ([#Heb 6:2](#)), which typified evangelical faith. The offerer's putting his hand on the head of the offering was to signify his desire and hope that it might *be accepted from him to make atonement for him*.

Though the burnt-offerings had not respect to any particular sin, as the sin offering had, yet they were to make atonement for sin in general; and he that laid his hand on the head of a burnt-offering was to confess that *he had left undone what he ought to have done and had done that which he ought not to have done*, and to pray that, though he deserved to die himself, the death of his sacrifice might be accepted for the expiating of his guilt.

5. The sacrifice was to be killed by the priests of Levites, before the Lord, that is, in a devout religious manner, and with an eye to God and his honour. This signified that our Lord Jesus was to make his soul, or life, an offering for sin. Messiah the prince must be cut off as a sacrifice, *but not for himself*, [#Da 9:26](#). It signified also that in Christians, who are living sacrifices, the brutal part must be mortified or killed, the flesh crucified with its corrupt affections and lusts and all the appetites of the mere animal life.

6. The priests were to *sprinkle the blood upon the altar* ([#Le 1:5](#)); for, the blood being the life, it was this that made atonement for the soul. This signified the direct and actual regard which our Lord Jesus had to the satisfaction of his Father's justice, and

the securing of his injured honour, in the shedding of his blood; *he offered himself without spot to God*. It also signified the pacifying and purifying of our consciences by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ upon them by faith, [#1Pe 1:2](#); [Heb 10:22](#).

7. The beast was to be flayed and decently cut up, and divided into its several joints or pieces, according to the art of the butcher; and then all the pieces, with the head and the fat (the legs and inwards being first washed), were to be burnt together upon the altar, [#Le 1:6-9](#).

"But to what purpose," would some say, *"was this waste? Why should all this good meat, which might have been given to the poor, and have served their hungry families for food a great while, be burnt together to ashes?"*

So was the will of God; and it is not for us to object or to find fault with it. When it was burnt for the honour of God, in obedience to his command, and to signify spiritual blessings, it was really better bestowed, and better answered the end of its creation, than when it was used as food for man. We must never reckon that lost which is laid out for God. The burning of the sacrifice signified the sharp sufferings of Christ, and the devout affections with which, as a holy fire, Christians must offer up themselves their whole spirit, soul, and body, unto God.

8. This is said to be *an offering of a sweet savour, or savour of rest, unto the Lord*. The burning of flesh is unsavoury in itself; but this, as an act of obedience to a divine command, and a type of Christ, was well pleasing to God: he was reconciled to the offerer, and did himself take a complacency in that reconciliation. He rested, and was refreshed with these institutions of his grace, as, at first, with his works of creation ([#Ex 31:17](#)), rejoicing therein, [#Ps 104:31](#). Christ's offering of himself to God is said to be of a *sweet-smelling savour* ([#Eph 5:2](#)), and the spiritual sacrifices of Christians are said to be *acceptable to God, through Christ*, [#1Pe 2:5](#).

Ver. 10. thru Ver. 17.

Here we have the laws concerning the burnt-offerings, which were of the flock or of the fowls. Those of the middle rank, that could not well afford to offer a bullock, would bring a sheep or a goat; and those that were not able to do that should be accepted of God if they brought a turtle dove or a pigeon. For God, in his law and in his gospel, as well as in his providence, considers the poor. It is observable that those creatures were chosen for sacrifice which were most mild and gentle, harmless and inoffensive, to typify the innocence and meekness that were in Christ, and to teach the innocence and meekness that should be in Christians. Directions are here given,

1. Concerning the burnt-offerings of the flock, [#Le 1:10](#). The method of managing these is much the same with that of the bullocks; only it is ordered here that the sacrifice should be killed *on the side of the altar northward*, which, though mentioned here only, was probably to be observed concerning the former, and other sacrifices. Perhaps on that side of the altar there was the largest vacant space, and room for the priests to turn them in. It was of old observed that *fair weather comes out of the north*, and that *the north wind drives away rain*; and by these sacrifices the storms of God's wrath are scattered, and the light of God's countenance is obtained, which is more pleasant than the brightest fairest weather.
2. Concerning those of the fowls. They must be either turtle-doves (and, if so,

"they must be *old* turtles,"

say the Jews), or *pigeons*, and, if so, they must be *young* pigeons. What was most acceptable at men's tables must be brought to God's altar. In the offering of these fowls,

(1.) The head must be wrung off,

"quite off,"

say some; others think only pinched, so as to kill the bird, and yet leave the head hanging to the body. But it seems more likely that it was to be quite separated, for it was to be burnt first.

(2.) The blood was to be *wrung out at the side of the altar*.

(3.) The garbages with the feathers were to be thrown by upon the dunghill.

(4.) The body was to be opened, sprinkled with salt, and then burnt upon the altar.

"This sacrifice of birds," the Jews say, "was one of the most difficult services the priests had to do,"

to teach those that minister in holy things to be as solicitous for the salvation of the poor as for that of the rich, and that the services of the poor are as acceptable to God, if they come from an upright heart, as the services of the rich, for he accepts *according to what a man hath*, and not *according to what he hath not*, [#2Co 8:12](#). The poor man's turtle-doves, or young pigeons, are here said to be *an offering of a sweet-smelling savour*, as much as that of an ox or bullock that hath horns or hoofs. Yet, after all, to *love God with all our heart, and to love our neighbour as ourselves, is better than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices*, [#Mr 12:33](#).