



The Book of Leviticus

Gordon J. Wenham

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Leviticus used to be the first book that Jewish children studied in the synagogue. In the modern church it tends to be the last part of the Bible that anyone looks at seriously. Because Leviticus is largely concerned with subjects that seem incomprehensible and irrelevant today — rituals for sacrifice and regulations concerning uncleanness — it appears to have nothing to say to twenty-first-century Christians. In this excellent commentary on Leviticus, Gordon Wenham takes with equal seriousness both the plain original meaning of the text and its abiding theological value. To aid in reconstructing the original meaning of the text, Wenham draws from studies of Old Testament ritual and sacrifice that compare and contrast biblical customs with the practices of other Near Eastern cultures. He also closely examines the work of social anthropologists and expertly utilizes the methods of literary criticism to bring out the biblical author's special interests. In pursuit of his second aim, to illumine the enduring theological value of Leviticus, Wenham discusses at the end of each section how the Old Testament passages relate to the New Testament and to contemporary Christianity. In doing so, he not only shows how pervasive Levitical ideas are in the New Testament but also highlights in very practical ways the enduring claim of God's call to holiness on the lives of Christians today.

The Book of Leviticus Details

Date : Published October 5th 1979 by Eerdmans (first published 1979)

ISBN : 9780802825223

Author : Gordon J. Wenham

Format : Hardcover 375 pages

Genre : Reference, Christianity, Old Testament, Religion, Theology, Nonfiction

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From Reader Review The Book of Leviticus for online ebook

Graham Heslop says

Considering some of the other reviews of "this book," let me clearly state up front that this short review pertains to Wenham's commentary on the biblical text of Leviticus. Let me list a few of my criticisms, before outlining the positives and hopefully convincing you that this is a key commentary well worth owning.

So, negatively: (1) I think Wenham was somewhat in two minds as he wrote this book, which resulted in a work that both falls short in its Christian application of the Old Testament and doesn't quite offer enough technical commentary. This might be an unfair criticism because on both those fronts Wenham has clearly done a lot of work. But I found myself frustrated by the abrupt application for Christians at the end of each section; on the other hand, the technical work has undoubtedly been done and is present, often in the footnotes, however certain issues are only touched on lightly and differing view points on interpretation are often left undeveloped. (2) Because of the repetitive nature of the Levitical laws I felt that the commentary could have been laid out better, taking this into consideration; instead it is at times repetitious. (3) Transliteration of Hebrew; I don't think this is pedantic but important when wanting to cross reference or turn to lexicons. (4) The work is a little dated in terms of the literary critical approach to biblical texts and the influence of biblical theology.

Positively, and after all of the above perhaps you're wondering how these will warrant my rating of the book. (1) The Christian application was at points remarkable insightful, even if a little hurried. Too many Christian commentators, often preachers, treat Leviticus with too broad a brush and the result is application that doesn't get far beyond, "Praise God Jesus has removed the sacrificial system by becoming our sacrificial lamb," "Jesus makes us clean," and "Leviticus shows that someone must die in order for us to live, forgiven and free." Now, those aren't wrong but they do, in my opinion, belie a laziness in approaching passages as difficult as those found in Leviticus. In contrast to these, Wenham unpacks the theology of Leviticus and argues its relevance for numerous areas of the Christian life, with richness. (2) The introductory treatment of Leviticus as a whole is very helpful in providing headers under which to understand the text generally. (3) Similarly to my first positive point, Wenham is willing to wrestle with more obscure and difficult details of Leviticus, as well as providing suggestions for further reading in the footnotes. As I've already said, too many approaches to Leviticus simply choose to ignore these, treating the text far too generally.

As far as more technical commentaries go, this title is relatively readable, structured in shorter convenient sections, and well written with regards to style. In closing, I haven't come across a better commentary on Leviticus and therefore I think this is a key work

Herbert says

I read Wenham's WBC commentary on Genesis (2 vols.) (Genesis 1-15) many years ago and thought it was a really impressive work of biblical scholarship. His NICOT volume on Leviticus is equally outstanding. This book had long been recommended to me as not only the best commentary on Leviticus, but one of the all-time best commentaries on any biblical book ever written. I wholeheartedly concur. Wenham's scholarship is top notch, but it is his writing that makes this commentary one of the best. So clear, so eloquent, and so concise! Wenham is a good model of excellent scholarly writing. He is especially great at negotiating all the scholarly technicalities that plague so many commentaries and then translating them to the general reader in a lucid way that ultimately contributes to the all important goal of understanding what the biblical text means. The introduction alone, especially the section on "The Theology of Leviticus," is well worth reading.

The summary section on the difficult concept of clean/unclean and holy/common is the best I have ever read on this exegetical problem. Within his verse by verse commentary, Wenham finishes each section with analyses on "Leviticus and the NT" and "Leviticus and the Christian" that are sometimes downright inspirational. So well done that I am moved to now read his Tyndale commentary on Numbers (Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary). How geeky is that!

Tim Sheppard says

I truly appreciated this read, especially during this crazy period of time. Wenham handles the text respectfully with his approachable teaching. Be holy for I the Lord your God am holy...

Nate says

Very helpful book! Each chapter ends with an applicable connection to the NT.

Michael Easter says

The best commentary I've ever read. I had a A lot of questions on Old Testament law and why the Jews has to follow them, and how it applies to New Testament Christians. This book answered a lot of my ?s. I was motivated to better understand the Pentateuch from apologetics. After I've heard many liberals saying that biblical reasoning on homosexuality is a double standard because many of the commandments in Leviticus are not followed today. I wanted to understand the context of the laws and how they relate to the modern Christian and how to answer this attack from liberal commentators.

Bill says

This was consistently recommended to me as the gold standard commentary on Leviticus, and I can see why. It is insightful, authoritative, thorough and scholarly, and more readable than I expected in the NICOT series. As I preached through Leviticus, I was often grateful for Wenham's clarity regarding various uncertain issues. His "Leviticus and the NT" sections after each passage were brilliant. Highly recommended, along with Sklar in the Tyndale series.

Jason Farley says

I love wenham's commentaries. I read his commentary on Numbers 18 months ago and have been looking for this one ever since. I just got it from Diane Garaway of santacruzbooks.blogspot.com (though I haven't paid her yet) and it is looks awesome (if you like commentaries).

I have paid her now, and this was great (though portions I just skimmed).

It is basically theonomic (trying to understand the law and apply the law today) which was helpful for

thinking through some of the issues.

Greg says

Best single book on Leviticus. If you can read only one, this is the one. One of the things I really appreciated is the section at the end of nearly every chapter that relates the Old Testament context to that of the New Testament.

Rui Coelho says

Terrible.

Brian says

Wenham is one of the more reasonable authors I have read this year. He doesn't surprise me much, but he doesn't shock me either and he put me in contact with a ton of good questions. He also knows what to take from Mary Douglas.

John says

Fantastic commentary on Leviticus. It covers all the major interpretive issues and Gordon Wenham communicates very well the purpose of the book of Leviticus and how it applies to us today. He takes what is typically an ignored and misunderstood book of the Bible and makes it come alive to where you really start to love it.

Clayton Tinervin says

This is the best commentary on the book of Leviticus that I have ever found. Wenham is a phenomenal scholar, and this work is top notch.

Benjamin Stocksdale says

Clear, thorough, and immensely readable. Would recommend to anyone for a clearer view of Leviticus and how it ties in with the Gospel of Jesus.

Kelsey says

I recommend this book, for a number of reasons.

1. It isn't dense. (Which surprised me since Leviticus itself is, well, pretty dense.) There is a very informative introduction that focuses on the book's structure, sources, authorship and date, the Hebrew text of the book and more. Since I feel that Leviticus is often written off as irrelevant, I appreciated the section on "Leviticus and the Christian," because I think the book is in the Bible for a reason. The body of the commentary, past the introduction, isn't dense either, although there is a lot of information to take in. I took it slowly, for that reason.
2. The author's focus in the commentary is on understanding the meanings of the Hebrew words in Leviticus and thus understanding what was being prescribed/commanded/performed. While each section ends with a brief discussion of "x (e.g. Leviticus 26) and the NT"--which often deals with instances where the NT quotes Leviticus--the author steers away from the issue of whether or not these laws should still be followed by Christians today. His issue isn't proving one side or another, but interpreting the text in its context. (This issue is something I've been interested in recently and I've read a lot of arguments on both sides. It was refreshing to read something more balanced.)
3. The organization of the book allows for easy retrieval of specific information. Leviticus is first divided into larger chunks (e.g. the first 7 chapters cover "Laws on Sacrifice"), and then each chapter within each chunk is treated separately. First the chapter is quoted in its entirety, then there is a verse-by-verse discussion of it, with clear headers that tell the verses being discussed and their topic (verses are usually grouped into 3s or 4s). If I wanted information about exactly how the peace offering was supposed to be offered, it would be easy to go back and find.
4. Related to the above point about how easy it is to find information, there are 4 indexes in the back: (1) Index of Chief Subjects, (2) Index of Authors, (3) Index of Scripture References and (4) Index of Nonbiblical Texts.
5. Based on indexes 2 and 4 above, this commentary seems to be well-researched. The author notes many different interpretations for the same things, and states clearly which he finds more reasonable. (But does not necessarily discount other arguments.) The studies that he cites are all footnoted, so it would be easy to look up exactly what the author is drawing on.

In short, I really like this commentary. I may look into other commentaries in this series. I read this one cover-to-cover over a couple of months. (I had to re-check it out of the library a few times.) It took so long partially because I didn't want to overload on info, but also because I was only doing a chapter or so a day in the morning, and also reading a second commentary at the same time.

Chris says

Good commentary that resolves a lot of popular misunderstandings and clarifies the concept of holiness in the Bible.
