

Leviticus

Overview & Timeline

Leviticus literally means “the book concerning Levites,” but it really applies to all Israel. Its **primary purpose** is to give instruction to the *congregation of Israel* for the correct way to offer sacrifices, observe holy days, and live as a holy people. God uses the regulations of Leviticus to develop them into a people for His glory, by placing them under His rule, before He brings them into the place He promised. God has gone to **extraordinary lengths** to fulfill His promises and be in fellowship with his people. But, there’s still a problem.

[Read Exodus 40:34-35 & Leviticus 1:1](#)

Major Theme

God is holy, and therefore His people must be holy, too.

- **God is holy:** Leviticus continually reminds us of God’s unique identity. “I am Yahweh” (18:5-6, 21; 19:12, 14, 16, 18, etc.), “I am Yahweh, your God” (18:2, 4, 30; 19:3-4, 10, 25, etc.), as well as “you shall be holy, for I, Yahweh your God am holy” (19:2; 20:7, 26; 21:8)
- **His people must be holy:** to have fellowship with Him & to fulfill His glorious motive

Outline of Content

Chiasm – literary device used to highlight a central idea by reverse repetition

Rituals (of sacrifice & offerings)
Chapters 1-7

Conclusion
Chapters 26-27
Call to faithfulness

Rituals (of remembrance) Chapters 23-25
Ways to say “thank you” and “I’m sorry”

Priesthood (ordained)

Day of Atonement
Chapters 16-17
God provides a

Chapters 8-10
God must be approached a certain way

Purity (ritual)
Chapters 11-15
God is a God of life
Continual reminders of all God had done

Priesthood (qualified)
Chapters 21-22
Mediators between God and man

Purity (moral)
Chapters 18-20
Not like the other nations

way

Sacrifice & Atonement

- 1) The Day of Atonement was an incredibly important ritual, completed once a year to atone for the sins of the entire nation of Israel. It involved two goats: one would be sacrificed as a sin offering, the other symbolically took on the sins of the people as the scapegoat and was sent out into the wilderness, away from Israel and the presence of God.
- 2) Jewish and Christian scholars widely agree that atonement sacrifices were primarily meant to atone for unintentional sins. In other words, “high-handed” or premeditated sins were “for the most part beyond the power of the sacrificial system to expiate [or atone].” (LaSor, Hubbard, & Bush).
- 3) Furthermore, prophets repeatedly emphasized the importance of obedience rather than sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22-23; Isaiah 1:10-20), praise of the Lord rather than offerings (Hosea 14:2), and humility (Micah 6:8).
- 4) The whole of scripture testifies that salvation is accomplished by God apart from human achievement. Hebrews 10:1-4, 8-14 and Ephesians 2:8-9 offer very clear truths about the insufficiency of sacrifice, the glorious work of Christ, and the necessity of God’s grace.

Group Discussion: In light of these truths, what was the purpose of Old Testament offerings, sacrifices and ritual observances in the work of atoning for sin?

Which commands apply to us?

God’s commands in the Old Testament can be broadly categorized as: civil, ceremonial, and moral. Moral commands can often be further separated into two categories: 1) commands that transfer from one culture to another with little or no alteration 2) commands that embody timeless principles that find varying expressions in different culture.

Ultimately, understanding and applying the commands of Scripture, both Old & New Testaments, requires good **hermeneutics** (the theory and methodology of interpretation).

- 1) Scripture interprets scripture -> sometimes a verse or passage is interpreted elsewhere
- 2) Context interprets scripture -> surrounding verses, chapters, and books provide context for interpretation, as well as history, culture, and linguistics
- 3) Intent interprets scripture -> all scripture has an intention for its original audience; there is only one correct interpretation, but many possible applications
- 4) the clear interprets the obscure -> clear passages inform understanding of less clear passages

Group Discussion: Read Mark 7:14-23, Romans 7:4-6, and Romans 3:31. What role does the written law play in our lives as 21st century Christians?

Application of Major Themes

Group Discussion: What does Leviticus teach us about:

- 1) The character of **God**: Leviticus 11:45; 22:32-33; 26:9, 14 and following
- 2) The seriousness of **sin**: Leviticus 10:1-2; 20:22-23; 17:11; Hebrews 9:22
- 3) Our **role** as the people of God: Leviticus 20:7, 26; Isaiah 42:6-7, 49:6; 1 Peter

2:9-12 4) Our need for **Jesus**: Leviticus 22:20; 16:2-3; Hebrews 9:24, 10:11-12

5) The preciousness of God's **presence**: Leviticus 16:16-17; 26:11-12, Romans 8:9-11