

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today we will learn how the book of LEVITICUS came into being, its character as divine revelation, its division into seven main parts and its main difference with the religious rituals of the other nations.

### **POINT 1. THE ORIGIN OF LEVITICUS**

#### **First. The name of the book.**

The Old Testament was originally written in the Hebrew language. In the Hebrew Bible, the first five books form a unity and each book is called by its first words. So in Hebrew, this book is called “and he called”, referring to the Lord’s call of Moses. The oldest translation of the Hebrew Old Testament was in the Greek language. In the Greek translation this book is called “Leviticon”, referring to the Levitical priesthood (Hebr 7:11).

#### **Second. The writer, the date and the place of writing.**

From the book of Leviticus it is clear that Israel was still living in tents in a camp and in the desert. Certain parts of the sacrifices had to be burned outside the camp (4:12; 14:8). People with infectious diseases had to live outside the camp until the priest had examined them and declared them healed (13:46; 14:3). The scapegoat, on which all the sins, wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites was laid, was released in a solitary place in the desert (16:21-22). The Israelites were forbidden to make any sacrifices inside or outside the camp, except at “the Tent of Meeting” (17:3-4). From the book of Leviticus it is also clear that Israel was on its way to the land of Canaan where idolatrous and wicked nations lived (18:3,24). All these conditions point to the time when Moses led Israel to the Promised Land. Leviticus 26:46 and 27:34 clearly state that the regulations given in the book of Leviticus was given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Exodus 40:17 and Numbers 1:1 indicate that Israel stayed for one month at Mount Sinai. Thus we conclude that Leviticus was recorded by Moses in the month of April, 1444 B.C.

#### **Third. The character of the book.**

Like Genesis and Exodus, Leviticus is the result of God’s *revelation*. The book begins with the words, “The Lord called Moses and spoke to him from ‘the tent of meeting’. He said, ‘Speak to the Israelites and say to them’.” Then the Lord gave Moses instructions concerning the sacrifices. No less than 38 times we read the statement, “the Lord said to Moses” or “the Lord said to Moses and Aaron”. *No other book in the Bible is so full of direct messages from the Lord.*

### **POINT 2. THE DIVISION OF LEVITICUS**

The book of Leviticus may be divided into seven parts as follows:

#### **The first part of Leviticus** consists of chapters 1-7.

It regulates *the different offerings* that Israel had to bring in order to have fellowship with God. It regulates the circumstances under which each offering should be brought and the way in which it should be brought. There are five different kinds of offerings: the burnt offering, the grain offering, the peace (fellowship) offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering. Leviticus 6:8-7:38 regulates what the priests should do and what their share of the offering is.

#### **The second part of Leviticus** consists of chapters 8-10.

It regulates *the priesthood* in Israel. It describes the ordination of the first priests, Aaron and his sons, and the tragic death of Aaron’s oldest two sons.

#### **The third part of Leviticus** consists of chapters 11-15.

It regulates *ceremonial (ritual) cleanliness*. Israel must keep itself away from all ceremonial unclean things. Leviticus lists all kinds of food, which is regarded as ceremonially clean and unclean (11). It regulates how a person after childbirth may become ceremonially clean again (12). It regulates how people with infectious diseases, clothes and buildings that were contaminated by mildew, may again become ceremonially clean (13-14). And it regulates how people, who have sexual emissions or show symptoms of having some kind of sexual disease, may again become ceremonially clean (15).

#### **The fourth part of Leviticus** consists of chapters 16-17.

It regulates *the bringing of sacrifices* to the Tent of Meeting. Nobody, except the high priest on the Day of Atonement once a year, may appear before the Lord in ‘the Most Holy Place’ behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark. Nobody may sacrifice anywhere inside or outside the camp, except in front of the Tent of Meeting. It also forbids the eating of blood.

**The fifth part of Leviticus** consists of chapters 18-20.

It regulates *the relationships towards family members, the neighbour and the alien* living in the midst of Israel. It lists very clearly all unlawful sexual relationships (18). It lists various laws of holiness, truthfulness and fairness towards the neighbour as well as laws forbidding all forms of spiritism, sorcery and occultism (19). It also lists the punishments for violating these laws, especially the punishments for idolatry, occultism, sexual perversion and rebellion against parents (20).

**The sixth part of Leviticus** consists of chapters 21-25.

It regulates *the ceremonial life* of Israel. The purpose of the ceremonial law in the Old Testament was to teach God's people how to approach God in worship. The ceremonial law consisted of holy people: the priests and Levites; a holy place: the Tent of Meeting and later the temple; holy actions like the animal and grain sacrifices, the share of the harvest, the first-born son, circumcision and clean foods; and holy times: the Sabbath and festivals. This part of Leviticus gives laws for the priesthood (21) and for unacceptable sacrifices (22). It regulates Israel's holy seasons (times) and yearly festivals. There were five yearly festivals, namely the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles. There is one weekly festival called the Sabbath and two seasonal festivals called the Sabbath Year, which occurred every seventh year, and the Year of Jubilee, which occurred every fiftieth year. To this section is added chapter 24, which gives additional regulations about the Tent of Meeting and especially about the death penalty and some laws of restitution when a person has caused damages.

**The seventh part of Leviticus** consists of chapters 26-27.

This is a closing chapter and an addition. Chapter 26 was originally intended to be the closing chapter and emphasises God's reward for obedience and God's punishment for disobedience. Chapter 27 is a later addition to the book giving laws about redeeming people who have made a special vow to the Lord.

### **POINT 3. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE OLD TESTAMENT CEREMONIAL LAWS AND RITUALS AND THAT OF THE HEATHEN NATIONS.**

Leviticus 18-20 contains various moral laws like those in the Ten Commandments. The moral laws stress living *a holy life!* Leviticus 19:2 says, "Be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy". You can always tell the character of someone's god by looking at the way that person worships and lives. The worship and life of the Canaanite nations were wicked, cruel and immoral. Their gods were also full of wickedness, cruelty and immorality. These gods demanded sacrifice of children and sponsored temple prostitution. In contrast the God of the Bible is alive, morally pure and holy. The God of the Bible demands that his people worship and live in accordance with his character!

Leviticus contains ceremonial laws concerning priests, sacrifices, clean food and religious festivals. Why did the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Bible, give a place to ceremonial laws and rituals, which were also found in other nations in the world? The answer is that the Holy Spirit intended to teach God's people how to approach God in worship and life. The Holy Spirit intended to teach them that *the God of the Bible is the controlling centre of everything, that he is the final goal of every action on earth and that he is the Saviour of the total man.*

What were the differences between the ceremonial laws and rituals of Israel and that of the other nations?

**First. The Old Testament ceremonies were very different.**

While the religious ceremonies of the nations depended on magical rites, the Old Testament ceremonies *depended on the inner attitude of the heart.* The Old Testament ceremonial (ritual) law of Israel regulated the worship of a holy God. Its purpose was to regulate how sinful man could approach a holy God. It consisted of four parts. There were laws with respect to *holy places* like the Tent of Meeting and later the temple. There were laws with respect to *holy people* like the priests and the Levites. There were laws with respect to *holy actions*, like circumcision, eating clean foods, bringing sacrifices, tithes and harvest offerings. And there were laws with respect to *holy times (seasons)*, like the Sabbath, the festivals and the fasts. While the religious life was essentially a matter of the individual, the rituals were a matter of the whole community. Therefore the value of these rituals depended on the extent to which they were an expression of the sincere spiritual life of the individual!

The prophet Samuel teaches this truth in 1 Samuel 15:22 when he says: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in *obeying the voice of the Lord?* To obey is better than sacrifice." King David teaches this truth in Psalm 51:16-17 by saying: "You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; *a broken and contrite heart,* O God, you will not despise." And Moses teaches that God demands, "*Circumcise your hearts* and do not be stiff-necked any longer!" (Dt 10:16) The Bible says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb 11:6). The Old Testament religious ceremonies without a changed heart and without faith were completely useless!

### **Second. The Old Testament Tent of Meeting or temple was very different.**

While the temples of the nations were places of idols, the Old Testament Tent of Meeting or temple was *the visible dwelling of the living God*. While despicable idols filled the temples and shrines of the nations, only the glory of the living God would once in a while descend on the Tent of Meeting in a cloud. In the Old Testament, the God of the Bible never acknowledged the existence of any other god. He says, "Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I am the LORD and apart from me there is no saviour" (Isa 43:10-11). While millions of people every year flock to particular religious shrines and buildings in particular religious cities, the God of the Bible is not worshipped at any particular place on earth. After the first coming of Jesus Christ also the temple had finished its purpose. Paul says in Acts 17:24, "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and *does not live in temples built by hands*".

### **Third. The Old Testament priests were very different.**

While the priests of the nations were regarded as loaded with magical powers to manipulate the gods, the Old Testament priests were only servants of the living God. The priests of the heathen nations were regarded as people with visionary and magical powers. They were wonder-doctors or witch-doctors, or bearers of some secret, mysterious and magical knowledge. In contrast, the Old Testament priests were appointed by God to be *mediators between the people and God*. Their first task was to preserve God's Word, to guard God's covenant, to teach God's laws to the people (Dt 33:9-10) and to bless the people (Dt 10:8). Their second task was to be righteous judges and make fair decisions in disputes. In these two tasks the priests *represented God with the people*. They spoke on behalf of God to the people. Their third task was to bring the offerings of the people to God (Dt 33:10). Their fourth task was to worship God with songs and prayers and pray for the people to God. In these two tasks the priests *represented the people with God*.

In the book of Genesis, Abraham still built his own altars and brought his own offerings to God (Gen 12:7). But in the books of Exodus (Ex 28:1) and Leviticus, these functions belonged only to the priests, who were appointed by God from the tribe of Levi. Although Leviticus 1:5 shows that the ordinary people still brought their offerings to the tent of meeting, slaughtered, skinned and removed the intestines themselves, it is clear that the priests were appointed to actually present these offerings to the Lord.

### **Fourth. The Old Testament offerings were very different.**

While the offerings of the nations were regarded as food or gifts to the gods, the Old Testament sacrifices were only for the atonement of sin!

#### **The Old Testament offerings were not regarded as food for God.**

The nations often regarded their sacrifices as food for their gods. Israel still used ancient sacrificial terminology, like "a food-offering by fire" (Lev 3:11) and "the Lord's table" (Mal 1:7). They added "salt" to the meat offering and "oil" to the flour offering, because some of the offerings became the share of the priests. But no where in the Old Testament do we find the idea that the God of the Bible needs our food. Acts 17:25 clearly teaches that the God who made the heavens and the earth "is *not served by human hands, as if he needed anything*, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else."

#### **The Old Testament offerings were not regarded as gifts to God.**

The nations often regarded their sacrifices as gifts to their gods in order to appease them. But the Old Testament teaches that the offerings were *not gifts of man to God, but rather were God's gracious gifts to man*. God had graciously given the institution of sacrifices to man as the way in which sinful people could have access to God and fellowship with God. God had given the blood of creatures *to make atonement for man's sins*. In Leviticus 17:11 we read, "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and *I have given it to you to make atonement* for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." Therefore, the Old Testament offerings were not the result of man trying to climb up to the unknown God, but rather the way in which the God of the Bible came down to man to reconcile man to himself. The offerings were meant to teach man that *only by death could man gain life* and gain a relationship with God. The Old Testament offerings were therefore the visible means of God's grace.

#### **The Old Testament offerings were not regarded to have magical power.**

The sacrifices of the nations were regarded to have magical power to manipulate the gods and to force reconciliation between the gods and people. The sacrifices of the nations could control the minds of their gods and the lack of sacrifices could make those gods very angry and revengeful. But in the Old Testament the offerings had no magical power at all. God instituted the offerings and controlled their functioning.

Of course, God is able to show grace without any offerings. He did that after Israel had broken the covenant by making the golden calf (Ex 32:30f). But God instituted the sacrifices to teach people that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Lev 17:11; Heb 9:22). The Old Testament sacrifices were a *shadow* pointing forward to the sacrifice of atonement that Jesus Christ brought on the cross.

And of course, God also has the right and power to reject the offerings that people bring. God says in Isaiah 1:13, “Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me.” The value of the Old Testament offerings depended on *the attitude of the heart and the sincerity of behaviour!*

**Fifth. The Old Testament people bringing offerings were very different.**

While the bringing of sacrifices among the nations was an exclusive privilege for kings and priests, every person in the Old Testament could bring a sacrifice. Among the nations, often only their kings and priests were worthy of bringing sacrifices to their gods. This was because the king was regarded as related to his god and the priest was regarded as possessing secret knowledge to open the way to the gods.

However, in the Old Testament the king was no more than any ordinary citizen. He was as it were taken from pasturing sheep in the field to pasture God’s people (2 Sam 7:8). The king was subject to God’s Law just like all the other citizens in Israel.

Also the priest in the Old Testament was nothing more than a member of an ordinary family, called by God “to minister in the Holy Place” (Ex 28:43). Leviticus 1:1-9 teaches clearly that in the Old Testament, the ordinary people knew God’s laws and ceremonies, brought an animal without defect to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, laid their hand on the head of the animal to signify that it would make atonement for sin on their behalf, slaughtered it, skinned it and cut it into pieces.

**Sixth. The Old Testament ceremonial law was very different.**

While the rituals of the nations were the product of some priestly class of people, the book of Leviticus was God’s revelation. While the rituals of the nations were often individual, family or clan rituals how to appease the gods, the ceremonial law was the same for the whole nation of Israel and taught people how to approach and worship God. While the anger of the gods of the nations was despotic and purely arbitrary, the wrath of the God of the Bible was caused only by disobedience and disrespect towards God’s clearly revealed will that usually resulted in failing to live a holy life.

**ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. During the next week, read Numbers 1-12. After two weeks we will introduce the book of Numbers.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and build Christ’s Church” and Internet on [www.dota.net](http://www.dota.net)

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.