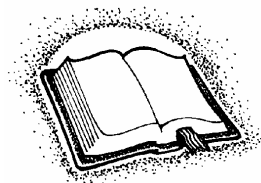


Unlocking the Bible (7)



LIVE LIKE THIS A look at the Book of Leviticus

In our survey of the books of the Old Testament we have looked at the process of New Beginnings in Genesis and an Escape to Life in Exodus. The remaining three books of Moses are concerned with different aspects of how that new life is lived.

The first of these, Leviticus, is concerned with various laws and practices. In it, we have a catalogue of offerings which the people were to present to God: offerings for sin and guilt, cereal offerings, burnt offerings, etc. Next is a collection of practical laws about hygiene, health, recovery and relationships, all of which are important in social and religious behaviour. Then follows a series of communal celebrations, such as the Feasts of Passover and Tabernacles, commemorating significant acts of God in their redemptive history.

What can we learn from an overview of the whole book?

Firstly, the importance of laws. A new life needs to be lived in a special and distinctive way; a way which reflects the very character and purpose of God. These laws are not negative, inhibiting, restrictions: they are clear guidelines for living a life which has not been encountered before.

The laws apply initially to people's relationship to God Himself. Forgiveness is sought, guidance is heeded, appreciation is expressed – all aspects of true worship so that *'those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again'* (2 Cor. 5:15). Yet, that focus on God has benefits, both for themselves and for the society of which they are a part. Leviticus clearly demonstrates God's concern for wholesomeness and well-being. But, these practical regulations and instructions, emphasising appropriate behaviour and conduct in real situations, are sandwiched between two other main features: *sacrifices* and *festivals*.

So, secondly, Leviticus stresses is God's **provision for sin and forgiveness**. Various offerings and sacrifices are introduced to cover a range of situations and adapted so that they are within reach of anyone. God's gracious forgiveness is like that. In 1 John 1 it is expressed in this way: *if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins..... If we say we have no sin, we lie and do not the truth. But if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous*. Forgiveness through the Cross is fundamental. Good life and worship begin there.

The third feature is **expression**, a public declaration of praise for what has been experienced. Each of these feasts commemorated a significant event in the past experience of redemption. Worship should be like that. Worship is praise for that which is experienced. And the form of worship should convey something of that meaning.

All three features - the offerings, the behaviour and the expression - need to follow the patterns and principles carefully laid down by God.

Provision for forgiveness and principles for behaviour result in expression, as in the old English hymn,

Praise my soul the King of Heaven
To Thy feet thy tribute bring
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
Who like thee His praise should sing?

How they did **what** they did was an essential part of the testimony. Leviticus highlights that.