

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

Leviticus and the Critics.

BY THE REV. MARCUS JOHNSON, A.K.C.

II.

IT is a relief to turn from the dry bones of criticism to the living, breathing tissues of the written word of God, and to ask what messages this portion of it has for men to-day. An old book of old laws, whose interest and importance have long since evaporated, many would say. But this will not be the verdict of those who have carefully studied Leviticus; rather is their wonder aroused, their admiration called forth, and their belief in the book's genuineness and inspiration confirmed, for the illustrative or spiritual aspect of this book is far from being without its apologetic value. Powerful arguments are thus supplied in favour of the traditional view of authorship and date. The keynote of Leviticus is "holiness to Jehovah," and its central truth the great doctrine of expiation or substitution, whereby the forfeited life of innocent victims was accepted in place of that of sinful men. This was expressed in the Levitical axiom that "without shedding of blood there is no remission." It will not be forgotten that the author of that wonderful Epistle to the Hebrews (in great part an inspired comment on the principles of the Mosaic law) prominently emphasizes and interprets this axiom, and that it is in that book of the New Testament we read also that without holiness no man shall see the Lord (Heb. ix. 22, xii. 14). For this reason alone the importance and interest of Leviticus can never cease for the Christian world; but, looking more closely into the book, we are able to perceive many more points of instruction which have by no means lost their force to-day. The principles and ritual of the various sacrificial offerings and the great Day of Atonement; the law of the daily life, including the law of holiness; the Divinely appointed feasts; the Bread of the Presence and the penalty for blasphemy; the Sabbatic year and the Jubilee, all

have their antitypical, Christian, and some their still prophetic, teaching for the twentieth century after Christ.

Turning first to the Sacrificial Offerings, it is to be noted that in all the offerings in which blood was shed, and in the case of the goat for Azazel on the Day of Atonement, the offerer had to lay his hands on the head of the victim. That this was not merely significant of ownership, but of a transfer of something invisible—viz., of the sin of the offerer to the victim—seems evident from the fact that this was not done in the case of the bloodless offerings, which were equally the offerer's property. Rabbinical tradition, too, avers that the custom was to accompany this laying on of the hands by an actual confession of sin, of which the form has been preserved. The *burnt-offering*, which was completely consumed by fire—no part being eaten or remaining — taught, evidently, that for acceptable worship complete consecration is necessary, and pointed forward to that Coming One who was to be the perfect example of self-consecration to men. In the fact that a lamb was thus offered morning and evening, the fire never going out, we can see the ever-continued presentation of His unique offering in the heavenly place by man's great Representative and Mediator. The heathen idea latent in sacrificial offering was that man makes a feast for a god; the root idea in the Mosaic peace-offering is that God feasts pardoned man. In this feast the offerer, with all the members of his family, partook of the flesh of the victim at a joyous meal. "The sacrificial feast," it has been truly said, "at which man shall have fellowship with God is provided not by man for God, but by God for man, and is to be eaten, not in our house, but spiritually partaken in the presence of the invisible God" (Kellogg's "Leviticus," p. 92). When we reflect that that sentence is equally true of the Jewish peace-offering and the Christian Eucharist, we see how typical was the peace-offering of the Christian feast and of all the soul's feeding upon the Lamb of God. Any flesh of the victim remaining until the third day was then to be burned, doubtless to prevent the least possible commencement of decomposition,

and, again, to be typical of the Holy One who should be suffered to see no corruption, but rise again on the third day. But two parts of sacrificial animals, even if not offered but consumed at home, might never be eaten, because both were regarded as especially God's—the fat as the best and the blood as the vehicle of life. This last must be drained away, even from an animal taken in hunting, and reverently covered with dust. The law of the *sin-offering* teaches to-day that God, the righteous Judge, distinguishes between sins. All sins were not equally heinous; some, indeed, were so grievous that the Mosaic law provided no offering for them—such were blasphemy, murder, adultery—the law thus leading men to think of the possibility of some better offering for sin than the blood of bulls and of goats yet to come. But for sins of ignorance or rashness, or for offences admitting of reparation, a sin-offering was specified by the law, and the central idea in the offering was expiation by blood presented to Jehovah. It is also most noticeable that whenever other sacrifices were offered, the sin-offering must be always presented first. How significant of the holiness of Him who will by no means clear the guilty, and of the primary necessity of forgiveness before any other transaction between man and God! The value of the offering was determined by the position of the sinner, and so merciful was the law in this particular that if a man could afford no victim at all he might bring an offering of fine meal, the support of one day, rather than not obtain forgiveness of his sins. No sacrificial meal was here. Anything remaining must be burnt without the camp, typical of that One Offering for sin which should be sacrificed outside the city of Jerusalem and cast forth beyond Israel's law and congregation. Because the sin-offering is mentioned late in Israel's history, and seldom referred to before the Exile, the Higher Criticism has decreed that this offering is of post-exilic origin. But apart from the danger of arguing from silence, the hardness of Israel's heart and their inability to understand the holiness of God, or even the constant customariness of the offering, would be sufficient to account for this. The root idea in the necessity

of the *guilt* or *trespass-offering* was that man, having by sin defrauded God of His proper due of service, is God's debtor. It should be particularly observed that this is the special kind of offering that Isaiah prophetically declared Christ should present when He should make His soul a trespass-offering for sin (Isa. liii. 10)—a distinct contradiction of modern Unitarian or Socinian teaching. Before leaving the subject of the sacrificial offerings, it is to be noted that the order in which they were commanded to be offered is in entire accord with that of the spiritual life: first, always, the sin-offering or expiation by shedding of blood, the means of justification; then the burnt-offering, typifying that entire self-dedication which is desired and determined on by one sensible of his forgiveness; next, the meal-offering, or the consecration of what the forgiven sinner *has*, no less than what he *is*; lastly, the peace offering typifying that feeding on Christ than which those who walk by faith can go no higher, and by which spiritual strength is received unto sanctification and full redemption. The origin of so truly spiritual an order is to be sought, surely, in a Divine and not merely a human, if priestly, source.

The ceremonies of the Day of Atonement, the critics insist, are of post-exilic origin. Yet what more natural occasion for the promulgation of this law could there be than that of Lev. xvi. 1, for its central requirement was that Aaron "came not at all times into the holy place within the veil," but once only in the year? The antitypical, Christian correspondence to this annual entrance of the high-priest into the Most Holy Place has been drawn out by the inspired author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (ix. 11, 12, 24, 26; x. 10). Called by the Rabbis *Yom Kippur* (the day) *par excellence*, it is still regarded by them as the day of days. Appointed to be observed in the Sabbatic month (the seventh), the Day of Atonement was closely connected with the most joyous of all the feasts, the Feast of Tabernacles, significant of the fact that only through the forgiveness of all sin can man perfectly rejoice with God. In regard to the ceremonies with the two goats, the sacrifice

here was probably doubled because one animal could not so well set forth the double aspect of both the means and the effect of reconciliation with God. While the death of the first goat emphasized the one great truth of expiation of sin by the shedding of innocent blood, the other being sent into the wilderness signified the entire removal of sin from a forgiven people. This would be the case whether ^{לְאִזָּזֵל} (*Azazel*) signifies merely "removal," "dismissal," as in margin R.V. (Lev. xvi. 8), or is given as a proper name to the "accuser of the brethren" (Rev. xii. 10, 11).

Even that part of the Levitical law which concerns animals and things clean and unclean is not without its bearing on the law's origin. In the light of the investigations and discoveries of modern medical science, the most probable reasons for the distinctions of the Mosaic law between the clean and the unclean appear to be of a hygienic and sanitary character. Particularly it has been shown that in the ancient Hebrew dietary there was avoidance of all animals especially liable to parasitic disease (see Kellogg's "Leviticus," pp. 291, 292). Was such a law, then, which only of late years has been found to possess such striking correspondences with the laws of health, the invention of Jewish priests? Surely not. Even the Egyptian education of Moses is insufficient to account for such knowledge as he, if not Divinely inspired, must have had 3,000 years before his time. The Egyptians, too, far from holding contact with the dead produced defilement, considered the dead sacred. Nor were the dietary laws of the Hebrews the laws of Egypt.

The severity of the penal sanctions in chapter xx. 1-27 may be considered too great in modern times, but the objects no doubt were, first, to uphold the holiness and sovereignty of the Head of the Theocracy, and, secondly, to act as a sure deterrent. The penalty of death by stoning for blasphemy, *e.g.*, was necessary because public and private morality is founded on reverence for God. The consequence in France to-day of the abandonment of all national acknowledgment of God and proscribing of religious teaching in the schools has been

discovered to be that there is no foundation on which to build so necessary a moral instruction for children as obedience to parents. Is it not more likely that man has become too lax than that God was too severe? The Jew has always been known for the comparative purity of his social life; the state of modern society at home or abroad is on a far lower plane. The object of the present age is material well-being; the object which God has shown to be the end of government and life is holiness.

A paper on *Leviticus* would be incomplete without some reference to the Set Feasts of the Lord. A special word (חגים) is applied to these, which number three—a word which, as is shown by its connection with the root חגג, meaning “to dance,” indicates that these three, the Feasts of Unleavened Bread, of Pentecost, and of Tabernacles, were to be special seasons of joy. For the other three feasts the word מועדים (“appointed seasons”) is employed. It has been asserted that the feasts of the Hebrews were merely natural festivals identical with the harvest rejoicings of other nations. But the entire series of Jewish feasts was based upon the weekly Sabbath, the sacred covenant number *seven* appearing everywhere in the whole system of sacred times. Nothing like such a series is found in any form of heathenism. The two Sabbatic ideas are rest and redemption; these, with varying emphasis, appear in the cycle of sacred seasons. In the *Feast of Unleavened Bread* the offering of the sheaf of first-fruits bore witness to the historic origin of the feast when Israel became God’s first-born (Exod. iv. 22), the beginning of the harvest of the nations. But St. Paul has shown us that that festival looked not merely backward, but also forward to Christ in His resurrection, “the first-fruits of them that are asleep” (1 Cor. xv. 20). On the fiftieth day after the presentation of that wave-sheaf fell the *Feast of First-Fruits* or *Weeks* or *Pentecost*. A peculiar feature of this feast was the presentation of two wave-loaves of meal from the new corn, “for first-fruits unto the Lord”—typical, surely, of the conversion of those 3,000 from many lands, and so of the birth of the “Church of the first-

born," as a kind of first-fruits of God's creatures (Jas. i. 18), on the first Christian day of Pentecost. Five days after the Day of Atonement fell the last, and most joyous of all the set feasts, the *Feast of Tabernacles*. The antitype of this still waits, for, as the wave-sheaf at the commencement of harvest foreshadowed Christ risen from the dead, so the Feast of Tabernacles, coming at the conclusion of the year's harvest, looked forward to the completion of the harvest of humanity, when all who, being Christ's, were sown in the earth, shall rise from the dead at His coming; "the holy convocation" of the *eighth* day—always significant of a new era—typifying the new age of the future life and recompense for the toils and pains of earthly life for Christ. In the immediate precedence of this feast by the great day of national humiliation and repentance was doubtless predicted in type that turning to God of the Jews and their acceptance of Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah to which the Hebrew prophet Zechariah and the Christian Apostle St. Paul alike clearly point (Zech. xii. 10, xiii. 1; Rom. xi. 12, 15).

In these days of labour unrest and class division we should be well able to admire the wisdom which framed the laws in connection with the Sabbatic and Jubilee years—laws which removed from poverty much of its crushing and hopeless burden, while putting no premium on indolence or vice. Those notable years in the Mosaic law, and especially the Jubilee, falling as it did on an *eighth* year, bear witness to the future return of Israel to their own land (see Isa. xi. 11), and to a permanently blessed condition, not only for Israel, but for the whole redeemed people of God. Except for its appendix, *Leviticus* closes with mingled threats and promises to that people which still exists as an ethnological miracle in all lands, yet without a land of their own, known and marked, and, alas! too often persecuted and oppressed, and whose ancient country, so rich and fertile, and for centuries lying on one of the world's principal highways of commerce and travel, has yet remained comparatively unoccupied and untilled.

In view of the striking typical and predictive character of the whole Mosaic system of sacrifices, feasts, and seasons, it

remains to ask how, on the critical assumption, came this typical and prophetic element there? Allow a direct revelation of the law by God to Moses and all is at once understood; so much so that we can see that, God being what He is, and man what he is, and the plan of redemption necessary and determined on, God in the Levitical law could not have ordered otherwise than He did, even to the colour of the high-priest's garments. But on the supposition that this law was a fraudulent fabrication of post-exilic priests, whence did they obtain the necessary wisdom and foreknowledge of things to come, even of things that have not yet come to pass? That the God of truth could have chosen such means for communicating to the inner consciousness of the Israelitish race, and through them to all mankind, the fundamental principles of His great scheme of redemption it seems impossible to believe.

One argument for the traditional view remains—the testimony of our Lord to the Mosaic authorship of the law and the Divine revelation contained in it. It may have been no part of His work to decide questions of literary criticism, any more than those of natural science, but He certainly based His belief in the Mosaicity of the Pentateuch upon His Father's revelation inherent in it. Could our Lord have affirmed of a forgery, "Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished" (Matt. v. 18)? Could a fabrication of fallible and fraudulent priests have been that "beginning from" which "He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke xxiv. 27)? Would He have placed, as on the critical theory He did, a man-made edict that he who cursed father and mother should be put to death—a law found only in the so-called priestly code (Exod. xxi. 17; Lev. xx. 9)—on a level with the Fifth Commandment, declaring the former precept of Moses a "commandment of God" which the Jews had made void by their tradition (Matt. xv. 3, 6)? It was Lev. xix. 18, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," with the signature of Jehovah, "I am the Lord," that Christ described as "a

second like unto it" (the first great commandment of the law) (Matt. xxii. 39). Was, then, the moral and spiritual progress of Israel so clear and so great that this summing up of the whole duty of man to man should have been evolved by cunning priests? Did God give the *first* great commandment to Moses and not the *second*? Did Christ falsely or mistakenly call this to the lawyer the *second*—*i.e.*, in the Mosaic law? The law of Leviticus was unquestionably in our Lord's view a revelation for Israel from God. But if Christ could not distinguish between a forgery of late date and His Father's word, how can we be sure He was qualified, as He claimed to be, to give men a perfect revelation of that Father, which was the great object of Christ's coming? No *kenosis* theory is of any use here. He who by His resurrection "was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness" (Rom. i. 4), could not have been deceived upon so vital a point.

