

## Book Review

*Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*

**Jay Sklar**

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Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries have been a solid and concise source of conservative, United Kingdom and North American scholarship on the books of the Bible for fifty years. Now, it is being made even stronger and more helpful with a complete revision. Current questions and issues will be engaged along with an improved format consisting of Context, Comment, and Meaning. Relating the original meaning of the text to readers today is a definite priority of the series revision.

Jay Sklar, from Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, has written this fresh volume on Leviticus and has done a thorough and up-to-date job. He did his dissertation on the Old Testament sacrificial system and his supervisor was Gordon Wenham, one of the best scholars on Leviticus, and a favorite of mine.

Sklar's summary of the book shows how he sees its big-picture relevance. He says, "Leviticus describes a point in human history when God ... came and dwelt in the midst of some of our fellow human beings (the Israelites) and taught them what their purpose in life really was" (p. 9). More specifically, he says (in almost the same words I have been saying for years) that Leviticus answers the question: "How in the world can the holy and pure King of the universe dwell among his sinful and impure people" (p. 27)?

I found myself in agreement with Sklar's brilliant explanations and summaries, many of which are expounded in the Introduction. One of his greatest contributions is the conclusion that the intent of the Hebrew verb, *kipper*, usually translated as "to atone for," covers both the ideas of ransoming and purifying, both averting wrath and cleansing (pp. 50-51). In regard to the sacrificial system, he points out that it was given to Israel, in God's grace, as the means to receive forgiveness. Regarding the theology of Leviticus, he concludes with an exposition on how Jesus fulfilled the sacrificial system. This is an example of how relevant this commentary on Leviticus is to all Bible believers.

Sklar reasons, as have I, that the biblical laws reflect God's values and, therefore, should have some application to our lives today. He deals with the big question: Which laws apply today and how do we decide? I agree with him that the key understanding is that Israel was God's unique, theocratic nation, whose purpose was to prepare for Christ (p. 57ff).

A scholar's detailed outline of a book of the Bible illustrates his or her conclusions regarding the flow of the message. I found Sklar's outline very insightful and confirmed my personal conclusions regarding the teachings of Leviticus.

Sklar presents insightful answers to questions that arise, such as how is Paul using 18:5, when he says that the law was not about faith but about obedience and faithfulness. Sklar's one-page explanation is the best I have seen on it (p. 229). His additional note on slavery in Leviticus 25 (p. 307ff) is an excellent clarification, pointing out that slaves in Israel were not chattel, and that the term usually should be translated servant.

Another valuable and rare contribution of this commentary is the many charts it provides, which visually clarify the various subjects and instructions. Some of the most informative are: gradations of ritual purity; instructions regarding impurity; how the sabbatical and jubilee years worked for sowing and reaping; and comparing blessings and curses.

One of the most challenging unexplained subjects in Leviticus is the rationale for what was clean versus unclean. Sklar summarizes the proposed explanations better than most

other commentaries and then wisely concludes that no one has been able to explain all the data. Here and elsewhere he readily admits when he does not know an explanation and consistently emphasizes what is clear from the text. In the case of clean and unclean, it is clear that they function to teach broad principles of God's holiness for His people (p. 168). Sklar also observes that what caused an uncleanness was not necessarily condemned as sinful. The uncleanness could be about inappropriateness for the situation.

The only weakness I find with the book is its lack of an index. I do not fully comprehend why, in the age of computers, such a rich and informative reference tool would not include this great study tool.

I recommend this as the best commentary for any level of study of Leviticus. However, the reader must understand that the volume does not provide as much detail as some scholars might want on the Hebrew text or the various issues.