



TEACH THE TEXT  
COMMENTARY SERIES

# Leviticus and Numbers

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# Welcome to the Teach the Text Commentary Series

Why another commentary series? That was the question the general editors posed when Baker Books asked us to produce this series. Is there something that we can offer to pastors and teachers that is not currently being offered by other commentary series, or that can be offered in a more helpful way? After carefully researching the needs of pastors who teach the text on a weekly basis, we concluded that yes, more can be done; the Teach the Text Commentary Series (TTCS) is carefully designed to fill an important gap.

The technicality of modern commentaries often overwhelms readers with details that are tangential to the main purpose of the text. Discussions of source and redaction criticism, as well as detailed surveys of secondary literature, seem far removed from preaching and teaching the Word. Rather than wade through technical discussions, pastors often turn to devotional commentaries, which may contain exegetical weaknesses, misuse the Greek and Hebrew languages, and lack hermeneutical sophistication. There is a need for a commentary

that utilizes the best of biblical scholarship but also presents the material in a clear, concise, attractive, and user-friendly format.

This commentary is designed for that purpose—to provide a ready reference for the exposition of the biblical text, giving easy access to information that a pastor needs to communicate the text effectively. To that end, the commentary is divided into carefully selected preaching units, each covered in six pages (with carefully regulated word counts both in the passage as a whole and in each subsection). Pastors and teachers engaged in weekly preparation thus know that they will be reading approximately the same amount of material on a week-by-week basis.

Each passage begins with a concise summary of the central message, or “Big Idea,” of the passage and a list of its main themes. This is followed by a more detailed interpretation of the text, including the literary context of the passage, historical background material, and interpretive insights. While drawing on the best of biblical scholarship, this material is clear, concise,

and to the point. Technical material is kept to a minimum, with endnotes pointing the reader to more detailed discussion and additional resources.

A second major focus of this commentary is on the preaching and teaching process itself. Few commentaries today help the pastor/teacher move from the meaning of the text to its effective communication. Our goal is to bridge this gap. In addition to interpreting the text in the “Understanding the Text” section, each six-page unit contains a “Teaching the Text” section and an “Illustrating the Text” section. The teaching section points to the key theological

themes of the passage and ways to communicate these themes to today’s audiences. The illustration section provides ideas and examples for retaining the interest of hearers and connecting the message to daily life.

The creative format of this commentary arises from our belief that the Bible is not just a record of God’s dealings in the past but is the living Word of God, “alive and active” and “sharper than any double-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12). Our prayer is that this commentary will help to unleash that transforming power for the glory of God.

The General Editors

# Introduction to the Teach the Text Commentary Series

This series is designed to provide a ready reference for teaching the biblical text, giving easy access to information that is needed to communicate a passage effectively. To that end, the commentary is carefully divided into units that are faithful to the biblical authors' ideas and of an appropriate length for teaching or preaching.

The following standard sections are offered in each unit.

1. *Big Idea*. For each unit the commentary identifies the primary theme, or “Big Idea,” that drives both the passage and the commentary.
2. *Key Themes*. Together with the Big Idea, the commentary addresses in bullet-point fashion the key ideas presented in the passage.
3. *Understanding the Text*. This section focuses on the exegesis of the text and includes several sections.
  - a. *The Text in Context*. Here the author gives a brief explanation of how the unit fits into the flow of the text around it, including reference to the rhetorical strategy of the book and the unit's contribution to the purpose of the book.
  - b. *Outline/Structure*. For some literary genres (e.g., epistles), a brief exegetical outline may be provided to guide the reader through the structure and flow of the passage.
  - c. *Historical and Cultural Background*. This section addresses historical and cultural background information that may illuminate a verse or passage.
  - d. *Interpretive Insights*. This section provides information needed for a clear understanding of the passage. The intention of the author is to be highly selective and concise rather than exhaustive and expansive.
  - e. *Theological Insights*. In this very brief section the commentary identifies a few carefully selected theological insights about the passage.



4. *Teaching the Text.* Under this second main heading the commentary offers guidance for teaching the text. In this section the author lays out the main themes and applications of the passage. These are linked carefully to the Big Idea and are represented in the Key Themes.
5. *Illustrating the Text.* At this point in the commentary the writers partner with a team of pastor/teachers to pro-

vide suggestions for relevant and contemporary illustrations from current culture, entertainment, history, the Bible, news, literature, ethics, biography, daily life, medicine, and over forty other categories. They are designed to spark creative thinking for preachers and teachers and to help them design illustrations that bring alive the passage's key themes and message.

# Abbreviations

## Old Testament

Gen.	Genesis	2 Chron.	2 Chronicles	Dan.	Daniel
Exod.	Exodus	Ezra	Ezra	Hosea	Hosea
Lev.	Leviticus	Neh.	Nehemiah	Joel	Joel
Num.	Numbers	Esther	Esther	Amos	Amos
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Job	Job	Obad.	Obadiah
Josh.	Joshua	Ps(s).	Psalms	Jon.	Jonah
Judg.	Judges	Prov.	Proverbs	Mic.	Micah
Ruth	Ruth	Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	Nah.	Nahum
1 Sam.	1 Samuel	Song	Song of Songs	Hab.	Habakkuk
2 Sam.	2 Samuel	Isa.	Isaiah	Zeph.	Zephaniah
1 Kings	1 Kings	Jer.	Jeremiah	Hag.	Haggai
2 Kings	2 Kings	Lam.	Lamentations	Zech.	Zechariah
1 Chron.	1 Chronicles	Ezek.	Ezekiel	Mal.	Malachi

## New Testament

Matt.	Matthew	Eph.	Ephesians	Heb.	Hebrews
Mark	Mark	Phil.	Philippians	James	James
Luke	Luke	Col.	Colossians	1 Pet.	1 Peter
John	John	1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians	2 Pet.	2 Peter
Acts	Acts	2 Thess.	2 Thessalonians	1 John	1 John
Rom.	Romans	1 Tim.	1 Timothy	2 John	2 John
1 Cor.	1 Corinthians	2 Tim.	2 Timothy	3 John	3 John
2 Cor.	2 Corinthians	Titus	Titus	Jude	Jude
Gal.	Galatians	Philem.	Philemon	Rev.	Revelation

## General

ca.	circa	lit.	literally
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare	mg	margin
chap(s).	chapter(s)	p(p).	page(s)
col(s).	column(s)	rev.	revised
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example	s.v.	<i>sub verbo</i> , under the word
esp.	especially	v(v).	verse(s)
ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> , in the same source		

## Ancient Texts, Text Types, and Versions

LXX Septuagint  
MT Masoretic Text

## Modern Versions

CEV Contemporary English Version  
CJB Complete Jewish Bible  
ESV English Standard Version  
HCSB Holman Christian Standard Bible  
KJV King James Version  
Message The Message  
NASB New American Standard Bible  
NCV New Century Version  
NEB New English Bible  
NET New English Translation (The NET Bible)  
NIV New International Version  
NJPS *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text*  
NKJV New King James Version  
NLT New Living Translation  
NRSV New Revised Standard Version  
REB Revised English Bible  
RSV Revised Standard Version  
TEV Today's English Version

## Greek and Latin Works

### Diodorus

*Bib. hist.* *Bibliotheca historica (Historical Library)*

### Herodotus

*Hist.* *Historiae (Histories)*

### Josephus

*Ant.* *Jewish Antiquities*  
*J.W.* *Jewish War*

### Pliny the Elder

*Nat.* *Naturalis historia (Natural History)*

### Porphyry

*Abst.* *De abstinentia (On Abstinence)*

## Secondary Sources

*ABD* *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992

*BDB* Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford, 1907

*CAD* *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. Chicago, 1956–

*HALOT* Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden, 1994–99

*IDB* *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by G. A. Buttrick. 4 vols. Nashville, 1962

*ISBE* *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Edited by G. W. Bromiley. 4 vols. Grand Rapids, 1979–88

*NBD* *New Bible Dictionary*. Edited by J. D. Douglas, N. Hillyer, and D. R. W. Wood. 3rd ed. Downers Grove, IL, 1996

*NIDB* *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld. 5 vols. Nashville, 2006–9

*NIDOTTE* *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Edited by W. A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, 1997

*TDOT* *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Edited by G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H.-J. Fabry. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 15 vols. Grand Rapids, 1974–2006

*TLOT* *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Edited by E. Jenni, with assistance from C. Westermann. Translated by M. E. Bidle. 3 vols. Peabody, MA, 1997

# Introduction to Leviticus

Leviticus is among the least appreciated books of the Christian canon. Nonetheless, it is essential for biblical theology. In particular, Leviticus speaks of the concept of the holiness of God and the need for atoning sacrifice for sin. That in turn provides the conceptual framework for understanding the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

## Title

The title “Leviticus” is derived through the Latin Vulgate from the early Greek translation, the Septuagint, that labels this book *Leuitikon*, “Pertaining to Levi” (i.e., the priestly tribe). This is somewhat misleading because much of the book is in fact addressed to the laity. The title in Hebrew is *wayyiqra* (“and he called”), the first word of the book in Hebrew.

## Setting

The book of Leviticus continues the story of Exodus. Exodus ends with Israel at Sinai having built the tabernacle. Leviticus tells Israel how to use the tabernacle they just

built. Narratives in Leviticus take place at Mount Sinai, where God gives Moses further instructions.

## Outline of Leviticus

Leviticus can be outlined as follows:

1. Sacrificial system (Lev. 1–7)
2. Priesthood (Lev. 8–10)
3. Impurity system (Lev. 11–15)
4. Day of Atonement (Lev. 16)
5. Laws of holiness (Lev. 17–27)

John Walton has proposed an outline based on the concept of preserving and maintaining sacred space.<sup>1</sup> In this outline certain procedures and qualifications maintain the divine equilibrium of sacred space against sin and impurity: sacrifices, priesthood, purity regulations for the camp, and the Day of Atonement ritual that resets the equilibrium annually (Lev. 1–17). Regulations that disqualify people, priests, and animals from the sacred space contribute to preventing Israel and its sacred space from

being set out of equilibrium (Lev. 18–22), and regulations establishing religious festivals promote that equilibrium (Lev. 23). Other regulations maintain equilibrium between the human and sacred space (Lev. 24–27).

1. Divine equilibrium (Lev. 1–23)

a. Equilibrium of sacred space: maintenance procedures and qualifications (Lev. 1–17)

i. Sacrifices to maintain the holiest center zone (Lev. 1–7)

ii. Priests set up to maintain enclosure zone (Lev. 8–10)

iii. Purity regulations to maintain the camp zone (Lev. 11–15)

The Israelites are camped around Mount Sinai when God reveals the instructions to Moses that are recorded in Leviticus. This view of Saint Catherine's Monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai shows the Wadi el Deir spreading out below it. Open areas like this would have provided a place for the Israelites to pitch their tents.

iv. Yom Kippur, which resets the holiness of the entire sacred compass annually, features the priest moving into the center, bringing the accumulated impurities out and, finally, sending them outside the camp (Lev. 16)

v. Maintaining holiness from outside the camp (Lev. 17)

b. Equilibrium of sacred status: disqualifications from sacred space (Lev. 18–22)

i. Disqualification of people from the camp (Lev. 18–20)

ii. Disqualification of priests from the enclosure (Lev. 21–22:16)

iii. Disqualification of animals for use in the center (Lev. 22:17–33)

- c. Equilibrium of sacred times: sacred festivals (Lev. 23)
- 2. Human equilibrium (Lev. 24–27)
  - a. Human equilibrium in sacred space (center zone) (Lev. 24:1–9)
  - b. Human equilibrium in status (in the camp) (Lev. 24:10–23)
  - c. Human equilibrium in setting times (outside the camp) (Lev. 25)
  - d. Establishing or disrupting equilibrium across the zones (Lev. 26)
  - e. Sacred objects vowed to Yahweh (movement through zones) (Lev. 27)

### Authorship

The authorship of Leviticus is anonymous, but Moses plays a key role in it. Although critical scholars typically deny to Moses any role in writing the Pentateuch, the traditional view among Jews and Christians is that Moses wrote it. Jesus’s statements support a role for Moses’s writing the Pentateuch (Matt. 8:4; 19:8 [cf. Deut. 24:1–4]; Mark 7:10 [cf. Exod. 20:12, 17]; John 5:46). In Leviticus and Numbers Moses is repeatedly said to have received laws from Yahweh for Israel. Any view must take into consideration the following observations. Moses could not have written the account of his own death (Deut. 34). Genesis, which is part of a continuous narrative with Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, mentions geographic and ethnic terms that probably were unknown in Moses’s day (Arameans, Chaldeans, Dan [the city], Philistines). The statement about Edomite kings reigning “before any Israelite king reigned” (Gen. 36:31) seems to imply a

perspective after kings reigned in Israel (i.e., after David and Solomon).

Most of the laws were given to Moses (e.g., Lev. 1:1; 4:1; 5:14; Num. 1:1; 3:5), though a few laws were given only to Aaron (Lev. 10:8; Num. 18:1, 8, 20), and some were given to both Moses and Aaron (e.g., Lev. 11:1; 13:1; 14:33; 15:1; Num. 2:1; 4:1). Presumably, Moses and Aaron wrote down the laws given to them. Those Mosaic (and Aaronic) materials could then be incorporated into the book, making the final product essentially Mosaic. And it is not just laws. Numbers 33:2 indicates that Moses wrote down an account of the stages of the journey. Exodus 17:14 says that Moses recorded its narratives. It is entirely possible that Moses wrote narrative accounts of many events in the wilderness even if the text does not explicitly say so.

In the Pentateuch Moses is described in third-person narration (he, him) rather than first person (I, me). Is that incompatible with Mosaic authorship? Referring to oneself in the third person is not unknown in ancient writings. Moses could have adopted third-person narration about himself as a literary style.<sup>2</sup> Alternatively, third-person narration may indicate that someone took the Mosaic laws and other archival materials from Moses and Aaron and finalized a narrative for them.

The Pentateuch, including its narratives, could still be essentially Mosaic even if a later editor put Moses’s materials in their final form. The view adopted in this commentary is that Leviticus and Numbers are essentially Mosaic but not purely Mosaic. Moses (with Aaron) received and wrote down the laws and is responsible for other materials in the Pentateuch; however, these

writings have been edited and updated for a later audience, creating the present Pentateuch.

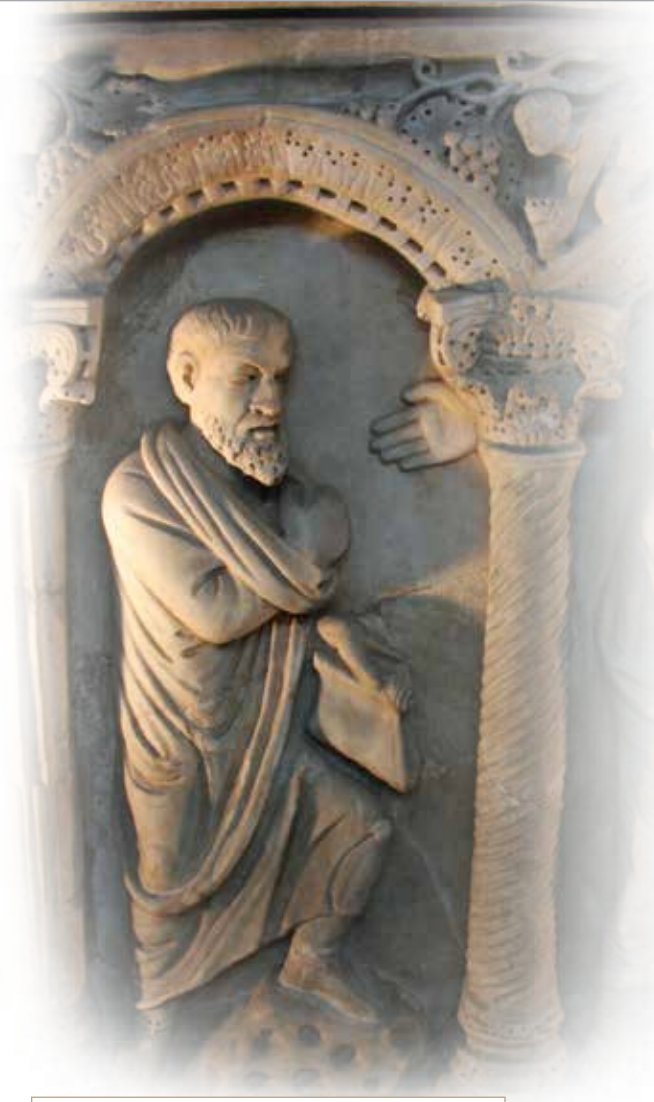
### Theological Themes

There are many important theological themes in Leviticus.

1. *Holiness.* Holiness is the key theme of Leviticus. Holiness involves being set apart to God or the realm of the divine. Thus priests and all items associated with God's sanctuary were holy. God by definition is holy, and he expected his people likewise to be holy (Lev. 19:2); that is, they were set apart from other nations through the covenant as God's special possession (Exod. 19:5–6) and were to maintain moral and ritual purity out of respect for God's holiness. Holiness was conveyed by righteous laws, sacrifices, and the purity system that helped Israel be uniquely dedicated to God. Violation of God's holiness could be severely punished, as happened when Nadab and Abihu encroached on the sanctuary improperly (Lev. 10). The laws of purity (Lev. 11–15), among other things, underscore the holiness of God.

2. *Purity: life and death.* The laws of purity (Lev. 11–15) concerning unclean animals, childbirth, skin diseases, and sexual discharges symbolically associate impurity with death and purity with life. One purpose of these laws was to promote life and to encourage avoidance of that which is associated with death.

3. *Worship.* Israel's worship differed from Christian worship in that it was centered on the tabernacle (later the temple), with its priesthood and animal sacrifices, and involved holy days no longer obligatory under the new covenant. There were



Most of the laws recorded in Leviticus were given to Moses by God. This section from the sarcophagus of Agape and Crescenziano (AD 330–60) depicts Moses receiving God's commandments.

no congregational “church services” as we have today. Despite his holiness, God wanted to have fellowship with his sinful people. The sacrificial system (Lev. 1–7; 16) made it possible for Israel to remain in the presence of the holy God. Worship involved special holy days and festivals (Lev. 23). It could involve vows that dedicated animals or persons to God (Lev. 27). Rituals played an important role in Israel's worship.

4. *Mercy, love, and grace.* The sacrificial system (Lev. 1–7) graciously allowed undeserving sinners to be forgiven. The fact that God planned to receive them back after their violation of the covenant (Lev. 26:40–45) also showed God’s mercy.

5. *Priesthood.* Leviticus conveys lessons about spiritual leadership as represented by the priests. Priests were chosen by God (Lev. 8–9) and had to show proper holiness (Lev. 21–22). Failure of priests to maintain holiness could be deadly, as in the case of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10). Priests were subject to sin and defilement like anyone else, so they had to seek to avoid impurity (Lev. 21–22) and had to purify themselves before conducting rituals to purify others (Lev. 4:1–12; 6:19–23; 16:3–4).

6. *Morality.* Leviticus contains many abiding moral lessons. It condemns incest (Lev. 18; 20), which Paul applies to a specific case (1 Cor. 5:1). “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18) is cited by Jesus as one of the two greatest commandments (Matt. 22:39). The laws of holiness (Lev. 17–27) give moral instruction about the poor, the foreigner, the slave, children, justice, honesty, sexual purity, integrity, and keeping one’s promises.

7. *Typology.* The writer of Hebrews sees in the tabernacle, priests, and sacrifices of Leviticus a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ (Heb. 5:1–6; 7:11, 26–28; 8:1–6; 9:1–14, 23–28; 10:10–14).



# The Burnt Offering

**Big Idea** *God is receptive to the petitions of those totally consecrated to him.*

## Understanding the Text

### The Text in Context

Leviticus continues the story of the book of Exodus. Eleven and a half months after the exodus, Israel completes the tabernacle, and the “glory of the LORD” takes up residence there (Exod. 40:1, 17, 34–38). Leviticus instructs Israelites on using that tabernacle for burnt offerings (Lev. 1), grain offerings (Lev. 2), fellowship offerings (Lev. 3), sin offerings (Lev. 4:1–5:13), and guilt offerings (Lev. 5:14–6:7). It then instructs priests about these same offerings

Rituals involving offerings, sacrifices, and altars were common to the cultures of the ancient Near East. Pictured here is the large, round stone altar at Megiddo dated to the Early Bronze Age.

(Lev. 6:8–7:38). All this underscores the importance of sacrificial worship for ancient Israel.

### Historical and Cultural Background

Israel’s neighbors conducted animal sacrifices similar to Israel’s. The prophets of Baal in their contest with Elijah prepared a burnt offering (1 Kings 18). Mesha of Moab offered his son as a burnt offering (2 Kings 3:27). Ugarit in the thirteenth century BC utilized burnt offerings, labeled *shrp* (“[totally] burnt”). Worshipers sacrificed fellowship offerings on altars to pagan gods (2 Chron. 34:4). Though disputed, the cognate for “fellowship offering” probably

is used for sacrifices at Ugarit and in Phoenician/Punic.<sup>1</sup> Archaeologists found what appears to be an altar dating to the Bronze Age at Canaanite Megiddo.

Food gifts contributed to the “care and feeding of the gods,” gifts that gods ate and drank (Deut. 32:37–38), though Mesopotamia lacked Israel’s “blood consciousness”—blood rituals or a sense of blood’s power.<sup>2</sup> But since Yahweh does not actually eat or drink offerings (Ps. 50:12–13), the sacrifices of Leviticus do not feed him in the way pagans thought they were sustaining their gods. Nonetheless, the text uses the language of sacrifice as God’s food (Lev. 3:11; 21:6; cf. Mal. 1:7) or as a “food offering” (Lev. 1:9; 2:2; 3:3; 7:5). The tabernacle’s table, plates, dishes, cups, bowls, and bread set before God’s presence (Exod. 25:23–30; 1 Kings 7:48–60) have the look of a royal banquet. Symbolically and metaphorically, the sacrifices appear to be cultivating Israel’s relationship with God by presenting him with covenant meals (cf. Lev. 24:5–9: “lasting covenant”).<sup>3</sup>

### Interpretive Insights

**1:2** *When anyone among you brings an offering to the LORD.* Leviticus begins with a general introduction to sacrifices. This introduction applies to both burnt offerings and fellowship offerings (Lev. 3), both of which are voluntary sacrifices. The “tent of meeting” is the just-completed tabernacle, so named because God has promised to “meet” there with worshipers (Exod. 29:42–43). Teaching about sacrifice is not limited to priests because lay Israelites can voluntarily offer this sacrifice when they wish. Animal sacrifices are permitted from livestock or from birds (Lev. 1:14). From the

### Key Themes of Leviticus 1:1–17

- Show total consecration to God.
- Seek God’s favor.
- The burnt offering is a substitutionary sacrifice.

livestock the choice is limited to the “herd” (cattle) or the “flock” (sheep or goats). This excludes all other mammals (e.g., donkeys, camels, deer).

**1:3–17** Now come rules specific to the burnt offering, or holocaust. The text is organized on the basis of more-expensive bulls (vv. 3–9), to medium-expensive sheep/goats (vv. 10–13), to less-expensive birds (vv. 14–17). Every “you” in this section (though not vv. 1–2) is literally “he” or “his.” The NIV adjusted the renderings for gender neutrality since women could also offer the various sacrifices (cf. female Nazirites [Num. 6:2, 12–15]).

**1:3** *a burnt offering from the herd.* A burnt offering must be a male. Males are expendable: only a few bulls are needed to sire calves, while cows have additional value for milk. Moreover, bulls are aggressive, so having fewer of them aids in herd control. Only animals “without defect” are eligible for the altar (Deut. 15:21), whether for burnt offerings as here or for fellowship offerings, sin offerings, or guilt offerings (cf. Lev. 3:1; 4:3; 5:15). Offering blemished animals on the altar would show contempt for God, a practice bringing prophetic condemnation (Mal. 1:7–8). The animal is presented at the entrance to the tent of meeting in the presence of God in the tent. This is as close as a layperson can come to God’s presence. “So that it will be acceptable to the LORD” could also be rendered, “to gain favor on his behalf before the LORD.”<sup>4</sup>

**1:4** *lay your hand on the head.* “Lay” (*samak*) connotes “lean on” with pressure. What does this symbolize? It could refer to a transfer of sin as in the Day of Atonement offering (Lev. 16:21–22), though there two hands are laid on the animal, whereas only one hand is laid here. The laying of one hand is also required for the fellowship offering that is nonatonement for sin (Lev. 3:2). Perhaps the use of two hands represents the transfer of something, whether sin (Lev. 16:21–22) or authority (Num. 27:23), whereas using one hand implies identification between the person and the sacrifice.<sup>5</sup> The leaning of a single hand on the animal indicates that the animal belongs to and is being offered on behalf of the worshiper.

*and it will be accepted.* This phrase should instead be rendered modally: “so that it can be accepted.” Although God’s acceptance requires proper ritual, final acceptance of the sacrifice by God depends on the moral/spiritual state of the offerer, not the worshiper’s doing the mechanics correctly, for “the LORD detests the sacrifice of the wicked” (Prov. 15:8). On “atonement,” see “Additional Insights” following the unit on Leviticus 4:1–35. The burnt offering, the sin offering, and the guilt offering are atoning sacrifices.

**1:5** *slaughter the young bull before the LORD.* The layperson would “slaughter,” or “cut the throat of,”<sup>6</sup> the animal, a relatively humane way of dispatching it. “Young bull” probably should be rendered simply “bull” (ESV, NRSV) because the Hebrew expression (lit., “son/member of



The procedure for bringing a burnt offering from the herd includes laying a hand on its head and slaughtering it before the Lord. Cutting the throat, as illustrated in this painting from the tomb of Djoserkareneb (Thebes, 1422–1411 BC), was the most humane method.

the herd”) does not indicate the age of the animal. See also “young pigeon” (v. 14). “Before the LORD” indicates before the tabernacle, his abode.

**1:9** *a burnt offering, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.* The priests are to “splash,” or “dash” (cf. NRSV), the blood against the altar. On the importance of blood, see “Teaching the Text” at Leviticus 17:1–16. “Fire” (v. 7) often symbolizes God (Exod. 24:17; Deut. 4:24). The burnt offering, the grain offering, the fellowship offering, and the sin offering are each called a “food offering” (*’ishsheh* [1:9; 2:2, 3; 3:3; 5:12]). Traditionally, this word has been rendered “an offering made by fire” (KJV), but Hebraists increasingly prefer the rendering “food offering” (NIV).<sup>7</sup> “Pleasing” (*nihoah* [vv. 9, 13, 17]) could also be rendered “soothing” or “tranquilizing.”<sup>8</sup> A pleasing sacrifice appeases any anger that God might have (see Gen. 8:21) and makes him favorably disposed to grant requests.

**1:10–17** *sheep or goats . . . birds.* The sequence of bull → sheep/goats → birds is

from most expensive to least expensive animals. The location, “north side of the altar” (v. 11), is less specific for the harder-to-control bull (v. 5). The dove (or turtledove [ESV]) and the young pigeon are snared and caged. Birds are not “slaughtered” with blood collected in bowls to be dashed on the altar, but their necks are wrung and their blood directly drained onto the altar. Removal of the bird’s crop would serve to clean out the intestines, all of which would be discarded. Due to its small size, it is split open rather than quartered in preparation for burning on the altar.

### Theological Insights

The burnt offering is intended to make God favorable toward the worshiper so that he will grant the worshiper’s requests. It can also be used to quell God’s anger. When human wickedness brings God’s wrath on humankind through the flood (Gen. 6:5–7), God finds Noah’s burnt offering a “pleasing” or “soothing” aroma (Gen. 8:20–21; cf. Lev. 1:9 above) that pacifies his anger and makes him inclined to grant favor. The burnt offering can also be used primarily to seek God’s favor when no particular sin is in view (see below). All of this shows God’s receptiveness to human petition.

### Teaching the Text

With burnt offerings, the entire animal was burned to ashes. There were daily burnt offerings every morning and evening (Exod. 29:38–41), but Leviticus 1 describes a free-will offering.

The purpose of the burnt offering is not explicit here, except that it could “make

atonement” for the offerer (Lev. 1:4). But its purpose can be deduced from various Scriptures.

1. *Show total consecration to God.* By leaning a hand on the head of the animal being sacrificed, the worshiper was identified with the animal (Lev. 1:4). Arguably, the animal represented the worshiper, and its being burnt to ashes symbolized the surrender of the person’s life to God.<sup>9</sup> Support for this is seen in Paul’s allusion to the burnt offering in Romans 12:1: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” Paul sees the identification with and total consumption of the animal in the burnt offering as representing total consecration of the worshiper to God. Just as the burnt offering was totally consumed on the altar, so the Christian should express total allegiance to God and his service. But unlike the burnt offering, we are to sacrifice ourselves totally to God while we remain alive.

2. *Seek God’s favor.* The burnt offering seems to represent an appeal on the part of the worshiper for God’s favor and appeasement. It made God favorably disposed to answer petitions and overlook any unaddressed sin that might prevent him from bestowing favor.

Several examples show how the burnt offering was used to entreat God for favor and appeasement. In 1 Samuel 7:9 Samuel uses the burnt offering to seek favor for a fearful Israelite army about to face the Philistines. God answers this appeal by granting them victory in battle (1 Sam. 7:10–11). Saul likewise uses the burnt offering to appeal for Yahweh’s favor in

battle (1 Sam. 13:12). Though the Israelites do not know why God has not favored them, they in remorse seek God's forgiveness and renewed favor through burnt offerings after he allows them to be defeated in battle (Judg. 20:26). The burnt offering is used for appeasement and forgiveness when David offers a burnt offering to stop God's wrath in the form of a plague (2 Sam. 24:21–25).

3. *The burnt offering is a substitutionary sacrifice.* Genesis 22 suggests that the burnt offering was a substitutionary sacrifice. God commands Abraham to offer up his son Isaac as a burnt offering. Abraham in faith sets out to obey God's horrible command. But when Abraham is about to slit Isaac's throat, God intervenes and provides a ram caught in the thicket as a substitute for Isaac (Gen. 22:12–14). That the burnt offering was substitutionary in nature goes along with the notion above that totally burning

the animal represented the worshiper's total consecration to God.

Although no New Testament text identifies Christ specifically with the burnt offering, the New Testament does (especially in Hebrews) see the whole Old Testament sacrificial system as pointing to the atoning work of Christ, a work often understood in terms of substitutionary atonement (see Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Pet. 2:24).

### Illustrating the Text

*Sacrifice was practiced throughout the ancient world.*

**Historical Artifact:** The White Obelisk of Ashurnasirpal (I or II), now in the British Museum, shows, according to its inscription, a ritual for the goddess Ishtar (see the image). A person (the king?) stands before the goddess Ishtar sitting on her throne in a temple on a hill (left). Offerings were deposited on tables, and incense was burning before the king followed by a man (priest? servant?) (center). A man puts his hand on a bull's head, perhaps with the other men leading the bull to an altar for sacrifice. This whole scene is reminiscent of the bull offering in Leviticus 1:4.<sup>10</sup>

*Our sacrifices to God must be wholehearted.*

**Scripture:** Acts 5:1–11. This narrative tells of how Ananias and Sapphira sell some land and pretend to give all

Although difficult to see because of the deterioration of the reliefs, one of the registers on the White Obelisk of Ashurnasirpal (I or II) depicts a bull-offering scene similar to that described in Leviticus 1 (see detail).



the proceeds to God, when in fact they have kept back a portion.

**Hymn:** “I Surrender All,” by J. W. Van De Venter. This older hymn (1896) might be used in its beautiful rendition by the contemporary Christian artist CeCe Winans.

*We must seek God's favor by giving him what he asks for.*

**Literature:** *The Lost Princess: A Double Story*, by George MacDonald. In this wise and convicting children’s story (first published in 1875 as *The Wise Woman: A Parable*), George MacDonald, a great British writer whose works influenced C. S. Lewis, shows the importance of following God’s commands. His godly heroine is the Wise Woman, who tries to teach two young girls the evil of their selfishness and direct them toward a different way. One of them,

Rosamund, who is spirited away by the Wise Woman from her indulgent parents, is put through a series of disciplines that she can obey or disobey to her own good or misfortune. She is asked to do the things that the Wise Woman wants done, in the way the Wise Woman wants them. At one point she is left alone in a cottage and told to keep it clean in specific ways, or else she will be unable to eat. Because Rosamund does not do it according to the directions, she has to clean the rooms twice. The Wise Woman says to Rosamund, “Let me remind you that if you had not put it off, you would have found it not only far easier but by and by quite pleasant work. . . . More than that, you would have been glad to see me when I came back. You could have leaped into my arms instead of standing there looking so ugly and foolish.”<sup>11</sup>