

## Chapter 6: Leviticus

### Key Terms

- atonement: to "pay" for sin by means of sacrifice and offering, as a symbol of repentance and confession before God
- Leviticus: pertaining to the Levites
- Documentary Hypothesis: an approach to the authorship of the Pentateuch associated with source criticism that understands the five books as a patchwork composition of four (or more) literary documents
- tent of meeting: tent where Yahweh met with Moses and delivered parts of the book of Leviticus
- holiness: a term that conveys the idea of separation from the ordinary for service and/or worship to Yahweh
- Sabbath: a day of rest that indicated Israel's special relationship with God and testified that Israel's holiness was rooted in Yahweh, not ritual

### Key Ideas

- The holiness of God.
- The purity of the covenant community.
- The principle of substitution in the sacrificial ritual.
- The principle of mediation in the service of the priests.
- The redeeming of time by means of the liturgical calendar.

### Chapter Summary

This third book of the Pentateuch provides instructions for priestly activity and outlines the standards of holy living for the community. Though the book does not specify its author, the traditional view ascribes the work to Moses, based on the book's own claim. Scholars date the book according to their dating of the exodus. An early exodus places the book in the early stages of the Late Bronze Age, while a late date places the book between the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. Those who adhere to the Documentary Hypothesis ascribe the entirety of Leviticus to the priestly source. The authors of this text argue for Moses as the author, writing during the Sinai sojourn.

The ritual and sacrificial systems prescribed in Leviticus share many similarities to the customs of the ANE. However, the Hebrew system bears several important distinctions, revealing unique theological understandings.

Leviticus picks up where Exodus left off in the narrative of Israel's journey. The book prescribes the procedures for liturgical worship and the regulations for holiness in the community, concluding with the establishment of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel.

Holiness is a central theme of Leviticus. When applied to God, this concept denotes God's separation from his creation; when applied to God's creatures, the concept indicates something that has been set apart for God's service.

The purpose of the sacrificial system was to allow the people to worship God and to maintain his presence in their midst. There were five types of sacrifice in Israel's sacrificial system: (1) cereal or grain offering, (2) fellowship or peace offering, (3) whole burnt offering, (4) sin offering, and (5) guilt or trespass offering. Each had a particular role in the system, though it must be noted that the OT never teaches that sacrifice was intended to save people from sin or gain them entry into heaven. Righteousness came only by faith, even in the OT.

The Sabbath rest was a unique sign of the covenant between Israel and Yahweh that demonstrated to the world that Israel's holiness was rooted in Yahweh, not in ritualistic worship or the keeping of laws. This Sabbath rest extended to the land as well. Sabbaths were intended to foster social and economic equality and to inculcate covenant principles in Hebrew society.