

“Our LORD & Leviticus”

Leviticus Survey

February 4, 2018

VIDEO: *“Literary Styles In The Bible”*

Welcome to *Bible-reading-Basics & fundamentals of the faith*

Welcome... to BRIDGE family of Christ-followers

➤ 2018’s year of ***God-honoring REVERENCE...***

○ REALLY... learn, love, & live His Word

- *“Hold On”* – study of Hebrews
- *“BE Holy”* – study of Leviticus
- *“Hear Me”* – study of Amos...

Today we move from ***“Our LORD & the Law”*** to

“Our LORD & Leviticus” (Survey of Leviticus)

PREVIEW:

- I. **CONTEXT** of Leviticus
- II. **CONTENT** in Leviticus
- III. **CONFLICT** with Leviticus

BIG IDEA: Today’s time together is designed to help you to “biblically-unlock” & better understand the relationship between ***“Our LORD & Leviticus”***

T/S: Let’s pick up where our opening video left off...
(because context is critical to effective communication)

I. CONTEXT in Leviticus

Generic Contextual Truths

When we look at biblical context myopically... we miss the message and the full Messianic mission. - JDP

- A. **Literary “*styles*” determine:** (per opening video)
- a. **Preparations** (phone book, love letter, user’s manual, etc)
 - b. **Expectations** (high, low, or no impact/refinement sought)
 - c. **Perceptions** (“Are you talkin’ to ME?”)
 - d. **Interpretation(s)** (“It can’t possibly mean THAT... can it?”)
 - e. **Digestion** (“I just can’t believe or accept THAT...”)
 - f. **Application(s)** (“Oh... that might be good for YOU... But....”)
 - g. **Transformation (or not)** (“I’m basically a good person.”)
- B. **Literary “*tools*” develop:**
- a. **Points** – refined
 - b. **Plots** - revealed

VIDEO: *“Jewish Literary Narrative”*

T/S: *“Give me 6 hours to chop down a tree & I will spend the first 4 sharpening the axe.” - Abraham Lincoln*

- c. **Powerful-Parallels**
- Simple “couplets” to complex Chiastic arches
 - Parallelism in a generic, secular sense...
 - *Winners never quit, quitters never win.*

➤ **Parallelism** is another “literary tool”

- Helps with *memory*
- Helps with *message*
- Helps with *mission!*

➤ **The BIBLE:**

Creation

Corruption

Incarnation

Corruption

Completion

➤ **The Law of Moses**

- Leviticus is the point of the Law’s arch
(Genesis, Exodus, **LEVITICUS**, Numbers, Deut.)
- Flood in Genesis 6-8 **VIDEO: Chiasms**

➤ **JESUS example:**

Mark. 2:27

- *The Sabbath*
 - *was made for man*
 - *man made for*
 - *the Sabbath*
- NOT**

T/S: Now let us begin to zero in on Leviticus...

Specific Contextual Truths

- Leviticus (like Lamentations) is a chiastic arch
 - Rituals ch.1-7 & 23-25
 - Priests ch.8-10 & 21-22
 - Purity ch.11-15 & 23-25
 - Atonement ch.16-17
 - Obedience ch.26-27

“It took God one night to get Israel out of Egypt, but it took 40 years to get Egypt out of Israel.” – anonymous

- Leviticus has ZERO geographical movement...
- Leviticus time span = 1 MONTH
- Leviticus *sandwich* between Exodus & Numbers
 - Exodus ends with Moses OUTSIDE the Tent
 - Numbers begins with Moses INSIDE...
 - Leviticus = the SOLUTION

T/S: *Jesus said that He came to fulfill the Law. How does Jesus fulfill the Law? We’ll see as we go thru Leviticus*

II. CONTENT in Leviticus

What’s the Importance of Leviticus?

Perhaps this is the most basic question to answer regarding the book of Leviticus. Many Christians have had the experience of committing themselves to read through the Bible, so they begin with the dramatic narratives of Genesis and continue with the

spectacular miracles of Exodus. They read along swimmingly until they arrive in Leviticus where they begin to bog down in molasses. They read about sacrifices that are no longer offered, a priesthood that no longer exists, and laws we are no longer obligated to obey. Leviticus describes all of that and more in tedious detail, so some people ask... “What does this all mean for contemporary Christians?” Leviticus is challenging, but what if the result of studying Leviticus... we see powerful truths about God and ourselves that will profoundly affect the way we think and live? What if we see how Jesus is exalted in Leviticus?

- **Christ-Centered Exposition**

A book referred to about 40 times in the New Testament should be of great significance to every Christian... the Book of Leviticus contains extensive revelation concerning the character of God—especially His holiness but also His electing love and grace. Also, it provides many rich lessons concerning the holy life that God expects of His people. – **Layman Bible Commentary**

➤ Big Idea of Leviticus: **Holiness (87X)**

➤ Key Structure:

- Leviticus has 2 halves... with parallel parts...
- Title: Hebrew = **“And He called”**

➤ Key themes of Leviticus:

Leviticus is a literary expression of God's desire that His holiness be reflected in the life of His covenant people. - Dallas Seminary Faculty.

- LORD's holiness & that of His people
- LORD's defining love & Sovereign grace
- Man's Corruptive sin & Consequential guilt
- LORD's miraculous mercy & divine mission
 - Peculiar "substitutionary atonement"
 - Paves the way for the Gospel...
 - Prepares us for the Gospel...
 - Points to the Gospel... ([Heb. 9:11-22](#))

VIDEO: *"Leviticus: Visual Exegesis"*

III. CONFLICT in Leviticus

- A fight for the truth & love of the God who speaks
 - **Look IN** - read our Bibles better
 - **Look UP** - relate *"Our LORD & Leviticus"*
 - **Look OUT** - reach the lost thru Leviticus

- A fight for righteousness

Over **125X**, Leviticus indicts mankind for uncleanness and/or instructs on how to be purified. The motive for such holiness is stated in two repeated phrases: *"I am the LORD"* and *"I am holy."* These are used over **50X**.

- A fight for reverence, redemption & restoration

*The context, content, & conflict within Leviticus is parallel to Hebrews and the entirety of the Bible....
Here-in our Creator-God has designed, declared, developed, delivered, & deployed a loving, gracious, merciful & miraculous plan to restore & redeem a remnant of His sin-soaked, but captured creatures, those who will BE His blood-bought, gospel-believing, cross-carrying, Christ-following, children... Those whose fruit-producing lives witness to their Spirit-led & Spirit-fed transformation. Here we will see the origins of Christ's literal ARMY, AROMA, & AMBASSADORS... all growing in an ever progressive, woeful & wicked world! -JDP*

CLOSE:

See... **Leviticus is not "about" the Law... it's about the LORD!**

...not an application of the Law... but an application of LOVE!

Leviticus is not for people back then... it's for US... NOW!

➤ **A fight for "Help" "Hope" & "Healing"**

Let's Pray!

VIDEO: *O Come To The Alter!*

“Leviticus focuses on the worship & walk of the nation of God... Leviticus shows how God’s people are to fulfill their priestly calling... They must move from deliverance to dedication.”

Leviticus has two primary parts: 1-17 = Sacrifice & 18-27 = Sanctification... the first focuses on the way to God, with the second half fixated on follower’s walk with God. The book begins with what is necessary to approach our holy God, and continues into the requirements for ongoing fellowship with God.

Key Observations:

- Clear theme of Leviticus = Holiness (**set apart, unique**)
 - God is holy
 - We are to be holy
 - Relationships with God must be holy!
 - Holiness is referenced **87X** in Leviticus...
- Hebrew title = “And He Called”
 - Talmud refers to it as: “Law of the Priests”
 - Septuagint name = “...pertains to the Levites”
 - NOTE: a bit misleading...
 - Levites = only a portion of the Priests
- Remember: the Law/Torah is ONE literary unit...
 - We must see the Law as a whole to “get” its parts
 - Leviticus must be interpreted as part of the Law!
- Jesus attributed Pentateuch authorship to Moses...
- **Much of Levitical law is for migratory lifestyles vs. “all”**
- **Leviticus has ZERO geographical movement...**
- **Leviticus time span = 1 MONTH**
- **See the Leviticus sandwich between Exodus & Numbers**
 - Exodus ends with Moses **OUTSIDE** the Tent...
 - Numbers begins with Moses **INSIDE** the Tent...
 - Leviticus = the **SOLUTION** (incorporated holiness)
 - NOTE:

- In Genesis man was ruined, Israel was born
 - In Exodus people redeemed, Israel delivered
 - In Lev. people cleansed, Israel consecrated to the service of God!
- Key passages:
- Chapters 16-17
 - Day of Atonement (a.k.a. “Yom Kippur”)
 - Chiastic pinnacle of Leviticus
 - Middle pinnacle of LORD’s chiasm
 - Law arch = Leviticus pinnacle...
 - Lev. arch = ch.16-17 pinnacle...
 - LORD arch = Heb. 1 pinnacle...
 - Foundation for all of Hebrews (esp. 1:1-4)

Introduction To

Leviticus

Author, Date, and Title

The authorship of Leviticus is closely related to the larger question of who wrote the Pentateuch. As discussed in Introduction to the Pentateuch: [Composition](#), the Pentateuch itself clearly presents Moses as the mediator between the Lord and Israel at this point in Israel’s history (e.g., [1:1](#)). Moreover, it also states explicitly that Moses wrote down at least some portions of the Pentateuch ([Deut. 31:9, 24](#)). These factors indicate at the least that Moses is the primary source for the Pentateuch’s material, and at the most that he is also its primary author. With regard to Leviticus in particular, the Lord is described as “speaking to” Moses over 30 different times, and in many of these instances he then goes on to command Moses to “speak” the words he has just heard to the Israelites ([Lev. 1:1-2; 4:1; 6:8-9](#); etc.). This again indicates that Moses is the source of Leviticus, if not its author. (For other views, see [Introduction to the Pentateuch: Composition](#).) This in turn suggests a date for the book in or near the time of Moses, which would be in the fifteenth or thirteenth century B.C., depending on when one dates the exodus (see [The Date of the Exodus](#)).

The Hebrew name for Leviticus, taken from the beginning of the book, is *wayyiqra*, meaning “and he called.” The English name “Leviticus” can be traced back to the Septuagint (the Gk.

translation), in which the book is called *leyitikon*, meaning “things concerning Levites.” (This title may incorrectly suggest that the material of the book concerns only what priests do. As will become apparent, Leviticus is about much more than priestly duties.)

Theme

The book of Leviticus is a further and deeper unfolding of the divine-human relationship codified on Mount Sinai. On the one hand, it **assumes that Israel is sinful and impure. On the other hand, it describes how to deal with sin and impurity so that the holy Lord can dwell in the people’s midst.**

Purpose, Occasion, and Background

Leviticus should be considered a continuation of Exodus. The second part of Exodus is devoted to building the tabernacle ([Exodus 25-40](#)), the purpose of which is to manifest the Lord’s glory among the people (see [Ex. 29:42-46](#); [Lev. 9:23](#)). The entire content of Leviticus was given less than a month after the construction of the tabernacle, between the first month of the year ([Ex. 40:1, 34-35](#); [Lev. 1:1](#)) and the second month of the year ([Num. 1:1](#)) following the exodus from Egypt.

Interpretative Issues

Leviticus is a difficult book, mainly because modern readers have no firsthand experience of ancient rituals and the worship practices of the tabernacle. For this reason, readers should be aware of the potential pitfall of imposing concepts or distinctions that are foreign to the biblical text itself. With this general warning in mind, several particular interpretative issues may be mentioned.

Ritual and ethical commands. To begin, there is some debate about how to understand the relationship between the “ritual” regulations of [chapters 1-16](#) and what are commonly called the “moral/ethical” commands of [chapters 17-26](#). It is not uncommon for modern readers to see “ritual” and “ethics” as two very separate matters and thus to view these two sections of the book as quite different and distinct. Leviticus, however, is more nuanced than that. While it may be true that not every “ethical” law of [chapters 17-27](#) involves a ritual, it is not true that every “ritual” law of [chapters 1-16](#) is disconnected from ethics. In fact, the whole of the book is concerned with Israel’s being “holy” to the Lord, and the ritual laws of [chapters 1-16](#) are just as important in this regard as are the laws of [chapters 17-27](#). From the perspective of Leviticus, there is no such thing as a “nonethical” ritual law. As a result, it is unwise to see [chapters 1-16](#) and [chapters 17-27](#) as two unrelated sections of material. Both are equally concerned with Israel’s holiness to the Lord.

Unclean, clean, holy. **Leviticus also often uses the language of “unclean,” “clean,” and “holy” differently than today. With “unclean” and “clean,” for example,**

most modern readers are tempted to think of that which is “nonhygienic” or “hygienic.” In Leviticus, however, these words do not refer to hygiene at all. Rather, they refer to “ritual states.” (The word “holy” is also used in many contexts to describe a ritual state.) Understanding the concept of ritual states is very important to understanding Leviticus as a whole.

Leviticus sets forth three basic ritual states: the unclean, the clean, and the

holy. On the one hand, these categories guide the community with reference to the types of actions a person may (or may not) engage in, or the places that a person may (or may not) go. Those who are unclean, e.g., may not partake of a peace offering (7:20), while those who are clean may (7:19). (A modern analogy might be that of registering to vote: a person who is “registered” may vote, whereas a person who is “unregistered” may not.) There is a distinction to be made between “ritual states” and “moral states.” One who is in the ritual state of holiness is not necessarily more personally righteous than a person who is simply clean or unclean (just as a person who is “registered” to vote is not necessarily more righteous than a person who is not).

How ritual purity relates to moral purity. Even though ritual states and moral states are different, the ritual states also seemed to represent or symbolize grades of moral purity. The highest grade of moral purity was that of the Lord himself, who was “holy” and who dwelt in the “Holy of Holies.” By constantly calling the Israelites to *ritual* purity in all aspects of life, the Lord was reminding them of their need for also seeking after *moral* purity in all aspects of life (20:24-26).

Interpreting the rituals and ceremonies. A further challenge in Leviticus is how to interpret the various rituals and ceremonies. In particular, how should the individual acts and objects that make up a ritual be understood? Answering this question can be difficult, for the simple reason that Leviticus rarely explains what various ritual actions or objects mean. (One of the few exceptions is 17:11, where sacrificial animal blood is said to be the “life” of the animal.) Some help is provided, however, by asking questions about the *general* function(s) and the *specific* function(s) of the ritual. *Generally* speaking, rituals may function in several ways: e.g., to address aspects of the human condition (such as impurity or sinfulness), to serve as a way for the offerer to express emotions or desires to the Lord, and to underscore various truths about the Lord or the human condition. (In many instances, one ritual may accomplish all of these things.) It is helpful to ask which of these general functions is in view in the ritual being considered. Related to this, one should also ask, “What is the *specific* goal/function of this particular ritual as a whole?” Answering these two questions provides an interpretative framework in which to understand the individual actions of the ritual (much as a paragraph is an interpretative framework for the sentences in it). For example, if a ritual as a whole is meant to express an emotion (general), and more specifically to express praise (specific), then the individual actions or objects of the ritual should somehow contribute to this goal. Though this approach may still leave some questions unanswered, it will usually provide helpful guidelines and protect readers from some of the interpretative excesses of the past.

Another interpretative issue is how one should understand various concepts such as uncleanness, cleanness, and holiness. Great debate accompanies this issue, for the simple reason that Leviticus often provides various laws concerning cleanness and uncleanness without giving an explicit

rationale of why something or someone is clean or unclean (e.g., [ch. 12](#)). Traditionally, commentators have thought that the rationale behind these rules was to be found in hygienic concerns, polemics against Canaanite religious customs, or the symbolic meaning of “death.” (For these and other views, see notes on [chs. 11-15](#).) Of these options, uncleanness as symbolic of death appears to be the only proposal that sufficiently covers many (as opposed to just some) of the cases of uncleanness. (If this is correct, then holiness—which is the polar opposite of uncleanness—could often symbolize “life.”)

NT relevance of commands in Leviticus. What do these legislative texts of Leviticus have to do with the church today? At this point, only a broad picture may be presented, and it will be painted in three brushstrokes, merely offering examples of the value of Leviticus for the Christian believer. First, **the sacrificial system of Leviticus has ceased for the people of God; it has been fulfilled in the coming of Christ (cf. [Heb. 9:1-14, 24-28; 10:1-14](#)). Yet studying these laws is important because they enable the reader to understand how the work of Christ saves people, since the sacrifices point to different aspects of the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice of himself.**

Second, **the festal calendar of Israel enumerated in Leviticus ([Lev. 23:1-44](#)) has strongly shaped the Christian church’s traditional calendar.** **The three main national pilgrim feasts of Israel are the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Harvest, and the Feast of Booths. For those churches that follow the traditional calendar, these celebrations find their climax in Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost. To fully understand the Christian celebrations, one must see their initial purpose in the OT.** At the same time, some aspects of the legislation in Leviticus (such as the laws regulating clean and unclean foods) had the goal of separating Israel from the other nations. Although this separation has been done away with in the Christian era, these laws still teach the people of God to be morally clean (see note on [11:1-47](#)).

Third, **the entire Levitical Holiness Code ([chs. 17-27](#)) deals with sanctification, i.e., the idea of holiness affecting how one lives in the covenant community. The NT applies to Christians the same principle of life stated in [Leviticus 11:44](#), “be holy, for I am holy” (quoted in [1 Pet. 1:16](#)).** In fact, many of the moral requirements reflected in the Holiness Code reveal the kinds of moral conduct that are still either pleasing or displeasing to God (cf., e.g., [Lev. 19:11-18, 35-36](#)). On the other hand, several details of the Holiness Code concern more symbolic aspects of holiness that should no longer be followed in the Christian era (such as laws prohibiting garments of two kinds of cloth, [19:19](#); prohibiting the shaving of the edges of one’s beard, [21:5](#); and excluding people with physical defects from presenting offerings, [21:17-23](#)). Further, **the NT envisions a people of God that transcends national boundaries, and thus it dissolves the bond between the specifically theocratic system of**

government that was OT Israel. Therefore, current civil governments need not replicate the civil laws specific to the Mosaic theocracy (such as capital punishment for adultery in [20:10](#) or for blasphemy in [24:16](#), or the Sabbath year and Jubilee year in [25:1-22](#)), although of course all governments must pursue justice (and Leviticus may certainly help Christians develop their notions of justice).

Key Themes

- 1. The holy Lord is present in the midst of his people** ([Ex. 40:34](#); [Lev. 1:1](#)). The people of Israel must therefore properly address their sin and impurity and must strive for personal holiness.
- 2. In order to approach God, worshipers must be wholehearted in their devotion** ([1:1-6:7](#); [22:17-30](#)).
- 3. Those who are called to be spiritual leaders**, such as priests, **bear a heavier responsibility than do the laypeople** (chs. 4; 21). In addition to the outward holiness that the priests are granted when ordained, they are constantly commanded to maintain inner holiness (chs. 8; 9; 10; 21).
- 4. As seen in the Day of Atonement ritual** ([ch. 16](#)), the total cleansing of sins and uncleanness is done when the innermost part of the tent of meeting is purified. **Ultimate purification of uncleanness is impossible from the human side.**
- 5. Atonement is a gracious act of the Lord by which sins and impurities can be dealt with** ([17:11](#)).

History of Salvation Summary

The book of Leviticus is concerned with what it means to be the holy people of a holy God: it provides instruction for conduct, both in private and as members of the body of God's people, and it details the ways in which the sacrifices and priesthood are to be administered as God's gracious provision for his people's failures. Without doubt, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the culmination of salvation history, according to which he fulfilled the goals of the

various offerings, the holy objects, the role of the chief priest, and the holy feasts. He also, by his resurrection, entered into his Davidic kingship and has initiated the era in which the people of God include the Gentiles and are no longer defined as a nation-state. Because of this, *Christ's atoning work made obsolete the literal observance of not only the animal sacrifices and offerings but also the temple worship as a whole.*

But as long as believers continue to bear their sinful nature (which they do until they die), the atoning grace of Christ does not make Leviticus irrelevant to NT believers, since principles can still be learned from the underlying laws in this book. In fact, NT writers such as the apostles Paul and Peter employ language taken from Leviticus in their exhortations to believers to follow Christ (e.g., offerings, the tabernacle, priesthood, and feasts). NT authors use the burnt offering ([1 Pet. 1:19](#)), sin offering (e.g., [Rom. 8:3](#); [Heb. 5:3](#); [13:11](#); [1 Pet. 3:18](#); [1 John 2:2](#); [4:10](#)), and guilt offering (possibly [1 Cor. 15:3](#), using [Isa. 53:10](#)) to explain what Jesus accomplished on the cross, and the peace offering to explain the Christian Lord's Supper ([1 Cor. 10:16-18](#)). *Thus, the book of Leviticus serves as a constant reminder of the person and work of Jesus Christ and challenges believers to apply his gospel.* (For an explanation of the "History of Salvation," see the [Overview of the Bible](#). See also History of Salvation in the Old Testament: [Preparing the Way for Christ](#).)

Literary Features

Though on the surface Leviticus is a handbook of laws and regulations, it is actually much more than this. Composed as Israel was preparing to become a settled nation in a promised land, the book has affinities with utopian literature. Literary utopias both describe how people live in an ideal society and also offer an explanation of the institutions and practices that produce the society that is pictured. Leviticus outlines how people should live in God's ideal commonwealth, explaining the practices (the rules and regulations that God commands) and the institutional scaffolding (the Levitical priesthood) that produce God's intended good society. Additional genres include manual for worship, law code, community health regulations, liturgical calendar, and narrative.

The primary rhetorical form of Leviticus is oracular directive from a divine Lawgiver—a series of commands that come from the authoritative voice of God. The commands are addressed by God to Moses, with the formula "and the LORD spoke to Moses" repeated over 30 times. It thus becomes clear that Leviticus is meant to be received as the very words of the Lord that are intended to direct his covenant people in holy living.

Literary realism is present in the form of a total lack of inhibition in discussing such matters as the slaughter of animals, human diseases, bodily functions, and sexual behavior. A good reading

strategy is to imagine stories and human experiences of people living within the system—experiences such as the terror of discovering some type of contamination in one’s home and having to report it to the priests and perhaps dismantle the house ([14:33-47](#)).

The Setting of Leviticus *c. 1446/1260 B.C.*

The book of Exodus finishes with Moses and Israel having constructed and assembled the tabernacle at the base of Mount Sinai. The book of Leviticus primarily records the instructions the Lord gives to Moses from the tent of meeting, but also includes narrative... of a few events related to the tabernacle

Outline

1. Five Major Offerings ([1:1-6:7](#))
 1. The burnt offering ([1:1-17](#))
 2. The grain offering ([2:1-16](#))
 3. The peace offering ([3:1-17](#))
 4. The sin offering ([4:1-5:13](#))
 5. The guilt offering ([5:14-6:7](#))
2. Handling of the Offerings ([6:8-7:38](#))
 1. The burnt offering ([6:8-13](#))
 2. The grain offering ([6:14-23](#))
 3. The sin offering ([6:24-30](#))
 4. The guilt offering ([7:1-10](#))
 5. The peace offering ([7:11-36](#))
 6. Summary ([7:37-38](#))
3. The Establishment of the Priesthood ([8:1-10:20](#))
 1. The ordination of Aaron and his sons ([8:1-36](#))
 2. The first tabernacle service ([9:1-24](#))
 3. The Nadab and Abihu incident ([10:1-20](#))
4. The Laws on Cleanness and Uncleanness ([11:1-15:33](#))
 1. Clean and unclean creatures ([11:1-47](#))
 2. Uncleanness of a childbearing mother ([12:1-8](#))
 3. Leprous diseases and their purification ([13:1-14:57](#))
 4. Discharges from male and female reproductive organs ([15:1-33](#))
5. The Day of Atonement Ritual ([16:1-34](#))
6. The Handling and Meaning of Blood ([17:1-16](#))
7. The Call to Holiness ([18:1-22:33](#))
 1. Prohibitions against pagan practices ([18:1-30](#))
 2. Call to holiness ([19:1-37](#))
 3. Punishment for disobedience ([20:1-27](#))
 4. Holiness of the priests ([21:1-24](#))
 5. Holiness of the offerings ([22:1-33](#))
8. Holy Times ([23:1-25:55](#))
 1. Holy feasts ([23:1-44](#))
 1. Introduction and weekly Sabbath ([23:1-3](#))

2. The Passover ([23:4-8](#))
3. The Firstfruits ([23:9-14](#))
4. The Weeks ([23:15-22](#))
5. The Trumpets ([23:23-25](#))
6. The Day of Atonement ([23:26-32](#))
7. The Booths ([23:33-36](#))
8. Summary of the annual feasts ([23:37-44](#))
2. Oil and bread of the Presence ([24:1-9](#))
3. The case of a blasphemer ([24:10-23](#))
4. The sabbatical year and Jubilee ([25:1-22](#))
5. Laws of redemption ([25:23-55](#))
9. Blessings and Curses ([26:1-46](#))
 1. Fundamental conditions ([26:1-2](#))
 2. Blessings for obedience ([26:3-13](#))
 3. The first stage ([26:14-17](#))
 4. The second stage ([26:18-20](#))
 5. The third stage ([26:21-22](#))
 6. The fourth stage ([26:23-26](#))
 7. The fifth stage ([26:27-39](#))
 8. Conditions and confession within the covenant ([26:40-46](#))
10. Vows and Dedication ([27:1-34](#))
 1. The case of persons ([27:1-8](#))
 2. The case of animals ([27:9-13](#))
 3. The case of a house ([27:14-15](#))
 4. The case of land ([27:16-25](#))
 5. The case of the firstborn ([27:26-27](#))
 6. The case of devoted things ([27:28-29](#))
 7. The case of tithes ([27:30-33](#))
 8. Postscript ([27:34](#))

- ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version.

Introduction to Leviticus

Historical and Canonical Setting

The book of Exodus ends with an extended description of where the Lord was to be worshiped—in the tabernacle. The book of Leviticus describes how the Lord was to be worshiped—through the sacrificial system. Sacrifices were necessary because sin and impurity were inevitable. In order for the presence of God to be maintained, sin had

to be taken away, and Israel had sinned. Even before the covenant stipulations had gone into effect and before the tabernacle had been erected, the Israelites had sinned against the Lord by worshiping a golden calf. How could the people be assured of the continuing presence of holy God in light of the reality of their sin? The worship regulations described in the book of Leviticus answer that question.

Title

The Hebrew title is *vayyiqra*’, which **means “and he called.”** That is the first word of the Hebrew text of the book. In rabbinical literature the title of the book is *torat kohanim*, which means “instructions/laws of the priests.” The title in the Greek Septuagint is *Leuitikon*, which is an adjective meaning “levitical.” This was surely not intended to refer to the Levites, since the Levites are referred to only once in the book of Leviticus. In Hellenistic times, during which the Septuagint was produced, “Levites” meant priests. So the title meant that the book pertains to priestly matters. The Latin translation of that Greek term is *Leviticus*, from which we get our English title.

Outline

The simplest and perhaps the most helpful outline of Leviticus breaks the book into two divisions, the first theological and the second practical. According to this conception of the book, *Leviticus 1–16* *pertains to the maintenance of holiness* by means of the cult (system of worship), *and* *Leviticus 17–27* *pertains to the demonstration of holiness by the people*. Expressed another way, **chapters 1–16 describe the way of access to God, and chapters 17–27 address the way of living for God** (Rooker, *Leviticus*, 42). **That partitioning is not unlike the way some of Paul’s letters may be divided.** For example, Romans 1–11 addresses doctrine, and Romans 12–16 addresses application. Ephesians 1–3 is primarily doctrine, and Ephesians 4–6 is primarily application.

A more detailed outline based on the themes of the book is as follows:

- **Chapters 1–7**—Explanations of the rituals of sacrifice (the priestly code)
- **Chapters 8–10**—Consecration of the priests
- **Chapters 11–16**—Instructions regarding the maintenance of purity
- **Chapters 17–27**—Exhortations to holiness (the Holiness Code)

James Luther Mays provides an outline that helps to explain the contents of the book by means of a series of theological questions and answers. It is as follows:

- Question: **How do sinful and defiled people offer worship to the holy God and maintain fellowship with Him?**
- **Answer:** The rituals of the sacrifices ([Leviticus 1–7](#))
- Question: **How will their sacrifices reach God in worship, and how will God reach them?**
- **Answer:** The consecrated mediatorial priesthood ([Leviticus 8–10](#))
- Question: **How will the holiness of God dominate and sanctify profane life?**
- **Answer:** The manual of purification ([Leviticus 11–16](#))
- Question: **How will people obey God so that holiness becomes a way of life?**
- **Answer:** The laws of holiness ([Leviticus 17–27](#))

The Importance of Leviticus

Perhaps this is the most basic question to answer regarding the book of Leviticus. Many Christians have had the experience of committing themselves to read through the Bible, so they begin with the dramatic narratives of Genesis and continue with the spectacular miracles of Exodus. They read along swimmingly until they arrive in Leviticus where they begin to bog down in molasses. They read about sacrifices that are no longer offered, a priesthood that no longer exists, and laws we are no longer obligated to obey. Leviticus describes all of that and more in tedious detail, so some people ask, “Why is all this in the Bible, and what does it mean for contemporary Christians?” Leviticus is challenging, but what if the result of studying Leviticus is that in future years every time we read Leviticus we see powerful truths about God and ourselves that will profoundly affect the way we think and live? What if we see how Jesus is exalted in Leviticus? Such outcomes are possible, and they are the goals of this book. Allen P. Ross writes, “Leviticus was and is one of the most important books of the Old Testament” (*Holiness to the Lord*, 15). Why would he write that? **Leviticus is important for at least five reasons:**

1. **Leviticus describes the entire religious system of ancient Israel.** If we hope to understand how religion worked in Israel, we must understand the book of Leviticus.

2. **Leviticus provides the theological foundation for the atoning work of Christ.** The idea of a substitutionary sacrifice receives its fullest explication in the book of Leviticus.
3. **Leviticus demonstrates how important holiness is to God. Holiness is the main theme of Leviticus—God’s holiness and the holiness God expects from His people.** Holiness is still important to God, and God reminds His people of that crucial fact in the book of Leviticus.
4. **Leviticus is a record of the words of God in direct speech with His servant Moses. The book opens with the statement, “The Lord summoned Moses and spoke to him” (1:1). The book states 38 times that the Lord spoke to Moses and/or Aaron. Also, 18 times the book records that the Lord “commanded” Moses, Aaron, and the people.** Leviticus is important because it contains the very words of God in direct speech.
5. **The New Testament frequently alludes to the contents of Leviticus.** At numerous points New Testament writers seem to have assumed knowledge of Leviticus, and readers of the New Testament need this knowledge to understand what the writer was describing. For example, none of the following practices are explained by the New Testament writers: purification after childbirth, washing after the healing of a leper, journeys to the festivals in Jerusalem, and separation from the Gentiles in eating. All these find their origin in the book of Leviticus, and these practices were so ingrained in the thinking of first-century Jews that they needed no explanation. If modern people are to understand such practices, they should be familiar with the contents of the book of Leviticus.

The book of Leviticus has had more impact on Judaism than any other book in the Old Testament. Over half the commentary of the Talmud, the document that is the basis for rabbinic law, is concerned with the book of Leviticus. This influence of Leviticus on Judaism continued even after the destruction of the temple in AD 70 (Rooker, *Leviticus*, 22). That is remarkable in light of the fact that Leviticus primarily concerns the execution of worship in the tabernacle and the temple. For centuries the rabbis taught the Hebrew language to their students by having their students memorize much of the book of Leviticus in Hebrew, perhaps concurrently learning how to translate it (Alexander, “How Did the Rabbis Learn Hebrew?,” 80). Why wouldn’t contemporary Christians be highly interested in a book so influential in the ancient world and so much a part of the foundations of our faith?

Authorship

Leviticus nowhere contains a claim of authorship. However, the book consists of God’s personal revelations to Moses, which strongly implies that Moses wrote the book. Elsewhere, the Old Testament refers to Moses’ authorship of the Law, which includes Leviticus (e.g., [1 Chr 15:15](#); [22:13](#); [2 Chr 23:18](#); [Ezra 3:2](#); [Neh 1:7](#); [Mal 4:4](#)). All four of the Gospel writers refer to Moses’ authorship of the Old Testament Law (e.g., [Matt 8:4](#); [Mark 12:26](#); [Luke 24:27](#); [John 1:17](#)). The Gospel of Luke refers specifically to a passage in Leviticus and states that it is from Moses ([Luke 2:22](#)). The apostle Paul quoted [Leviticus 18:5](#) and wrote that it was from Moses ([Rom 10:5](#)). All four of the Gospels record that Jesus Himself referred to Moses’ authorship of the Law ([Matt 19:7-8](#); [Mark 10:3,5](#); [Luke 24:44](#); [John 5:46-47](#); [7:19](#)), and Jesus specifically referred to laws in Leviticus as from Moses ([Matt 8:4](#); [Mark 1:44](#); [Luke 5:14](#)). Since Jesus is omniscient and spoke infallibly, for followers of Jesus the identity of the author of Leviticus is settled: Moses wrote the book.

Interpreting and Applying Old Testament Law

One challenge in applying the book of Leviticus in practical ways is that we do not know how to interpret it well. A brief description of a Christian method of interpreting Old Testament law could be helpful. **Many Christians divide the laws in the Old Testament into three categories: ceremonial laws, civil laws, and moral laws.** **Ceremonial laws have to do with rituals regarding worship, leadership of worship, and preparation for worship. Jesus made the Old Testament ceremonial system obsolete when He became our high priest and the final sacrifice for sin (Heb 8:13; 9:11–10:18).** **Also, the civil laws no longer apply to us in the new covenant age, since their purpose was to govern the society of Israel during the period of the old covenant.** **It is clear, however, that the moral laws of the Old Testament still apply to us, since most or all of them are repeated in the New Testament.**

Thus, such a division of Old Testament laws into three categories can be helpful. However, we must admit that such categories are extraneous to the Bible. Furthermore, even though new covenant believers are not required to obey old covenant ceremonial and civil laws, can't such laws teach us something about God? God gave the laws, after all. He gave them to His people in a specific place for a specific time, but they are in the Bible and the whole Bible is important. So what do they mean to us today?

The following is a simple seven-step method that I have found helpful for interpreting and applying the law.

First, affirm inspiration and helpfulness. [Second Timothy 3:16](#) says,

All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness.

“All Scripture is inspired by God.” When the apostle Paul wrote that, the New Testament did not exist. He was writing about the Old Testament Scripture that includes Leviticus, and he wrote, “All Scripture is inspired by God.” “All Scripture,” including the books of law like Leviticus. So we affirm inspiration—God breathed out, inspired, Leviticus. Also we affirm its helpfulness. What does [2 Timothy 3:16](#) state next? “All Scripture is . . . profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness.” So all Scripture is not only inspired; all of it is also helpful, profitable. In the new covenant period the Old Testament ceremonial and civil laws are not *law* for us; our disobedience to individual laws is not punished as was the case in ancient Israel. However, they are profitable in that they teach us about God, His will, and how to live for Him in today's world (Guthrie, *Read the Bible for Life*, 95–108).

Second, affirm fulfillment in Jesus.

The whole Old Testament is fulfilled in Jesus, even the legal sections like Leviticus. After the resurrection of Jesus, He met a few of His disciples on the road to Emmaus. He told them that His life, death, and resurrection were prophesied in the Old Testament. He said in [Luke 24:44](#),

Everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

“Everything written about *Me* in the Law of Moses.” The law of Moses, including Leviticus, is somehow about Jesus. Jesus said, “Don’t assume that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” ([Matt 5:17](#)). **Jesus said that He came to fulfill the Law. How does Jesus fulfill the Law? We’ll see that as we go through Leviticus**, but for now let’s affirm Jesus’ statement that He fulfills it.

Third, determine what the law/text meant in its original context. We study what originally happened. What does the Bible say about how a particular sacrifice was offered, or how the Day of Atonement was observed? **The contemporary meaning is based on the original meaning; the contemporary application is based on the original application.** It’s often been said that:

A text in the Bible cannot mean what it never meant.

How would this passage have been understood and applied in its original setting? We base our interpretation on that.

Fourth, note the similarities with today’s context.

For example, [Leviticus 11:7](#) directs God’s people to refrain from eating pork. I like pork. Barbequed pork is so common in North Carolina that if I did not eat it I would likely be breaking some state law. However, I would not be breaking any law in the new covenant. Evidently some people were pressuring Christians in Colossae to follow the dietary regulations of the old covenant. **The apostle Paul wrote to them: “Don’t let anyone judge you in regard to food and drink. . . . These are a shadow of what was to come; the substance is the Messiah” (Col 2:16-17). So the Old Testament dietary laws no longer apply in the age of the new covenant; faith in Jesus the Messiah makes them obsolete and supersedes them.**

But what did the command against eating pork mean in its original context? The pagan peoples around Israel ate pork. In commanding His people *not* to eat pork God was creating a distinction between His people and other peoples. God's people were to observe that distinction; they were to be different, separate. What is the similarity with today's context? People still do things God forbids, and God's people are to be different. That's the connection to today's context.

Fifth, identify principles that apply to both ancient and modern contexts. With respect to refraining from eating pork, what's the principle? God still doesn't want His people to be exactly like the people around them. That principle applies today, so we've identified a principle that applies to both ancient and modern contexts.

Walter Kaiser refers to this as “principlization”
(Toward an Exegetical Theology, 150–63). What is the underlying principle(s) communicated by this law?
Answering that question is fundamental in the task of interpreting and applying old covenant laws.

Sixth, consider what the New Testament teaches about each principle. Does the New Testament teach anything, for example, about the separation of God's people from those who don't know and love God? It does. Did Jesus say anything about that? He did, and He fulfills that part of the Law because He lived separate from the sin of the world, He empowers His followers to be different, and He *is* the difference between His followers and those who don't know and love God.

Seventh, apply the principle to your life. The principle is that God wants us to be different from those who don't know Him. I apply that principle by rejecting the sinful practices of the world and separating myself from them and to Jesus.

- Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary – Exalting Jesus in Leviticus.

LEVITICUS

F. Duane Lindsey, A.B., B.D., Th.M., Th.D.

Introduction

The Book of Leviticus was the first book studied by a Jewish child; yet is often among the last books of the Bible to be studied by a Christian. However, a book referred to about 40 times in the New Testament should be of great significance to every Christian.

Apart from the question of the typological significance of the Levitical sacrifices:

the Book of Leviticus contains extensive revelation concerning the character of God—especially His holiness but also His electing love and grace. Also, it provides many rich lessons concerning the holy life that God expects of His people.

Many New Testament passages, including some key concepts in the Epistle to the Hebrews, cannot be evaluated properly without a clear understanding of their counterparts in the Book of Leviticus.

THE TITLES OF THE BOOK.

The title "Leviticus" comes from the Greek *Leuitikon*, an adjective used by the translators of the Septuagint as the title of the book because it pertains to priestly ceremonies and institutions. This may seem to be a strange title since the **Levites are mentioned only once in the book (25:32). But since the Aaronic priests were from the tribe of Levi and the sacrificial system which they administered is generally referred to as Levitical, the name is justified.** The title was carried across as "Leviticus" in the Latin Vulgate from which the English title was taken. The *Hebrew title is simply wayyiqrā', "and He called"* (the first word in [1:1](#)).

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE.

Though the author is not specifically identified in the book, Moses should be accepted as its author for these reasons: (1) Since the contents of the book were revealed to Moses at Sinai ([7:37-38](#); [26:46](#); [27:34](#)) and mostly to or through Moses ([1:1](#); [4:1](#); [6:1](#), [8](#), [19](#), [24](#); [7:22](#); [8:1](#); etc.), he is most likely the one who recorded these divine revelations. (2) The book is the sequel to Exodus (cf. [comments](#) under [Lev. 1:1](#)) which specifically claims Mosaic authorship ([Ex. 17:14](#); [24:4](#), [7](#); [34:27-28](#); cf. [Deut. 31:9](#), [24](#)). (3) Jesus affirmed its Mosaic authorship when referring to the law of cleansing from "leprosy" ([Matt. 8:4](#); [Mark 1:44](#); cf. [Lev. 14:2-32](#)). Thus Leviticus was written by Moses probably shortly after the composition of Exodus in the second half of the 15th century B.C.

Liberal viewpoints that deny Mosaic authorship and date much of the book, at least in its present form, in the period after the Exile (fourth century B.C.) have been satisfactorily answered by numerous conservative scholars (e.g., R.K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and*

Commentary, pp. 15-26; B.K. Waltke, "Leviticus," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 3:913-20).

HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SETTING.

The historical and theological context of the Book of Leviticus is implied in the opening and closing verses of the book ([1:1](#); [27:34](#); cf. [7:37-38](#)). **Historically, Leviticus was the sequel to Exodus**, for the Levitical sacrificial system was a divine revelation to Israel given through Moses as a part of the covenant obligation at Sinai. The book opens: "The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting" (i.e., the tabernacle). Thus the legislation contained in Leviticus follows the historical narrative concerning the construction of the tabernacle ([Ex. 25-40](#)) and precedes the next major historical narrative of the numbering of the Israelite tribes for the decampment from Sinai ([Num. 1-4](#)). The intervening exceptions are the historical narrative of the ordination of the priests ([Lev. 8-10](#)) and the brief interlude in [24:10-13](#).

Theologically the Levitical sacrificial system was instituted for a people redeemed from Egypt and in covenant relationship with their God. Thus sacrifice in Israel was not a human effort to obtain favor with a hostile God but a response to the Lord who had first given Himself to Israel in covenant relationship.

Yet whenever sin or impurity, whether ethical or ceremonial, disrupted this fellowship, the individual or the nation (whichever was the case) renewed covenant fellowship with the Lord through sacrifice, the particular sacrifice depending on the exact circumstance of the disruption. This approach to God through sacrifice could, of course, be purely dedicatory or communal if no disruption had taken place, but this seems to have been the exception rather than the norm.

CONTENTS AND LITERARY GENRE.

The Book of Leviticus deals with the worship of Israel—its sacrifices, priesthood, laws rendering a person unclean and so disqualifying him for worship, and various special times and seasons of worship. It also contains many regulations pertaining to daily living and practical holiness, both ethical and ceremonial. The literary genre of Leviticus is legal literature, including both apodictic law (laws expressing necessary conduct: "You shall [not]... ." e.g., [26:1-2](#)) and mostly casuistic law (laws expressing case decisions: "If [such is done]... then [such will result]..." e.g., [4:3](#)). Through these literary forms within the historical framework of the covenant between the Lord and Israel, God chose to reveal certain truths about sin and its consequences, and about holiness of life before God.

THEME AND STRUCTURE.

The theme of Leviticus is the Israelite believer's worship and walk before the holy God. By way of application this theme is significant for Christians today

(cf. [1 Peter 1:15-16](#)). The theme verse is [Leviticus 19:2](#): "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy" (cf. [20:26](#); etc.).

Leviticus is the book of holiness (*qāḏôš*, "separateness"; cf. [20:26](#)). While much stress is placed on **ceremonial holiness**, wherein persons, animals, or objects are set apart from profane use or cultic pollution for the service of God, such holiness **is** **ultimately symbolic of and foundational for ethical holiness** ([11:44](#); [19:2](#)). **God Himself is separate from all that is sinful** and profane (morally holy) as well as transcendent above all His Creation (majestically holy). God, who was present in the midst of His people Israel ([26:11-12](#)), demanded that they be holy ([20:22-26](#)).

The structure of the book corresponds with its theme. [Chapters 1-16](#) deal basically with worship before a holy God, while [chapters 17-27](#) relate primarily to the daily walk in holiness before God and people. (See the following [outline](#) and comments at the beginnings of various sections in the [Commentary](#).)

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF OLD TESTAMENT SACRIFICE.

Under the Law *sacrifice was given by God as the only sufficient means for Israelites to remain in harmonious fellowship with Himself*. It is noteworthy that the revelation of the sacrificial system through Moses did not include the revelation of any typical significance of the sacrifices. It did, however, spell out clearly the principle of atonement through a substitutionary sacrifice (see [comments on 1:4](#); and [comments on 17:11](#)). Another important factor is the distinction between two relationships which an Israelite had/could have with God: (a) a corporate relationship with God as a theocratic nation (cf. [Ex. 19-20](#)), and (b) a personal relationship with God based on individual regeneration and justification by faith. While ideally these two relationships should have been coextensive, nevertheless it appears that throughout Israel's history (except possibly immediately after the Exodus) there was only a remnant of true believers, and that a large number of the people (often the vast majority?) were merely going through the form of worshiping the Lord without genuine faith in Him.

The traditional view that the sacrifices only "covered" sin fails to do justice to *the real forgiveness that was granted by God* ([Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7](#)). That sacrificial atonement merely "covered" sin without in some sense removing it finds no support in the etymology of the Hebrew word for "atonement" (see [comments](#) on [1:4](#)). Rather, sacrificial atonement involved the actual removal of the guilt and punishment for the particular sin(s) involved. The broad scope of the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement (cf. [discussion](#) on [chap. 16](#)) extended this principle to include "all the people" ([v. 33](#)) and "all their sins" ([v. 22](#)), that is, "all the sins of the Israelites" ([v. 34](#)). The complete forgiveness of the Israelites' sins for the past year is further described in terms of cleansing from sin in [verse 30](#).

Nevertheless Levitical sacrifices (as well as genuine prelevitical sacrifices) had a number of limitations. First, *the sacrifices were limited in their moral efficacy*. **Since empty ritualism was never an acceptable option to God, a truly acceptable sacrifice must have been prompted by genuine faith and moral obedience to the revealed will of God** ([26:14-45](#), esp. [v. 31](#); [Pss. 40:6-8; 51:16-17; Prov. 21:27; Amos 5:21-24; Heb. 10:5-10; 11:4, 6](#)). Sacrifices that were not brought in faith were perhaps sufficient at times for restoring ceremonial cleanness and meeting civil requirements (e.g., the restitution connected with the guilt offering), but did not really please God because they were empty formality. It is noteworthy that the object of faith was not the typology of the sacrifices or a consciousness of the coming Redeemer, but God Himself. Of course, the content of faith increased to correspond with progressive Old Testament revelation concerning the coming of the Lamb of God as the ultimate "guilt offering" ([Isa. 53:10](#)).

Second, with the possible exception of the Day of Atonement ritual, *the sacrifices were limited in scope to certain kinds of personal sins*. Theologically they did not atone for the sin nature, or for the imputed sin of Adam. Nor did they even include willful acts of sin which were committed in defiance of God (cf. [Num. 15:30-31](#), and [comments](#) on [Lev. 4:1-2](#)). Therefore ***Levitical sacrifice was not a complete and final scheme whereby all forms of sin could be removed***. It was mainly concerned with sins of ignorance, accident, carelessness, and omission, including sins of ritual defilement and misdemeanors that violated property rights. **Sins for which there was no individual sacrifice were those done in defiance of the Lord and His commands—willful violations of the Ten Commandments (except minor violations of the eighth and ninth commands), willful disregard for ceremonial regulations, and any other violations of covenant relationship between Israel and the Lord.** Such sins could be immediately forgiven only on the basis of unqualified grace in response to faith and repentance (cf. [Pss. 32; 51](#)). Otherwise they awaited the cleansing of the Day of Atonement ritual.

Third, *the sacrifices were limited in purpose to the covenant preservation and renewal of a redeemed people*. The Levitical sacrifices were a part of the worship of a redeemed people in covenant relationship with their God. Corporately, and perhaps for the most part individually, the occasion of the slaying of the Passover lamb and the application of its blood to the doorposts in Egypt were outward expressions of inward faith that signaled the regeneration and justification of individual Israelites. The subsequent sacrificial system dealt ideally with worship and covenant renewal, not initial salvation. It was comparable to the New Testament believer's experience of [1 John 1:9](#), not to the sinner's experience of [John 3:16](#). Nevertheless it is obvious

that as a new generation of Israelites came to the age of accountability, they needed to express faith for regeneration and justification before they could worship God acceptably and seek to maintain fellowship with Him. This might have occurred on any number of occasions, including the annual Passover commemoration with its attendant explanations. In some cases it might have occurred when the young Israelites brought their first sin offerings with a true understanding of what they were doing and with faith in their forgiving God.

Fourth, except for the Day of Atonement ritual, *the sacrifices were limited in scope and duration to one sin per sacrifice*. The forgiveness granted was real though temporary (in the sense that each sin required another sacrifice). Thus while God accepted the sacrifices for the removal of guilt in the case of the sin being dealt with, such temporary stays of divine wrath did not result in the permanent purging of a person's conscience ([Heb. 10:2](#)).

Fifth, *the efficacy of sacrifice was not inherent in the animals sacrificed or in any or all parts of the sacrificial ritual*. God provided atonement and forgiveness in view of the all-sufficient sacrifice that Jesus Christ would offer on the cross. Christ's death was "a sacrifice of atonement" by which God paid in full for the forgiveness which He had extended before the Cross ([Rom. 3:25](#)). In other words, *the Levitical sacrifices were validated in the mind of God on the basis of Christ's death* as the one truly efficacious Sacrifice for all sin, the Lamb of God who was slain from the foundation of the world ([Rev. 13:8](#); cf. [1 Peter 1:19-20](#)). The efficacious value of the sacrifices was therefore derivative rather than original. It is in this sense that the author of Hebrews asserts, "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" ([Heb. 10:4](#)). Nevertheless the benefits experienced by the Old Testament believers were just as real as the clothing which is worn by a 20th-century credit-card purchaser whose account has not yet been paid in full.

By way of summary, the Levitical sacrifices were efficacious both for restoring the covenant relationship and (when offered in faith) for the actual forgiveness of particular sins, but this efficacy was derivative, needing to be validated by the one all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Though the sacrifices were limited in scope and purpose, their spiritual value was also pedagogical in teaching Israel about the right way to approach a holy God: "First of all, sin had to be dealt with; the appropriate offering (sin or guilt) had to be made. This was closely linked with a burnt offering that followed it immediately (with its accompanying cereal offering as stated in many cases) and thus completed the self-committal ([2 Chron. 29:31](#)) that qualified the supplicant(s) for the last stage of the liturgy. The crowning phase was the presentation of [additional] burnt and peace offerings, the former including both the voluntary gifts of individuals and the calendrical offerings symbolizing the constant devotion of the people as a whole, [and] the latter representing the communal experience in which the Lord, the priest, and the worshiper... all had a share" (A.F. Rainey, "Sacrifice," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 4:203).

To summarize the theology of the ritual procedure (consult [comments](#) under various offerings in [Lev. 1-7](#)), it can be noted that **when an Israelite worshiper laid his hand on the**

animal victim, he identified himself with the animal as his substitute. When done in faith, this accomplished a symbolic transfer of his sin and a legal transfer of his guilt to the animal victim.

God then accepted the slaughter of the animal (this acceptance was symbolized by the burning on the altar) as a ransom payment for the particular sin which occasioned it (or for the sins of the past year in the case of the nation on the Day of Atonement), thus diverting God's wrath from the sinner and (ultimately) to Christ on the cross, so that God granted real forgiveness to the sinner who brought the sacrifice to Him in faith.

TYPOLGY AND THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS.

Biblical typology has probably suffered as much at the hands of its friends as at those of its enemies. A defense of the hermeneutics of typology is beyond the scope of this *Introduction*. However, since a suggested typological interpretation is given at the end of each of the five Levitical sacrifices (see [comments](#) after [1:17](#); [comments](#) after [2:16](#); [comments](#) after [3:17](#); [comments](#) after [5:13](#); and [comments](#) after [6:7](#)) and [comments](#) after the annual festival calendar ([chap. 23](#)), a few comments are in order concerning biblical typology. **A type may be defined as an exceptional Old Testament reality which was specially ordained by God effectively to prefigure a single New Testament redemptive truth.**

Because of its divine institution and its role in the forgiveness of sins under the Mosaic economy, the Levitical sacrificial system and the place and times of worship associated with it are especially fertile ground for the recognition of types.

However, those who seek to interpret types must always remember:

- (a) to **give proper attention to the historical reality**, noting especially its symbolic and redemptive significance to Old Testament believers and its subsequent continuation, commemoration, and influence on future generations of Israelites until its fulfillment in the antitype;
- (b) to **locate the chief point(s) of resemblance between the type and its antitype**, and not to press the interpretation beyond these points;

(c) to **relate the understanding of the typical significance to New Testament believers**, not to Old Testament believers; and

(d) to **interpret in the light of the established doctrines of Scripture** rather than attempting to establish a doctrine on a type.

- The Bible Knowledge Commentary:
An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas
Seminary Faculty.

“...the initial purpose of the book was to establish and maintain enduring patterns of divine-human and human-human interaction that are appropriate and necessary for a holy tribal community centered in the divine Presence.”

Leviticus is located at the structural and conceptual heart of the Pentateuch as its third book, a separate unit but also part of a cumulative development that depends on Exodus and paves the way for Numbers.

In Leviticus, as in countless other works, literary structure highlights themes, and structure can legitimately be found on more than one level. A strong case can be made for the structural centrality of chapter 16, both because it contains the middle divine speech and because its culmination of ritual matters (chs. 1-16) paves the way for laws on holy living to be observed by a morally cleansed community (chs. 17-27).

W. Shea has proposed that the overall structure of Leviticus is a large chiasm or introversion in chapters 1-25 with chapter 16 at its center, followed by concluding chapters (chs. [26-27](#))...

Cultic legislation (chs. [1-7](#))

Priestly history ([chs. 8-10](#))
Personal laws of uncleanness ([chs. 11-15](#))
Day of Atonement ([ch. 16](#))
Personal moral laws ([chs. 17-20](#))
Priestly legislation ([chs. 21-22](#))
Cultic legislation ([chs. 23-25](#), except history in [24:10-23](#))
Conclusion ([chs. 26-27](#))

- The NIV Application Commentary - Leviticus

Leviticus Research

Introduction to Leviticus

Though many see Leviticus as a book addressing the priests of Israel, the information here was actually written for the people, yet includes specific instructions for the priests. The laws relate to the entire nation of Israel, but it was the priests who were to teach others how to live as God's holy people and to regulate worship in the tabernacle (also called *sanctuary*, or *tent of meeting*), where God's holy presence dwelled. - Layman's Bible Commentary

The Importance of Leviticus

What is the importance of Leviticus? Perhaps this is the most basic question to answer regarding the book of Leviticus. Many

Christians have had the experience of committing themselves to read through the Bible, so they begin with the dramatic narratives of Genesis and continue with the spectacular miracles of Exodus. They read along swimmingly until they arrive in Leviticus where they begin to bog down in molasses. They read about sacrifices that are no longer offered, a priesthood that no longer exists, and laws we are no longer obligated to obey. Leviticus describes all of that and more in tedious detail, so some people ask, “Why is all this in the Bible, and what does it mean for contemporary Christians?” Leviticus is challenging, but what if the result of studying Leviticus is that in future years every time we read Leviticus we see powerful truths about God and ourselves that will profoundly affect the way we think and live? What if we see how Jesus is exalted in Leviticus? ...Allen P. Ross writes, “*Leviticus was and is one of the most important books of the Old Testament*” (*Holiness to the Lord*, 15). Why would he write that? **Leviticus is important for at least five reasons:**

- 1. Leviticus describes the entire religious system of ancient Israel. If we hope to understand how religion worked in Israel, we must understand the book of Leviticus.**
- 2. Leviticus provides the theological foundation for the atoning work of Christ. The idea of a**

substitutionary sacrifice receives its fullest explication in the book of Leviticus.

3. Leviticus demonstrates how important holiness is to God. Holiness is the main theme of Leviticus—God’s holiness and the holiness God expects from His people. Holiness is still important to God, and God reminds His people of that crucial fact in the book of Leviticus.

4. Leviticus is a record of the words of God in direct speech with His servant Moses. The book opens with the statement, *“The Lord summoned Moses and spoke to him” (1:1).*

1. The book states 38 times that the Lord spoke to Moses and/or Aaron.

2. Also, 18 times the book records that the Lord “commanded” Moses, Aaron, and the people.

5. The New Testament frequently alludes to the contents of Leviticus. At numerous points, New Testament writers seem to have assumed knowledge of Leviticus, and readers of the New Testament need this

knowledge to understand what the writer was describing. For example, none of the following practices are explained by the New Testament writers: purification after childbirth, washing after the healing of a leper, journeys to the festivals in Jerusalem, and separation from the Gentiles in eating. All these find their origin in the book of Leviticus, and these practices were so ingrained in the thinking of first-century Jews that they needed no explanation. If modern people are to understand such practices, they should be familiar with the contents of the book of Leviticus.

The book of Leviticus has had more impact on Judaism than any other book in the Old Testament.

Over half the commentary of the Talmud, the document that is the basis for rabbinic law, is concerned with the book of Leviticus.

For centuries, the rabbis taught the Hebrew language to their students by having their students memorize much of the book of Leviticus in Hebrew...

- Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary – Exalting Jesus in Leviticus.

TITLE:

The original Hebrew title of this third book of the law **is taken from the first word, translated “and He called.”** Several OT books derive their Hebrew names in the same manner (e.g., Genesis, “In the beginning”; Exodus, “Now these are the names”).

The title Leviticus comes from the Latin Vulgate version of the Greek OT (LXX) *Levitikon* meaning “matters of the Levites” (25:32, 33).

While the book addresses issues of the Levites’ responsibilities, much more significantly, all the priests are instructed in how they are to assist the people in worship, and the people are informed about how to live a holy life.

New Testament writers quote the Book of Leviticus more than fifteen times 15X.

- The MacArthur Bible Commentary.

The Hebrew title is *vayyiqra*, which means **“and he called.”** That is the first word of the Hebrew text of the book.

In rabbinical literature the title of the book is torat kohanim, which means “instructions/laws of the priests.”

The title in the Greek Septuagint is *Leuitikon*, which is an adjective meaning “levitical.” This was surely not intended to refer to the Levites, since the Levites are referred to only once in the book of Leviticus. *In Hellenistic times, during which the Septuagint was produced, “Levites” meant priests. So, the title meant that the book pertains to priestly matters.*

The Latin translation of that Greek term is *Leviticus*, from which we get our English title.

- Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary

The Hebrew name for Leviticus, taken from the beginning of the book, is *wayyiqra’*, meaning *“and he called.”*

The English name “Leviticus” can be traced back to the Septuagint (the Gk. translation), in which the book is called leytikon, meaning “things concerning Levites.”

(This title may incorrectly suggest that the material of the book concerns only what priests do. As will become apparent, Leviticus is about much more than priestly duties.)

- ESV Study Bible

Author and Date

Leviticus nowhere contains a claim of authorship. However, the book consists of God's personal revelations to Moses, which strongly implies that Moses wrote the book.

Elsewhere, **the Old Testament refers to Moses' authorship of the Law, which includes Leviticus** (e.g., [1 Chr 15:15](#); [22:13](#); [2 Chr 23:18](#); [Ezra 3:2](#); [Neh 1:7](#); [Mal 4:4](#)). **All four of the Gospel writers refer to Moses' authorship of the Old Testament Law** (e.g., [Matt 8:4](#); [Mark 12:26](#); [Luke 24:27](#); [John 1:17](#)). **The Gospel of Luke refers specifically to a passage in Leviticus and states that it is from Moses** ([Luke 2:22](#)). **The apostle Paul quoted [Leviticus 18:5](#) and wrote that it was from Moses** ([Rom 10:5](#)). **All four of the Gospels record that Jesus Himself referred to Moses' authorship of the Law** ([Matt 19:7-8](#); [Mark 10:3,5](#); [Luke 24:44](#); [John 5:46-47](#); [7:19](#)), **and Jesus specifically referred to laws in Leviticus as from Moses** ([Matt 8:4](#); [Mark 1:44](#); [Luke 5:14](#)). **Since Jesus is omniscient... Moses wrote the book.**

Authorship and date issues are resolved by the concluding verse of the book, “These are the commandments which the LORD commanded Moses for the children of Israel on Mount Sinai” ([27:34](#); cf. [7:38](#); [25:1](#); [26:46](#)).

The fact that God gave these laws to Moses (cf. [1:1](#)) appears fifty-six times in Leviticus’ twenty-seven chapters.

In addition to recording detailed prescriptions, the book chronicles several historical accounts relating to the laws (see chs. 8-10; [24:10-23](#)).

The Exodus occurred in 1445 B.C. (see [Introduction to Exodus: Author and Date](#)) and the tabernacle was finished one year later ([Ex. 40:17](#)). Leviticus picks up the record at that point, probably revealed in the first month (Abib/Nisan) of the second year after the Exodus. The Book of Numbers begins after that in the second month (Ziv; cf. [Num. 1:1](#)).

- The MacArthur Bible Commentary.

The authorship of Leviticus is closely related to the larger question of who wrote the Pentateuch. As discussed in Introduction to the Pentateuch: [Composition](#), the Pentateuch itself clearly presents Moses as the mediator between the Lord and Israel at this point in Israel’s history (e.g., [1:1](#)). Moreover, it also states explicitly that Moses wrote down at least some portions of the Pentateuch ([Deut. 31:9, 24](#)). These factors indicate at the least that Moses is the primary source for the Pentateuch’s material, and at the most that he is also its primary author.

With regard to **Leviticus in particular, the Lord is described as “speaking to” Moses over 30 different times**, and in many of these instances **He then goes on to command Moses to “speak” the words he has just heard to the Israelites** ([Lev. 1:1-2](#); [4:1](#); [6:8-9](#); etc.).

This again indicates that Moses is the source of Leviticus, if not its author. (For other views, see [Introduction to the Pentateuch: Composition](#).) This in turn suggests a date for the book in or near the time of Moses, which would be in the fifteenth or thirteenth century B.C., depending on when one dates the exodus (see [The Date of the Exodus](#)).

- ESV Study Bible

Background and Setting

The book of Exodus ends with an extended description of where the Lord was to be worshiped—in the tabernacle. The book of Leviticus describes how the Lord was to be worshiped—through the sacrificial system.

Sacrifices were necessary because sin and impurity were inevitable. In order for the presence of God to be maintained, sin had to be taken away, and Israel had sinned. Even before the covenant stipulations had gone into effect and before the tabernacle had been erected, the Israelites had sinned against the Lord by worshiping a golden calf. How could the people be assured of the continuing presence of holy God in light of the reality of their sin? The worship regulations described in the book of Leviticus answer that question.

- Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary –
Exalting Jesus in Leviticus.

Before the year that Israel camped at Mt. Sinai: (1) the presence of God's glory had never formally resided among the Israelites; (2) a central place of worship, like the tabernacle, had never existed; (3) a structured and regulated set of sacrifices and feasts had not been given; and (4) a high priest, a formal priesthood, and a cadre of tabernacle workers had not been appointed. As Exodus concluded, features one and two had been accomplished, thereby requiring that elements three and four be inaugurated, which is what Leviticus provides. Exodus 19:6 called Israel to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Leviticus in turn is God's instruction for His newly redeemed people, teaching them how to worship and obey Him.

Israel had, up to that point, only the historical records of the patriarchs from which to gain their knowledge of how to worship and live before their God. Having been slaves for centuries in Egypt, the land of a seemingly infinite number of gods, their concept of worship and the godly life was severely distorted. Their tendency to hold on to polytheism and pagan ritual is witnessed in the wilderness wanderings, e.g., when they worshiped the

golden calf (cf. [Ex. 32](#)). God would not permit them to worship in the ways of their Egyptian neighbors, nor would He tolerate Egyptian ideas about morality and sin. With the instructions in Leviticus, the priests could lead Israel in worship appropriate to the Lord.

Even though the book contains a great deal of law, it is presented in a historical format. Immediately after Moses supervised the construction of the tabernacle, God came in glory to dwell there; this marked the close of the Book of Exodus ([40:34-38](#)). Leviticus begins with God calling Moses from the tabernacle and ends with God's commands to Moses in the form of binding legislation. Israel's King had occupied His palace (the tabernacle), instituted His law, and declared Himself a covenant partner with His subjects.

No geographical movement occurs in this book. The people of Israel stay at the foot of Sinai, the mountain where God came down to give His law ([25:1](#); [26:46](#); [27:34](#)). They were still there one month later when the record of Numbers began (cf. [Num. 1:1](#)).

Leviticus should be considered a continuation of Exodus.

The second part of Exodus is devoted to building the tabernacle ([Exodus 25-40](#)), the purpose of which is to manifest the Lord's glory among the people (see [Ex. 29:42-46](#); [Lev. 9:23](#)).

The entire content of Leviticus was given less than a month after the construction of the tabernacle, between the first month of the year ([Ex. 40:1](#), [34-35](#); [Lev. 1:1](#)) and the second month of the year ([Num. 1:1](#)) following the exodus from Egypt.

- ESV Study Bible

Historical and Theological Themes

The book of Leviticus is comprised of twenty-seven chapters including many regulations and guidelines. The rules are not arbitrary, though. Each of the seemingly minute details in Leviticus deals with the main theme of holiness.

The phrase that is repeated most often in Leviticus is a variation of God's command, "Be holy as I am holy." During this time, Israel was a new nation. God's laws were designed to teach them how to become set apart—holy people who imitated God's character.

The tent of meeting was built by the Israelites as a holy place to house the presence of a holy God. Sinful people could not approach their God, though, because He was the essence of holiness. The rituals and

offerings detailed in Leviticus are God's compassionate design to allow His people to find atonement so that they could approach Him in worship and experience a covenant relationship with Him.

Leviticus can be divided into two major sections, separated by chapter 16, which deals with the annual Day of Atonement. Chapters 1-15 deal with what we might call priestly holiness, by giving instructions about sacrifices and rituals that relate to one's holiness. Chapters 17-27 deal more with what we could call practical holiness—that which is worked out in daily life.

- Layman's Bible Commentary

The core ideas around which Leviticus develops are the holy character of God and the will of God for Israel's holiness. God's holiness, mankind's sinfulness, sacrifice, and God's presence in the sanctuary are the book's most common themes.

With a clear, authoritative tone, the book sets forth instruction toward personal holiness at the urging of God ([11:44, 45](#); [19:2](#); [20:7, 26](#); cf. [1 Pet. 1:14-16](#)).

On over 125 occasions, Leviticus indicts mankind for uncleanness and/or instructs on how to be purified. The motive for such holiness is stated in two repeated phrases: *“I am the LORD”* and *“I am holy.”* These are used over fifty times. See note on [11:44](#), [45](#).

- The MacArthur Bible Commentary.

Key Themes

- 1. The holy Lord is present in the midst of his people** ([Ex. 40:34](#); [Lev. 1:1](#)). *The people of Israel must therefore properly address their sin and impurity and must strive for personal holiness.*
- 2. In order to approach God, worshipers must be wholehearted in their devotion** ([1:1-6:7](#); [22:17-30](#)).
- 3. Those who are called to be spiritual leaders, such as priests, bear a heavier responsibility than do the laypeople** ([chs. 4; 21](#)). In addition to the outward holiness that the priests are granted when ordained, **they are constantly commanded to maintain inner holiness** ([chs. 8; 9; 10; 21](#)).

4. As seen in the Day of Atonement ritual ([ch. 16](#)), the total cleansing of sins and uncleanness is done when the innermost part of the tent of meeting is purified. Ultimate purification of uncleanness is impossible from the human side.

5. Atonement is a gracious act of the Lord by which sins and impurities can be dealt with ([17:11](#)).

The primary rhetorical form of Leviticus is oracular directive from a divine Lawgiver—a series of commands that come from the authoritative voice of God. The commands are addressed by God to Moses, with the formula “and the LORD spoke to Moses” repeated over 30 times. It thus becomes clear that Leviticus is meant to be received as the very words of the Lord that are intended to direct his covenant people in holy living.

Literary realism is present in the form of a total lack of inhibition in discussing such matters as the slaughter of animals, human diseases, bodily functions, and sexual behavior.

A good reading strategy is to imagine stories and human experiences of people living within the system—experiences such as the terror of discovering some type of contamination in one’s home and having to report it to the priests and perhaps dismantle the house ([14:33-47](#)).

- ESV Study Bible

One cannot help but recognize prophetic implications in the punishments for disobedience; they sound like the events of the much later Babylonian deportment, captivity, and subsequent return to the land (c. 538 B.C.) almost 900 years after Moses wrote Leviticus. The eschatological implications for Israel’s disobedience will not conclude until Messiah comes to introduce His kingdom and end the curses of [Leviticus 26](#) and [Deuteronomy 28](#) (cf. [Zech. 14:11](#)).

The five sacrifices and offerings were symbolic.

Their design was to allow the truly penitent and thankful worshiper to express faith in and love for God by the observance of these rituals. When the heart was not penitent and thankful, God was not pleased with the ritual. (cf. [Amos 5:21-27](#)).

The offerings were burnt, symbolizing the worshiper's desire to be purged of sin and sending up the fragrant smoke of true worship to God.

The myriad of small details in the execution of the rituals was intended to teach exactness and precision that would extend to the way the people obeyed the moral and spiritual laws of God and the way they revered every facet of His Word. See notes on [11:1-47](#); [11:44, 45](#); [13:2](#).

- The MacArthur Bible Commentary.

Interpretive Challenges

Leviticus is both a manual for the worship of God in Israel and a theology of old covenant ritual.

Comprehensive understanding of the ceremonies, laws, and ritual details prescribed in the book is difficult today because Moses assumed a certain context of historical understanding.

Once the challenge of understanding the detailed prescriptions has been met, the question arises as to how believers in the church should respond to them, since the NT clearly abrogates OT ceremonial law (cf. [Acts 10:1-16](#); [Col. 2:16, 17](#)), the levitical priesthood (cf. [1 Pet. 2:9](#); [Rev. 1:6](#); [5:10](#); [20:6](#)), and the sanctuary (cf. [Matt. 27:51](#)), as well as instituting the new covenant (cf. [Matt. 26:28](#); [2 Cor. 3:6-18](#); [Heb. 7-10](#)).

Rather than try to practice the old ceremonies or look for some deeper spiritual significance in them, the focus should be on the holy and divine character behind them.

This may partly be the reason that explanations which Moses often gave in the prescriptions for cleanness offer greater insight into the mind of God than do the ceremonies themselves. The spiritual principles in which the rituals were rooted are timeless because they are embedded in the nature of God.

The NT makes it clear that from Pentecost forward (cf. [Acts 2](#)), the church is under the authority of the new covenant, not the old covenant (cf. [Heb. 7-10](#)).

The interpreter is challenged to compare features of this book with NT writers who present types or analogies based on the tabernacle and the ceremonial aspects of the law, so as to teach valuable lessons about Christ and new covenant reality. **Though the ceremonial law served only as a shadow of the reality of Christ and His redemptive work ([Heb. 10:1](#)), excessive typology is to be rejected.**

Only that which NT writers identify specifically as types of Christ should be so designated (cf. [1 Cor. 5:7](#), “Christ our Passover”).

The most profitable study in Leviticus is that which yields truth in the understanding of sin, guilt, substitutionary death, and atonement by focusing on features which are not explained or illustrated elsewhere in OT Scripture. Later OT authors, and especially NT writers, build on the basic understanding of these matters provided in

Leviticus. The sacrificial features of Leviticus point to their ultimate, one-time fulfillment in the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:11-22).

- The MacArthur Bible Commentary.

Leviticus is a difficult book, mainly because modern readers have no firsthand experience of ancient rituals and the worship practices of the tabernacle. For this reason, readers should be aware of the potential pitfall of imposing concepts or distinctions that are foreign to the biblical text itself. With this general warning in mind, several particular interpretative issues may be mentioned.

Ritual and ethical commands. To begin, there is some debate about how to understand the relationship between the “ritual” regulations of **chapters 1-16** and what are commonly called the “moral/ethical” commands of **chapters 17-26**.

It is not uncommon for modern readers to see “ritual” and “ethics” as two very separate matters and thus to view these two sections of the book as quite different and distinct.

Leviticus, however, is more nuanced than that. **While it may be true that not every “ethical” law of chapters 17-27 involves a ritual, it is not true that every “ritual” law of chapters 1-16 is disconnected from ethics.**

In fact, *the whole of the book is concerned with Israel's being "holy" to the Lord, and the ritual laws of [chapters 1-16](#) are just as important in this regard as are the laws of [chapters 17-27](#).*

From the perspective of Leviticus, there is no such thing as a "non-ethical" ritual law.

As a result, it is unwise to see [chapters 1-16](#) and [chapters 17-27](#) as two unrelated sections of material.

Both are equally concerned with Israel's holiness to the Lord.

Unclean, clean, holy. Leviticus also often uses the language of "unclean," "clean," and "holy" differently than today. With "unclean" and "clean," for example, most modern readers are tempted to think of that which is "non-hygienic" or "hygienic." In Leviticus, however, these words do not refer to hygiene at all. Rather, they refer to "ritual states."

(The word "holy" is also used in many contexts to describe a ritual state.)

Understanding the concept of ritual states is very important to understanding Leviticus as a whole.

Leviticus sets forth 3 basic ritual states: the unclean, the clean, and the holy.

On the one hand, these categories guide the community with reference to the types of actions a person may (or may not) engage in, or the places that a person may (or may not) go.

Those who are unclean, e.g., may not partake of a peace offering ([7:20](#)), while those who are clean may ([7:19](#)). (A modern analogy might be that of registering to vote: a person who is “registered” may vote, whereas a person who is “unregistered” may not.) There is a distinction to be made between “ritual states” and “moral states.” One who is in the ritual state of holiness is not necessarily more personally righteous than a person who is simply clean or unclean (just as a person who is “registered” to vote is not necessarily more righteous than a person who is not).

How ritual purity relates to moral purity. Even though ritual states and moral states are different, the ritual states also seemed to represent or symbolize grades of moral purity. The highest grade of moral purity was that of the Lord himself, who was “holy” and who dwelt in the “Holy of Holies.” **By constantly calling the Israelites to *ritual* purity in all aspects of life, the Lord was reminding them of their need for also seeking after *moral* purity in all aspects of life ([20:24-26](#)).**

Interpreting the rituals and ceremonies. A further challenge in Leviticus is how to interpret the various rituals and ceremonies. In particular, **how should the individual acts and objects that make up a ritual be understood?**

Answering this question can be difficult, for the simple reason that Leviticus rarely explains what various ritual actions or objects mean.

(One of the few exceptions is [17:11](#), where sacrificial animal blood is said to be the “life” of the animal.) **Some help is provided, however, by asking questions about the *general function(s)* and the *specific function(s)* of the ritual.**

Generally speaking, rituals may function in several ways: e.g., to address aspects of the human condition (such as impurity or sinfulness), to serve as a way for the offerer to express emotions or desires to the Lord, and to underscore various truths about the Lord or the human condition. (In many instances, one ritual may accomplish all of these things.) It is helpful to ask which of these general functions is in view in the ritual being considered. Related to this, one should also ask, “What is the specific goal/function of this particular ritual as a whole?” Answering these two questions provides an interpretative framework in which to understand the individual actions of the ritual (much as a paragraph is an interpretative framework for the sentences in it).

For example, if a ritual as a whole is meant to express an emotion (general), and more specifically to express praise (specific), then the individual actions or objects of the ritual should somehow contribute to this goal. Though this approach may still leave some questions unanswered, it will usually provide helpful guidelines and protect readers from some of the interpretative excesses of the past.

Another interpretative issue is how one should understand various concepts such as uncleanness, cleanness, and holiness. Great debate accompanies this issue, for the simple reason that Leviticus often provides various laws concerning cleanness and uncleanness without giving an explicit rationale of why something or someone is clean or unclean (e.g., [ch. 12](#)).

Traditionally, commentators have thought that the rationale behind these rules was to be found in hygienic concerns, polemics against Canaanite religious customs, or the symbolic meaning of “death.” (For these and other views, see notes on [chs. 11-15](#).) Of these options, uncleanness as symbolic of death appears to be the only proposal that sufficiently covers many (as opposed to just some) of the cases of uncleanness. (If this is correct, then holiness—which is the polar opposite of uncleanness—could often symbolize “life.”)

NT relevance of commands in Leviticus.

What do these legislative texts of Leviticus have to do with the church today? At this point, only a broad picture may be presented, and it will be painted in three brushstrokes, merely offering examples of the value of Leviticus for the Christian believer. **First, the sacrificial system of Leviticus has ceased for the people of God; it has been fulfilled in the coming of Christ (cf. [Heb. 9:1-14, 24-28; 10:1-14](#)).** Yet studying these laws is important because they enable the reader to understand how the work of Christ saves people, since the sacrifices point to different aspects of the meaning of Christ's sacrifice of himself.

Second, the festal calendar of Israel enumerated in Leviticus ([Lev. 23:1-44](#)) has strongly shaped the Christian church's traditional calendar. The three main national pilgrim feasts of Israel are the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Harvest, and the Feast of Booths. For those churches that follow the traditional calendar, these celebrations find their climax in Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost. To fully understand the Christian celebrations, one must see their initial purpose in the OT. At the same time, some aspects of the legislation in Leviticus (such as the laws regulating clean and unclean foods) had the goal of separating Israel from the other nations. Although this separation has been done away with in the Christian era, these laws still teach the people of God to be morally clean (see [11:1-47](#)).

*Third, the entire Levitical Holiness Code ([chs. 17-27](#)) deals with sanctification, i.e., the idea of holiness affecting how one lives in the covenant community. The NT applies to Christians the same principle of life stated in [Leviticus 11:44](#), “**be holy, for I am holy**” (quoted in [1 Pet. 1:16](#)). In fact, many of the moral requirements reflected in the Holiness Code reveal the kinds of moral conduct that are still either pleasing or displeasing to God (cf., e.g., [Lev. 19:11-18](#), [35-36](#)).*

On the other hand, several details of the Holiness Code concern more symbolic aspects of holiness that should no longer be followed in the Christian era (such as laws prohibiting garments of two kinds of cloth, [19:19](#); prohibiting the shaving of the edges of one’s beard, [21:5](#); and excluding people with physical defects from presenting offerings, [21:17-23](#)).

Further, the NT envisions a people of God that transcends national boundaries, and thus it dissolves the bond between the specifically theocratic system of government that was OT Israel. Therefore, current civil governments need not replicate the civil laws specific to the

Mosaic theocracy (such as capital punishment for adultery in 20:10 or for blasphemy in 24:16, or the Sabbath year and Jubilee year in 25:1-22), although of course all governments must pursue justice (and Leviticus may certainly help Christians develop their notions of justice).

- ESV Study Bible

Interpreting and Applying Old Testament Law

One challenge in applying the book of Leviticus in practical ways is that we do not know how to interpret it well. **A brief description of a Christian method of interpreting Old Testament law could be helpful.**

Many Christians divide the laws in the Old Testament into three categories: ceremonial laws, civil laws, and moral laws.

A. **Ceremonial laws** have to do with rituals regarding worship, leadership of worship, and preparation for worship. Jesus made the Old Testament ceremonial

- system obsolete when He became our high priest and the final sacrifice for sin ([Heb 8:13](#); [9:11-10:18](#)).
- B. **Civil laws** no longer apply to us in the new covenant age, since their purpose was to govern the society of Israel during the period of the old covenant.
- C. **Moral laws** however, of the Old Testament still apply to us, since most or all of them are repeated in the New Testament.

Thus, such a division of Old Testament laws into three categories can be helpful. However, we must admit that such categories are extraneous to the Bible.

Furthermore, even though new covenant believers are not required to obey old covenant ceremonial and civil laws, can't such laws teach us something about God? God gave the laws, after all. He gave them to His people in a specific place for a specific time, but they are in the Bible and the whole Bible is important.

So, what do they mean to us today?

The following is a simple seven-step method that I have found helpful for interpreting and applying the law.

1. First, **affirm inspiration and helpfulness.** [Second Timothy 3:16](#) says,

All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness.

“All Scripture is inspired by God.” **When the apostle Paul wrote that, the New Testament did not exist. He was writing about the Old Testament Scripture** that includes Leviticus, and he wrote, “All Scripture is inspired by God.” “*All Scripture*,” including the books of law like Leviticus. So, we affirm inspiration—God breathed out, inspired, Leviticus. Also, we affirm its helpfulness. What does [2 Timothy 3:16](#) state next? “**All Scripture is . . . profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness.**” **So, all Scripture is not only inspired; all of it is also helpful, profitable.** In the new covenant period the Old Testament ceremonial and civil laws are not *law* for us; our disobedience to individual laws is not punished as was the case in ancient Israel. However, **they are profitable in that they teach us about God, His will, and how to live for Him in today’s world** (Guthrie, *Read the Bible for Life*, 95–108).

2. *Second, **affirm fulfillment in Jesus.** **The whole Old Testament is fulfilled in Jesus,** even the legal sections like Leviticus. After the resurrection of Jesus, He met a few of His disciples on the road to Emmaus. He told them that His life,*

death, and resurrection were prophesied in the Old Testament. He said in [Luke 24:44](#),

Everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

“Everything written about *Me* in the Law of Moses.” The law of Moses, including Leviticus, is somehow about Jesus. Jesus said, *“Don’t assume that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill”* ([Matt 5:17](#)). Jesus said that He came to fulfill the Law. How does Jesus fulfill the Law? We’ll see that as we go through Leviticus...

3. Third, **determine what the law/text meant in its original context.** We study what originally happened. What does the Bible say about how a particular sacrifice was offered, or how the Day of Atonement was observed? **The contemporary meaning is based on the original meaning; the contemporary application is based on the original application.**

It’s often been said that *a text in the Bible cannot mean what it never meant.*

How would this passage have been understood and applied in its original setting? We base our interpretation on that.

4. Fourth, ***note the similarities with today's context.*** For example, [Leviticus 11:7](#) directs God's people to refrain from eating pork. I like pork. Barbequed pork is so common in North Carolina that if I did not eat it I would likely be breaking some state law. However, I would not be breaking any law in the new covenant. Evidently some people were pressuring Christians in Colossae to follow the dietary regulations of the old covenant. The apostle Paul wrote to them: "Don't let anyone judge you in regard to food and drink. . . . These are a shadow of what was to come; the substance is the Messiah" ([Col 2:16-17](#)). So, the Old Testament dietary laws no longer apply in the age of the new covenant; faith in Jesus the Messiah makes them obsolete and supersedes them.

But what did the command against eating pork mean in its original context? The pagan peoples around Israel ate pork. In commanding His people *not* to eat pork God was creating a distinction between His people and other peoples. God's people were to observe that distinction; they were to be different, separate. **What is the similarity with today's context?**

People still do things God forbids, and God's people are to be different. That's the connection to today's context.

5. Fifth, **identify principles that apply to both ancient and modern contexts.** With respect to refraining from eating pork, what's the principle? God still doesn't want His people to be exactly like the people around them. That principle applies today, so we've identified a principle that applies to both ancient and modern contexts.

Walter Kaiser refers to this as "***principlization***" (*Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 150–63). **What is the underlying principle(s) communicated by this law? Answering that question is fundamental in the task of interpreting and applying old covenant laws.**

6. Sixth, **consider what the New Testament teaches about each principle.** Does the New Testament teach anything, **for example**, about the separation of God's people from those who don't know and love God? It does. ***Did Jesus say anything about that? He did, and He fulfills that part of the Law***

because He lived separate from the sin of the world, He empowers His followers to be different, and He is the difference between His followers and those who don't know and love God.

7. Seventh, **apply the principle to your life.** The principle is that God wants us to be different from those who don't know Him. I **apply that principle by rejecting the sinful practices of the world** and separating myself from them and to Jesus.

- Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary – Exalting Jesus in Leviticus.

KEY STRUCTURE of the Book

Leviticus is a literary expression of God's desire that His holiness be reflected in the life of His covenant people Israel. This is seen in the two spheres of Israel's periodic worship and daily walk. Though there is substantial overlapping between these two spheres, they are reflected generally in the two major divisions of the book: (a) "The Way of Approach to God by Sacrifice ([chaps. 1-16](#))" and (b) "The Walk of Holiness before God by Separation ([chaps. 17-27](#))."

A. [Leviticus 1-16](#) explains how to have personal access to God through appropriate worship

Part 1 (1-16.), which tells Israel how to approach God so as to have communion with Him, appropriately opens with a description of the various kinds of sacrifices. ([Leviticus 1-7](#)) It next treats of the priesthood.

([Leviticus 8-10](#)) The thoroughly symbolical character of all, and hence the necessity of closest adherence to the directions given, are next illustrated by the judgment which befell those who offered incense upon "strange fire." ([Leviticus 10:1-6](#)) From the priesthood the sacred text passes to the worshippers. ([Leviticus 11-15](#)) These must be clean—personally ([11:1-47](#)), in their family-life, ([Leviticus 12](#)) and as a congregation. ([Leviticus 13-15](#)) Above and beyond all is the great cleansing of the Day of Atonement, ([Leviticus 16](#)) with which the first part of the book, concerning access to God, closes.

- Bible History Old Testament.

This first major division provides a handbook on sacrifice for both the people and the priests ([chaps. 1-7](#)), records the great ceremonial events which inaugurated the Aaronic priesthood and the sacrificial system ([chaps. 8-10](#)), prescribes detailed regulations concerning such matters as diet and disease lest potential worshipers become ceremonially unclean ([chaps. 11-15](#)), and presents the features of the great Day of Atonement whereby the priesthood and the nation could restore and maintain fellowship with a holy God and continue to worship His indwelling Presence in a holy sanctuary ([chap. 16](#)).

- The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

B. Leviticus 17-27 details how to be spiritually acceptable to God through an obedient walk.

The Second Part of the Book of Leviticus, which describes, in symbolic manner, the holiness that becomes the people of God, treats, first, of personal holiness, ([Leviticus 17](#)) then of holiness in the family, ([Leviticus 18](#)) of holiness in social relations, ([Leviticus 19, 20](#)) and of holiness in the priesthood. ([Leviticus 21, 22](#)) Thence the sacred text proceeds to holy seasons. ([Leviticus 23, 24](#)) As the duty of close adherence to the Divine directions in connection with the priesthood had been illustrated by the judgment upon Nadab and Abihu, ([Leviticus 10:1-6](#)) so now the solemn duty, incumbent on all Israel, to treat the Name of Jehovah as holy, is exhibited in the punishment of one who had blasphemed it. ([Leviticus 24:10-end](#)) Finally, [Leviticus 25](#) describes the holiness of the land. Thus, Part II treats more especially of consecration. As Part I, describing access to God, had culminated in the ordinance of the Day of Atonement, so Part II, in that of the Jubilee Year. Lastly, [Leviticus 26](#) dwells on the blessing attached to faithful observance of the covenant; while [Leviticus 27](#), reaching, as it were, beyond ordinary demands and consecrations, speaks of the free-will offerings of the heart, as represented by vows.

- Bible History Old Testament.

Potential Outline of Leviticus

- I. Laws Pertaining to Sacrifice ([1:1-7:38](#))
 - A. Legislation for the Laity ([1:1-6:7](#))
 1. Burnt offerings ([1:1-17](#))
 2. Grain offerings ([2:1-16](#))
 3. Peace offerings ([3:1-17](#))
 4. Sin offerings ([4:1-5:13](#))
 5. Trespass offerings ([5:14-6:7](#))
 - B. Legislation for the Priesthood ([6:8-7:38](#))
 1. Burnt offerings ([6:8-13](#))
 2. Grain offerings ([6:14-23](#))
 3. Sin offerings ([6:24-30](#))
 4. Trespass offerings ([7:1-10](#))
 5. Peace offerings ([7:11-36](#))

6. Concluding remarks ([7:37, 38](#))
- II. Beginnings of the Priesthood ([8:1-10:20](#))
 - A. Ordination of Aaron and His Sons ([8:1-36](#))
 - B. First Sacrifices ([9:1-24](#))
 - C. Execution of Nadab and Abihu ([10:1-20](#))
- III. Prescriptions for Uncleanness ([11:1-16:34](#))
 - A. Unclean Animals ([11:1-47](#))
 - B. Uncleanness of Childbirth ([12:1-8](#))
 - C. Unclean Diseases ([13:1-59](#))
 - D. Cleansing of Diseases ([14:1-57](#))
 - E. Unclean Discharges ([15:1-33](#))
 - F. Purification of the Tabernacle from Uncleanness ([16:1-34](#))
- IV. Mandates for Practical Holiness ([17:1-27:34](#))
 - A. Sacrifice and Food ([17:1-16](#))
 - B. Proper Sexual Behavior ([18:1-30](#))
 - C. Neighborliness ([19:1-37](#))
 - D. Capital/Grave Crimes ([20:1-27](#))
 - E. Instructions for Priests ([21:1-22:33](#))
 - F. Religious Festivals ([23:1-44](#))
 - G. The Tabernacle ([24:1-9](#))
 - H. An Account of Blasphemy ([24:10-23](#))
 - I. Sabbatical and Jubilee Years ([25:1-55](#))
 - J. Exhortation to Obey the Law: Blessings and Curses ([26:1-46](#))
 - K. Redemption of Votive Gifts ([27:1-34](#))

- The MacArthur Bible Commentary.

1. **Five Major Offerings** ([1:1-6:7](#))
 1. The burnt offering ([1:1-17](#))
 2. The grain offering ([2:1-16](#))
 3. The peace offering ([3:1-17](#))
 4. The sin offering ([4:1-5:13](#))
 5. The guilt offering ([5:14-6:7](#))
2. **Handling of the Offerings** ([6:8-7:38](#))
 1. The burnt offering ([6:8-13](#))
 2. The grain offering ([6:14-23](#))

3. The sin offering ([6:24-30](#))
4. The guilt offering ([7:1-10](#))
5. The peace offering ([7:11-36](#))
6. Summary ([7:37-38](#))
- 3. The Establishment of the Priesthood ([8:1-10:20](#))**
 1. The ordination of Aaron and his sons ([8:1-36](#))
 2. The first tabernacle service ([9:1-24](#))
 3. The Nadab and Abihu incident ([10:1-20](#))
- 4. The Laws on Cleanness and Uncleanness ([11:1-15:33](#))**
 1. Clean and unclean creatures ([11:1-47](#))
 2. Uncleanness of a childbearing mother ([12:1-8](#))
 3. Leprous diseases and their purification ([13:1-14:57](#))
 4. Discharges from male and female reproductive organs ([15:1-33](#))
- 5. The Day of Atonement Ritual ([16:1-34](#))**
- 6. The Handling and Meaning of Blood ([17:1-16](#))**
- 7. The Call to Holiness ([18:1-22:33](#))**
 1. Prohibitions against pagan practices ([18:1-30](#))
 2. Call to holiness ([19:1-37](#))
 3. Punishment for disobedience ([20:1-27](#))
 4. Holiness of the priests ([21:1-24](#))
 5. Holiness of the offerings ([22:1-33](#))
- 8. Holy Times ([23:1-25:55](#))**
 1. Holy feasts ([23:1-44](#))
 1. Introduction and weekly Sabbath ([23:1-3](#))
 2. The Passover ([23:4-8](#))
 3. The Firstfruits ([23:9-14](#))
 4. The Weeks ([23:15-22](#))
 5. The Trumpets ([23:23-25](#))
 6. The Day of Atonement ([23:26-32](#))
 7. The Booths ([23:33-36](#))
 8. Summary of the annual feasts ([23:37-44](#))
 2. Oil and bread of the Presence ([24:1-9](#))
 3. The case of a blasphemer ([24:10-23](#))

4. The sabbatical year and Jubilee ([25:1-22](#))
5. Laws of redemption ([25:23-55](#))
9. **Blessings and Curses** ([26:1-46](#))
 1. Fundamental conditions ([26:1-2](#))
 2. Blessings for obedience ([26:3-13](#))
 3. The first stage ([26:14-17](#))
 4. The second stage ([26:18-20](#))
 5. The third stage ([26:21-22](#))
 6. The fourth stage ([26:23-26](#))
 7. The fifth stage ([26:27-39](#))
 8. Conditions and confession within the covenant ([26:40-46](#))
10. **Vows and Dedication** ([27:1-34](#))
 1. The case of persons ([27:1-8](#))
 2. The case of animals ([27:9-13](#))
 3. The case of a house ([27:14-15](#))
 4. The case of land ([27:16-25](#))
 5. The case of the firstborn ([27:26-27](#))
 6. The case of devoted things ([27:28-29](#))
 7. The case of tithes ([27:30-33](#))
 8. Postscript ([27:34](#))

- ESV Study Bible

Outline

The simplest and perhaps the most helpful outline of Leviticus breaks the book into two divisions, the first theological and the second practical. According to this conception of the book, [Leviticus 1–16](#) pertains to the **maintenance of holiness** by means of (**worship**) and

Leviticus 17–27 pertains to the **demonstration of holiness by the people (walk & work)**. Expressed another way, chapters 1–16 describe the way of **access to God, and** chapters 17–27 address the way of **living for God** (Rooker, *Leviticus*, 42). **That partitioning is not unlike the way some of Paul’s letters may be divided.** *For example, Romans 1–11 addresses doctrine, and Romans 12–16 addresses application. Ephesians 1–3 is primarily doctrine, and Ephesians 4–6 is primarily application.*

A more detailed, thematic outline is as follows:

- **Chapters 1–7**—Explanations of the rituals of sacrifice (the priestly code)
- **Chapters 8–10**—Consecration of the priests
- **Chapters 11–16**—Instructions regarding the maintenance of purity
- **Chapters 17–27**—Exhortations to holiness (the Holiness Code)

- Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary

James Luther Mays provides an outline that **helps to explain the contents of the book by means of a series of theological questions and answers.** It is as follows:

- **Question:** How do sinful and defiled people offer worship to the holy God and maintain fellowship with Him?
 - **Answer:** The rituals of the sacrifices (Leviticus 1–7)

- **Question:** How will their sacrifices reach God in worship, and how will God reach them?
 - **Answer:** The consecrated mediatorial priesthood ([Leviticus 8–10](#))

- **Question:** How will the holiness of God dominate and sanctify profane life?
 - **Answer:** The manual of purification ([Lev. 11–16](#))

- **Question:** How will people obey God so that holiness becomes a way of life?
 - **Answer:** The laws of holiness ([Leviticus 17–27](#))

Potential Outline:

The Burnt Offering [1:1-17](#)

The Command [1:1-2](#)

Bulls [1:3-9](#)

Sheep and Goats [1:10-13](#)

Birds [1:14-17](#)

The Grain Offering [2:1-16](#)

Uncooked Grain [2:1-3](#)

Cooked Grain [2:4-10](#)

Yeast and Salt [2:11-13](#)

First-fruits [2:14-16](#)

The Peace Offering [3:1-17](#)

From the Herd [3:1-5](#)

From the Flock [3:6-17](#)

The Sin Offering [4:1-35](#)

Unintentional Sins [4:1-2](#)

The Priest's Sins [4:3-12](#)

The Community's Sins [4:13-21](#)

A Leader's Sins [4:22-26](#)

An Individual's Sins [4:27-35](#)

The Guilt Offering [5:1-19](#)

More on the Sin Offering [5:1-13](#)

The Guilt Offering [5:14-19](#)

More Offering Rules [6:1-30](#)

More on the Guilt Offering [6:1-7](#)

More on the Burnt Offering [6:8-13](#)

More on the Grain Offering [6:14-23](#)

More on the Sin Offering [6:24-30](#)

Even More Rules [7:1-38](#)

The Guilt Offering Again [7:1-10](#)

The Peace Offering Again [7:11-38](#)

Principles of Priesthood: Ordination [8:1-36](#)

The Choice [8:1-4](#)

The Clothes and the Oil [8:5-13](#)

The Sacrifice [8:14-36](#)

Principles of Priesthood: Ministry [9:1-24](#)

Preparation [9:1-14](#)

Service [9:15-24](#)

Principles of Priesthood: A Dangerous [Job 10:1-20](#)

Playing with Fire [10:1-5](#)

Following the Rules [10:6-11](#)

Understanding Holiness [10:12-20](#)

Clean and Unclean: Food Rules [11:1-47](#)

Land Creatures [11:1-8](#)

Water Creatures [11:9-12](#)

Flying Creatures [11:13-23](#)

The Solution [11:24-47](#)

Clean and Unclean: Mothers Only [12:1-8](#)

Unclean Mothers [12:1-5](#)

Purification [12:6-8](#)

Clean and Unclean: Problem Skin, Mildew [13:1-59](#)

Rashes and Infections [13:1-23](#)

Spots and Balding [13:24-46](#)

Mildew [13:47-59](#)

Clean and Unclean: Cleaning Infections and Mildew [14:1-57](#)

Outside Camp [14:1-8](#)

Inside Camp [14:9-32](#)

Mildew Matters [14:33-57](#)

Clean and Unclean Discharges [15:1-32](#)

The Male Kind [15:1-18](#)

The Female Kind [15:19-32](#)

The Day of Atonement [16:1-34](#)

Preparation [16:1-5](#)

Sacrifice [16:6-19](#)

Cleansing [16:20-34](#)

Precious Is the Blood [17:1-16](#)

Sacrificial Blood [17:1-9](#)

Lifeblood [17:10-16](#)

Relationship Rules [18:1-30](#)

A Covenant Relationship [18:1-5](#)

Relational Boundaries [18:6-23](#)

Consequences [18:24-30](#)

Holy, Holy, Holy [19:1-37](#)

Being Holy [19:1-8](#)

Loving Others [19:9-18](#)

Living Holy [19:19-37](#)

Capital Crimes [20:1-27](#)

Molech and Mediums [20:1-6](#)

Family Business [20:7-21](#)

Follow the Rules [20:22-27](#)

Holiness: True/False, Part 1 [21:1-24](#)

Mourning and Marriage (Priest) [21:1-9](#)

Mourning and Marriage (High Priest) [21:10-15](#)

Stay Back [21:16-24](#)

Holiness: True/False, Part 2 [22:1-33](#)

Keep It Clean [22:1-9](#)

The Priest's Food [22:10-16](#)

What to Give/Not Give [22:17-33](#)

All in Good Time [23:1-44](#)

The Weekly Sabbath [23:1-3](#)

Spring Holy Days [23:4-22](#)

Fall Holy Days [23:23-44](#)

Lamp, Loaves, and Loudmouth [24:1-23](#)

Keep the Fires Burning [24:1-4](#)

Give Us Our Weekly Bread [24:5-9](#)

The Peril of Profanity [24:10-23](#)

Super Sabbath [25:1-55](#)

Sabbath Year [25:1-7](#)

Jubilee Year [25:8-34](#)

Neighborly Ways [25:35-46](#)

Strange Company [25:47-55](#)

A Welcome Warning [26:1-46](#)

Blessings [26:1-13](#)

Curses [26:14-39](#)

Assurance [26:40-46](#)

The Value of a Vow [27:1-34](#)

People [27:1-8](#)

Animals [27:9-13](#)

Property [27:14-25](#)

GENERAL RESEARCH

(Leviticus)

THE Book of Exodus was intended to tell how the Lord God redeemed and set apart for Himself "a

peculiar people.*"** Accordingly, it appropriately closes with the erection of the Tabernacle and the hallowing of it by the visible Presence of Jehovah in the Holy Place. It yet remained to show the other aspect of the covenant. For the provisions and the means of grace must be accepted and used by those for whom they are designed, and the "setting apart" of the people by Jehovah implied, as it's converse, consecration on the part of Israel. And this forms the subject matter of the Book of Leviticus, which a recent German writer has aptly described as ***"the code regulating the spiritual life of Israel, viewed as the people of God."

To sum up its general contents—it tells us in its first Part (1-16.) how Israel was to approach God, together with what,

symbolically speaking, was inconsistent with such approaches; and in **its second Part (17-27.) how, having been brought near to God, the people were to maintain, to enjoy, and to exhibit the state of grace of which they had become partakers.** Of course, all is here symbolical, and we must regard the directions and ordinances as conveying in an outward form so many spiritual truths.

Perhaps we might go so far as to say, that Part 1 of Leviticus exhibits, in a symbolical form, the doctrine of justification, and Part 2 that of sanctification; or,

more accurately, the manner of access to God, and the holiness which is the result of that access.

It has already been pointed out, that the Book of Leviticus consists of two Parts; the one ending with [chapter 16](#); the other, properly speaking, with [chapter 25](#); [chapter 26](#) being a **general conclusion, indicating the blessings of faithful adherence to the covenant, while [chapter 27](#), which treats of vowing unto the Lord, forms a most appropriate appendix.**

At the close of the book itself, ([Leviticus 26:46](#)) and of the chapter which, for want of a better name, we have termed its appendix ([27:34](#)), we find expressions indicating the purpose of the whole, and that the book of Leviticus forms in itself a special and independent part of the Pentateuch.

We repeat it, *the Book of Leviticus is intended for Israel as the people of God; it is the statute-book of Israel's spiritual life; and, on both these grounds, it is neither simply legal, in the sense of ordinary law, nor yet merely ceremonial, but throughout symbolical and typical. Accordingly, its deeper truths apply to all times and to all men.*

It now only remains to describe the two illustrative instances already referred to—the one connected with the priesthood, the other with the people. Aaron and his sons had just been solemnly consecrated to their holy office, and the offering, which they had brought, consumed in view of the whole people by fire from before Jehovah, to betoken His acceptance thereof. ([Leviticus 9](#)) All the more did any transgression of the Lord's ordinance, especially if committed by His priests, call for signal and public punishment. But, Nadab and Abihu, the two eldest sons of Aaron, attempted to offer "strange fire before Jehovah, which He commanded them not." ([Leviticus 10:1](#))

Some writers have inferred from the prohibition of wine or of any strong drink to the priests during the time of their ministry, which immediately follows upon the record of this event ([10:8-11](#)), that these two had been under some such influence at the time of their

daring attempt. The point is of small importance, comparatively speaking. **It is not easy to say what the expression "strange fire" exactly implies.**

Clearly, the two were going to offer incense on the golden altar (ver. 1), and as clearly this service was about to be done at a time not prescribed by the Lord. For a comparison of vers. 12 and 16 shows that it took place between the sacrifice offered by Aaron ([Leviticus 9](#)) and the festive meal following that sacrifice; whereas incense was only to be burnt at the morning and evening sacrifices. Besides, it may be, that they also took "strange fire" in the sense of taking the burning coals otherwise than from the altar of burnt-offering. In the ceremonial for the Day of Atonement the latter is expressly prescribed, ([Leviticus 16:12](#)) and it is a fair inference that the same direction applied to every time of incensing. At any rate, we know that such was the invariable rule in the Temple at the time of Christ.

But Nadab and Abihu were not allowed to accomplish their purpose. The same fire, which a little ago had consumed the accepted sacrifice, ([Leviticus 9:24](#)) now struck them, "and they died before Jehovah," that is, in front of His dwelling-place, most probably in the court (comp. [Leviticus 1:5](#)), just as they were about to enter the Holy Place.

Thus, on the very day of their consecration to the priesthood, did the oldest sons of Aaron perish, because they had not sanctified the Lord in their hearts, but had offered Him a worship of their own devising,

instead of that holy incense consumed by fire from off the altar, which symbolized prayer, offered up on the ground of accepted sacrifice. And *this twofold lesson did the Lord Himself teach in explanation of this judgment ([10:3](#)). So far as the priesthood was concerned—"I will sanctify Myself in those who stand near to Me, 2 and" (so far as all the people were concerned) "before all the people I will glorify Myself."*

In other words, if those who had been consecrated to Him would not sanctify Him in heart and life, He would sanctify Himself in them by judgments (comp. also [Ezekiel 38:16](#)), and thus glorify His Name before all, as the Holy One, Who cannot with impunity be provoked to anger.

So deeply was Aaron solemnized, that, in the language of Scripture, he "held his peace." Not a word of complaint escaped his lips;

...nor yet was a token of mourning on his part, or on that of his sons, allowed to cast the shadow of personal feelings, or of latent regret, upon this signal vindication of Divine holiness ([10:6](#)). Only their "brethren, the whole house of Israel" were permitted to "bewail this burning (of His anger) which Jehovah hath kindled."

The history of the judgment upon the blasphemer ([Leviticus 24:10-14](#)) was inserted in the portion of Leviticus where it stands, either because it happened at the time when the laws there recorded were given, or else because it forms a suitable introduction to, and illustration of, the duty of owning Jehovah, which finds its fullest outward expression in the rest of the Sabbatical and in the arrangements of the Jubilee Year, enjoined in [Leviticus 25](#). **It also affords another instance of the dangers accruing to Israel from the presence among them of that "mixed multitude" which had followed them from Egypt. ([Exodus 12:38](#))** There seems no reason to doubt the Jewish view, that the latter occupied a separate place in the camp; the children of Israel being ranged according to their tribes, "every man by his own standard, with the ensign of their father's house." ([Numbers 2:2](#))

But the general law which decreed the punishment of death upon blasphemy ([Leviticus 24:16](#)) was to apply to native Israelites as well as to the stranger, as indeed all crimes that carried retributive punishment - specially those against the life or the person—were to be equally visited, whether the offender were a Jew or a foreigner. This is the object of the repetition of these laws in that connection. ([Leviticus 24:17-22](#)) For Jehovah was not a national deity, like the gods of the heathen; nor were Israel's privileges those of exceptional favor in case of offenses; but Jehovah was the Holy One of Israel, and holiness became His house for ever.

- Bible History Old Testament.

Contribution to the Bible

The book of Leviticus is quoted or referred to in the New Testament at least forty times (more than any other book in the Bible). Many of Jesus' teachings, particularly those on the Great Commandment, come from Leviticus ([19:18](#)). New Testament teachings on holiness tie directly to Levitical teachings ([1 Peter 2](#)).

The greatest theological contribution of Leviticus is an introduction to atonement.

The sacrificial system detailed in Leviticus reveals human sinfulness and introduces atonement through a substitutionary blood sacrifice.

To fully understand the reason for and importance of Jesus' ultimate sacrifice, a student of the Bible would need to understand the Old Testament system's purpose and flaws. - Layman's Bible Commentary

The laws on both ceremonial holiness and personal holiness were supposed to teach the Israelites about their holy God and how to live set apart as His people. Not only does God tell the Israelites how to worship, but He gives them practical ways to live out holiness in everyday life.

- Layman's Bible Commentary

LITERARY PARALLELISM/CHIASTIC-ARCHES

Never let a fool kiss you or a kiss fool you.

Winners never quit and quitters never win.

To know the measure of love you must love without measure.

“The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.” – Mark 2:27

1 John 5:14-15