



UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS FOR TODAY

TO: LEGISLATORS

FROM: PASTOR RALPH DROLLINGER 661-803-7970 24/7/365

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In the same-sex marriage debate there is increasing reluctance by believers to mention the Book of Leviticus. In this coming week's study I will attempt to not only familiarize you with this book, but also explain how it positively affects the debate.

Surrounding the prohibited Hebrews were the permissive Canaanites who practiced same-sex marriage. Do you know any Canaanites today? How about Jewish folks? That illustrates the huge error of every society that has allowed sexual predilection to determine marriage privilege. Let me show you what I mean herein.

Many are the simpletons who advocate that "love" should be the sole basis for sanctioning marriage rights. But if "love" is the reason for marriage then how can our courts deny matrimony to a petitioner who loves her cat? Historically our courts have done well to grant this privilege only to one man and one woman. Statistics indicate that it is only this combination that creates societal synergy, stability and sustenance. No other marriage definition affords such positive benefits to a culture. But this truth about marriage is nothing new: Leviticus underscores it!

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BOOKS OF THE BIBLE: LEVITICUS

I. INTRODUCTION

In Genesis 12: 1-3 God promises to Abraham, that He would create a progeny through him, a people set apart for God's own possession and purposes. Along the way, several generations later via the Patriarch Joseph, the great grandson of Abraham, the Hebrews found themselves captive in slavery for over 400 years to the polytheistic, pagan culture of the Ancient Egyptians. It follows when God finally called them out of bondage under Moses' leadership that He had some major reprogramming to do; God's chosen people had absorbed many of the idolatrous, pagan ways of their captors – and who wouldn't over a 400-year period! (This historical snapshot helps to explain why Israel would be susceptible to worshipping a golden calf that they, themselves had fashioned in the wilderness of Sinai).

The other reason God needed to reprogram His people relates to their soon assignment to enter the Promised Land where the depraved, corrupt, anything-goes Canaanites resided. As His people, He wanted them to worship Him in Holiness (cf. Lev. 20:26; 1Pet. 1:16).

**GOD INTENDS TO REPROGRAM ISRAEL
VIA HIS AMAZING BOOK CALLED
LEVITICUS**

This is the third book of the Old Testament immediately following the Book of Exodus wherein the Hebrews have escaped the possession and influence of the Egyptians. In Exodus, Israel receives the Ten Commandments. In Leviticus those Commandments are elaborated on in detail. For instance, the sexual sins listed in Leviticus 18 are an elaboration of the 7th Commandment (“thou shall not commit adultery”) recorded in Exodus 20:14. Much of Leviticus however, as it pertains to the ceremonies and rituals that God demanded of His chosen ones are abrogated in the New

Testament; i.e. God's Old Covenant is replaced by His New Covenant as explained in the NT book of Acts (chapter 2) and Hebrews (chapters 7-10). Nonetheless the spiritual principles that are embedded in the Old Covenant ceremonies, rituals and laws are *timeless* and are brought forward in the New Testament in the New Covenant because they are representative of the very nature of God: Prohibitions of homosexuality and same-sex marriage being prime examples.

Furthermore, many of the ceremonial laws and the prescriptions pertaining to the newly constructed mobile Tabernacle serve as a precursor, analogy and prefiguring of the then still future redemptive work of Christ. Leviticus beautifully pictures the salvific work of the future incarnate Savior.

**II. APPLICATION TO GOVERNING
AUTHORITIES**

As a Bible teacher to very busy people, I often fear that I will lose your attention unless you can immediately grasp how something I teach, such as a survey of an OT Bible book, somehow relates to you (ADD? ☺). Accordingly, before I provide a disciplined, procedural overview of the Book, I will cut to the chase in terms of application – lest you conclude prematurely that Leviticus is an obscure, out of date book. Trust me, there is nothing more relevant – no document shouts louder – at this moment in American history!

The principles that God reveals to the Israelites in Leviticus are intended to separate and protect His people from the past pagan influences of Egypt and the Canaanite paganism that will surround them again in the near future. Note Leviticus 18:3 in this regard:

You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes.



BOOKS OF THE BIBLE: LEVITICUS

In setting the Israelites apart as a people for God's own possession and purposes, it follows that He would instruct Israel, among many other things, to refrain from homosexuality and same-sex marriage. God wanted then, as He does now, for His representatives to be morally differentiated. States Klinghoffer,

An ancient Biblical tradition, a midrash (a midrash is an explanation of a Jewish rabbinic sage), relates that the Canaanites wrote marriage contracts between man and man and woman and woman, and that this was one reason the land "vomited" them up in favor of the Israelites who took their place.¹

Leviticus then represents God's deterrents for God's people. Note in contrast the consequences that God states in 18:24-25 will inure to the Canaanites for practicing deviant sexual behavior:

Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. For the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants.

Unfortunately for Israel, Scripture records repeatedly that they were less than obedient to all the precepts found in Leviticus, (cf. 18:5) and as a result in terms of Israel too, in the future, **the land spewed out its inhabitants**² in the sense of God's people being taken away into Babylonian captivity.

To be sure, years later, upon their return to the land of Canaan, Nehemiah, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit states in retrospect that the reason for Israel's departure was disobedience to God's precepts (cf. Neh. 9:29-31).

On the other hand, when Israel has been obedient, God has greatly prospered her as is remarkably verified in particular eras of history. For instance under the early capable leadership of King Solomon

(cf. 1Kings 10). Even in modern history, God's graciousness, patience and prospering of His people are still in effect. George Gilder illustrates this in his book *The Israel Test*. Herein the author documents the amazing disproportionate contributions the Jews have made to world advancement.³ Keep in mind the Jews make up only a mere *three-tenths of one percent* of the earth's population. What follows is amazing and serves to underscore God's blessing of His people when they are obedient to the timeless spiritual principles revealed in Leviticus – wherein people live holy lives, because God is Holy. Such garners God's blessings! Ponder the wildly disproportionate accomplishments of the Jews in the sidebar below.

EXAMPLES OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OBEDIENCE TO PRECEPTS IN THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS AND JEWISH BLESSING

Jews have contributed some 25 percent of recent notable human-intellectual accomplishment in the modern period.⁴

The achievements of modern science are largely the expression of Jewish genius and ingenuity. If 26 percent of Nobel prizes do not suffice to make the case, it is confirmed by:

- ★ 51 percent of the Wolf Foundation Prizes in Physics
- ★ 28 percent of the Max Planck Medals
- ★ 38 percent of the Dirac Medals for Theoretical Physics
- ★ 37 percent of the Heinemann Prizes for Mathematical Physics
- ★ 53 percent of the Enrico Fermi Awards

Jews are not only superior in abstruse intellectual pursuits, such as quantum physics and nuclear science, they are also heavily overrepresented among entrepreneurs of the technological businesses that lead and leaven the global economy.⁵

**BOOKS OF THE BIBLE: LEVITICUS**

For the sake of making the point, save God's special place and setting apart of the Jews in world history, contemplate the results on the human side of a nation either choosing or not choosing to be obedient to the instructions found in the fascinating Book of Leviticus. Ensuing Jewish accomplishments serve to underscore the importance of a nation's alignment with the spiritual principles found in this book. The Jews, the recipients of Leviticus, have greatly advanced the world whereas in stark contrast, the Canaanites who were disobedient to the commandments of this book are now an extinct people! McGee elaborates in regards to the prohibited sexual sins listed in Leviticus 18, "These are the sins which mark a decadent society and the decline and fall of empires (e.g. Babylon, Persia, Egypt, Greece, Rome and France)."⁶ Such historic, recurring national lessons makes it clear: All nations, especially America at a time when it is contemplating legalizing same-sex marriage need be informed and obey the timeless spiritual principles that are found in the Book of Leviticus!

Woe to those nations that are not informed by the timeless spiritual principles found in the Book of Leviticus! Therein are God's specific guidelines for either national prosperity or else national disgorgement. To reject the clear instruction of Leviticus 18:22 which states,

You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination.

and instead reward those who practice such things with the governmentally endowed privileges associated with marital status is to choose a path toward extinction similar to the Canaanites. It is foolish for the highest court of our land to even ponder turning their back on Leviticus! May we instead, in understanding its message for today, choose the path of prosperity via obedience. All members of the Government, the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches, be ye warned

herein by what God says to you today via His Word:

**OUR NATION'S OBEDIENCE OR
DISOBEDIENCE TO GOD'S LAWS IN
TERMS OF SAME SEX MARRIAGE
REPRESENTS A TIPPING POINT WITH
ENORMOUS, ENORMOUS
CONSEQUENCES**

States Wenham "the order of the laws of Leviticus 18-20 is significant. These chapters set out the foundation principles of social morality." Wenham goes on to quote Hertz to make his point:

The first place among these [chapters 18 to 20] is given to the institution of marriage.... the cornerstone of all human society.... any violation of the sacred character of marriage is deemed a heinous offence, calling down the punishment of Heaven both upon the offender and the society that condones the offence.⁷

That is a profoundly sobering truth! Hear ye, hear ye! This is by far the most relevant application of the book today for public servants. Executives, Legislators and Judicials: Obey ye today the precepts of the Lord or experience His wrath and be spewed out of the land! This is the application; this is a profoundly serious moment in our history.

Now let's continue with an overall understanding and survey of Leviticus. May God give you greater comprehension, understanding, heart growth and conviction as you study what follows.

III. NAME

As with the two preceding OT books, their original Hebrew names were all derived from the first words in the book. Genesis was originally called "In the beginning"; Exodus was originally called "Now these are the names"; and Leviticus was called, "And He called." The present name of the book of Leviticus, *Leuitikon*, was gleaned from the Latin Vulgate version of the Greek OT (i.e. published in



BOOKS OF THE BIBLE: LEVITICUS

the 2nd Century B.C., the Septuagint, abbreviated as “LXX” was necessary to keep Judaism alive during the Diaspora wherein many Jews lived in Greek culture). The LXX name means “Matters of the Levites.”

The Levites were the chosen tribe amongst the twelve tribes of Israel assigned with the priestly duties. The book of Leviticus discloses how God desires the Levites to assist the other tribes with properly worshipping Yahweh (so it is similar in a sense to the Pastoral Epistles of the NT wherein God instructs Pastors as to how they ought to lead the Church). More broadly it reveals how God intends for all the tribes both individually and as a whole to live holy lives before Holy God. The NT writers quote the Book of Leviticus at least 15 times.

IV. AUTHOR AND DATE

The author of the book is conclusively revealed in the last verse of the book, “These are the commandments which the Lord commanded Moses for the sons of Israel at Mount Sinai” (27:34; cf. 7:38; 25:1; 26:46). The book states no less than 56 times that God gave these laws to Moses.

In that the Exodus occurred in 1445 B.C., and that the Tabernacle (Israel’s mobile, central, physical focal point for worshipping God) according to Exodus 40:17 was finished one year later, the book dates to 1446 B.C. Leviticus picks up the historical narrative once the Tabernacle is finished in the preceding Book of Exodus.

The book chronicles only one month of Israel’s existence, in that the Book of Numbers (the fourth book of the Torah) per Numbers 1:1, begins after the second month of the year after the Tabernacle was completed.

V. BACKGROUND

As stated previously, Israel had lost its understanding of how to worship God; they had

little in the way of a historical understanding from their Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph) who lived prior to the most recent 400 years of their Egyptian bondage.

Now they were gone from Egypt, God having miraculously delivered them via the crossing through the Red Sea, and encamped at the base of Mount Sinai. There God gave them His Ten Commandments as recorded in the Book of Exodus. By the end of the Book of Exodus, as mentioned previously, the construction of the Tabernacle had been completed and the glory of God had come to indwell it.

As the 12 tribes begin to develop into a nation, God’s next step was to create a formal priesthood and set aside Tabernacle workers who could instruct the other 11 Tribes in the proper worship of God via Sacrifices and Offerings (all of which in a temporal sense, prefigure the coming, finishing work of Christ in terms of God’s means of forever atoning for the sin of man). The Book of Leviticus then, is the instruction and inauguration of the Priests and the Sacrifices in the Tabernacle. The book is intended to bring order to an impure people (cf. Exodus 32:7-8; 25-28), shape them up, and prepare them for the future conquest of Canaan, the entrance into the Promise Land, and the fulfillment of God’s original promises to Abraham.

There is no geographical movement of Israel during the one-month period recorded in this Book; during this time they remained encamped at the base of Mount Sinai, where they had received the Ten Commandments and had constructed the Tabernacle.

VI. EMPHASIS AND THEMES

This book reveals God’s emphasis on demanding that His people be Holy. He is meticulous about this! Some of the authoritatively toned passages regarding this are 11:44-45; 19:2; and 20:7 & 26. In response to the Holy character of God, His chosen

**BOOKS OF THE BIBLE: LEVITICUS**

people should be the same. To make the point, “I am the Lord” and “I am Holy” are utilized in the book over 50 times.

Further, and as underscored previously, Leviticus forecasts the consequences of obedience and disobedience to God’s Holiness. In this regard it is a preamble for the later illustration of its truths in Israel’s Babylonian Captivity, wherein their disobedience results in the temporary loss of their nationhood.

Lastly, the various sacrifices and offerings recorded in the book are symbolic. By observing the Levitical rituals a truly humble worshipper of Yahweh could outwardly express his inward devotion. Amos 5:21-27 indicates however, that when the heart was not right in the worshipper, the ritual was displeasing to God.

VI. INTERPRETIVE CHALLENGES

This book contains much Old Covenant ritual; it is difficult to understand the ceremonies, laws and formalities today. Note however, importantly, that the NT clearly abrogates OT ceremonial law in Acts 10:1-16 and Colossians 2:16-17. The Levitical Priesthood is also done away with in 1Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10 and 20:6, and the idea/concept of Tabernacle/Temple ends as recorded in Matthew 27:51 (in the New Covenant God now inhabits the believer through the indwelling Holy Spirit).

In that God inaugurates a New Covenant in Matthew 26:18; 2Corinthians 3:6-18 and Hebrews 7 to 10, one should look to these OT matters with an eye for the principle behind them. What portion of divine character is revealed by this Old Covenant ritual, law or ceremony? That is the question to ask of the text when studying Leviticus. What are the embedded, timeless principles that speak to the character of God? The student of Scripture will find that the *timeless* principles and precepts, apart from the rituals will be repeated in the New Testament. This makes for adventurous study of

the Bible, matching the OT teachings with the NT. Such is certainly the case with the sexual sins listed detailed in Leviticus 20.

VII. OUTLINE

Chapters 1-16 explain how one appropriately worships and has access to the one true God. Chapters 17-27 detail what an obedient walk with God looks like.

VIII. SUMMARY

Several weeks ago I did a specific study on the Bible and same-sex marriage. In that study I made brief mention of Leviticus. What I said however relates well to how one should summarily respond to another who questions what Leviticus means by what it says. Note the following sidebar response that I included in that study:

LEVITICUS AND ARGUING ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

Advocates for same-sex marriage have attempted to put words in the mouth of Christian legislators. They often insinuate that Christians believe it is proper to stone homosexuals because that’s what the Israelites did in Leviticus (cf. 20:13). The response to such conjecture is quite simple.

Ask the following question in response: “Do you believe a specific act found in Leviticus is applicable for today, outside of the context of Ancient Israel?” If they answer “yes” then say, “I don’t.” If they answer “no” then say, “I agree.” Either way the argument is over.

You might want to add or clarify, “Is everything in the Bible that was stated in God’s Old Covenant about Ancient Israel repeated in the New Covenant about the Church?” No, it is not. For instance, Jesus deals differently with the adulterous sin of the woman at the well. Whereas the Israelites stoned adulterers, Jesus said, “Go and sin no more” (cf.



BOOKS OF THE BIBLE: LEVITICUS

John 4). Israel and the Church are distinguishably different entities in Scripture.

The corporeal punishment, or putting to death a man who lies with a male is not a tenet found recurring in the age in which we live, the Church Age of the Bible; the NT *does not* reiterate this practice for this day and age. However, the New Testament most certainly *does* reiterate and uphold the present prohibition of homosexuality.

IT IS NAÏVE, IF NOT DISINGENUOUS, TO FALSELY INSINUATE THAT CHRISTIAN LEGISLATORS HOLD TO A BELIEF THAT GOVERNMENTS TODAY SHOULD STONE HOMOSEXUALS

On the other end of the biblical illiteracy spectrum are those who suggest that homosexuality is no longer prohibited because Israel's holiness code is now obsolete. Both of these suppositions stem from a biblical ignorance stemming from a chronological and covenantal misunderstanding of Ancient Israel and the Church today. Such a lack of knowledge is unfortunately too common with journalists and secular lawmakers. (Challenge them to begin attending a good Bible study that may lead to their salvation: 1Corinthians 2:14 states in this regard, "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, *and he cannot understand them*, because they are spiritually appraised." Emphasis mine).

Hopefully this overview of Leviticus will add more understanding and agility in applying God's Word to the present Supreme Court debate regarding this tipping point in American culture.

¹<http://blog.beliefnet.com/kingdomofpriests/2009/04/canaanites-for-same-sex-marriage.html#ixzz2R0vsuPIZ>

² Notice this is a synonym to the earlier statement in the passage wherein God says, "which I am casting out before you." The land "spewing out its inhabitants" then is a euphemistic alternative expression to God's manifest judgment, versus interpreting this phrase as some kind of natural disaster apart from God's direct orchestration. The

prior synonym does not allow for that interpretation of the meaning of "the land spewing out." God can and does manifest "spewing out" in at least three ways: (1) Captivity by another nation: Such would be the case later on in association with Israel's disobedience to Levitical guidelines while residing in the land of Canaan. In essence they were "spewed out" when carried away into Babylonian captivity by an outside force they could not resist. (2) It could take the form of God's cataclysmic wrath, as was the case with the rebellion of Korah: The earth opened up and swallowed Korah and his insurgent cronies (cf. Numbers 16:16-24). God can orchestrate other forms of cataclysmic wrath, such as droughts, hailstorms, earthquakes, tornadoes and their likes. (3) Yet another way in which the land, via the orchestration of God, spews out its inhabitants is through God's wrath of reaping and sowing: When immoral people wreak havoc on their surrounding environment. Selfishness breeds omnibus bad stewardship, which includes the abuse of horticultural potential in surrounding lands. It follows that such people end up having to move in order to find a new food sources.

³ Richard Vigilante Books
(www.richardvigilantebooks.com) Copyright 2009 by George Gilder.

⁴ Ibid., Page 34, Location 418

⁵ Ibid., Page 35, location 427

⁶ McGee, Vernon J. *Learning Through Leviticus, Volume II* (Thru the Bible Books, Pasadena, 1980) p 38.

⁷ Hertz, J. *Milgrom Interpretation, A Prolegomenon to Leviticus 17:11*, JBL 90 (1971) p 172, as quoted by Wenham, Gordon J *The Book of Leviticus, The New International Commentary on The Old Testament* (Eerdmans, Michigan, 1979) p 250