

# LEVITICUS

## STUDY GUIDE

### AUTHOR

Though the author is not explicitly mentioned, the book starts out, “The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting” (Lev. 1:1). Some liberal scholars believe Leviticus is made up of portions of multiple authors, but biblical evidence and other sources determine Moses to be its author.

### DATE

Like other books of the Pentateuch, Leviticus is believed to have been written during the desert wanderings. Therefore, Leviticus was written around 1400 B.C.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In Hebrew, the title of the book comes from the first word of the text, *wayyiqrā*, “and he called.” Later the book was known as *tôrât kōhanim*, or “book of the priests.” However, the English title of Leviticus stems from the Greek term *Leuitikon*, “that which concerns the priests.”

Surprisingly, Leviticus is the first book taught to Jewish children in early history! It was believed children should first learn about the holiness of God and each person’s responsibility to live a holy life according to God’s rules. Therefore, Leviticus was the primer for the rest of the Torah. Children learned early on that to be holy meant “set apart” from the profane and/or common, and their lives were to reflect that as children of the Most High God.

### LITERARY STRUCTURE

Exodus ended with where God was to be worshiped (in the tabernacle). Leviticus focuses upon how God is to be worshiped – through offerings of sacrifice and daily life. The existence of sin & impurity was a constant threat to relationship with God, therefore the sacrificial system was an act of mercy on God’s behalf so His people could be in His holy presence and He could dwell with them.

Three essentials exist for any nation: a people, a land, and a constitution. In Genesis we saw the promise of a people, in Exodus we see the people gathered at Mt. Sinai and called “a holy nation” (Exod. 19:6), and in Leviticus we see an expansion upon the constitution first given at Mt. Sinai. Scholar G.J. Wenham well explains the book:

“Leviticus explains how covenant worship should be conducted (ch. 1-7), then how the covenant people should behave (ch. 18-25), and closes with a section of blessings and curses, entirely appropriate to a covenant document (ch. 26). Indeed, the last verse of this chapter connects all that precedes with Sinai, where the covenant was concluded (Lev. 26:46)...The Sinai Covenant was at once a treaty between God and Israel and laws imposed on the nation.”  
(Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*)

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Here are a few other ways of looking at the structure of the book:

Chapters 1-16	Chapters 17-27
Role of the priest & execution of sacrificial system	Requirements of holiness for Israelite people
Instruction on way of access to God	Way of living for God
Continuance of God's presence amidst a sinful nation	Effect of God's presence upon the people
Love the Lord your God with all your heart	Love your neighbor as yourself

### **DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF LAWS**

It's also worth mentioning some of the different categories of law mentioned here in Leviticus & other places in the Pentateuch:

- Moral law consists of direct commands of God revealing God's nature and will. Often, these laws are considered standard ethics in multiple cultures – laws against murder, adultery, etc. However, for the Christian, these laws reflect God's heart & ways to please Him.
- Ceremonial law relates to Israel's worship of God, which point forward to Jesus. Such laws dictated ceremonial purity, proper worship, & priestly activity. No longer necessary for the Christian, it is important to identify the principle behind the ceremonial laws, for the principles of loving & worshiping God still apply.
- Civil law dictates Israel's daily living. These laws often reflect specific cultural elements in Israel's society at that time, so look for the principle behind the law to determine its application for today.

Some also classify Old Testament laws as: command, statute, and case law.

- Commands are God's authoritative directive to His people (think 10 Commandments).
- Statutes specify the crime and its penalty.
- Case law reflects the application of statutes, usually including the offense, the punishment, and the circumstances.

Pay special attention to capital offenses, or those requiring the death penalty. Capital offenses often revolve around rebellion, value of human life, and proper relationship with God and family.

### **SACRIFICES**

In the pagan world surrounding Israel, sacrifices were something the gods needed. In essence, sacrifices fed & appeased the gods which then resulted in favor for the human offering them. Sacrifices were a means of self-service and manipulation of the supernatural. However, in the covenant context of God & Israel, it is not God who needs the sacrifices but the people! Jews offered sacrifices to Yahweh out of need of atonement for sin and faithful Israelites recognized their offerings would not benefit God, but would allow for continued relationship. Atonement for sin was possible in the Old Testament because it was the system God established, but it also required faith. Ultimately, Jesus validated all sacrifices by His own life, and all grace granted in the Old Testament through

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sacrifices was a foreshadowing of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. (Wow, thank you, Shannon, for giving us a key "where is Jesus in the book" answer!!) ☺

Old Testament Offerings				
	Name of Offering	References	Expression	Remarks
Worship Offerings	Grain Offering	Lev. 2	A gift, tribute to the Lord; submission & dedication; often used with other sacrifices; giving to God as a worship exercise	Provided food for the priests
	Animal: Fellowship, Peace	Lev. 3; 19:5-8; Three types: thank, vow, freewill (Lev. 7:15-18; 22:18-23):	Celebration of God's blessings in praise, thanks, & devotion	God received the fatty parts; worshiper, family, & priest ate the meat
Atonement Offerings (sin offering)	Whole Burnt Offering	Lev. 1	Judicial substitution, general repentance for sin, worship, & total dedication to the Lord	Totally burned to the Lord
	Sin Offering	Lev. 4:1-5:13	Purification from unintentional sins against God	<u>For priest or community:</u> totally burned; blood sprinkled in Holy Place. <u>For lay persons:</u> priest received the meat; blood poured out at altar
	Guilt Offering	Lev. 5:14-6:13	Paying a debt, penalty, & compensation for damages against a person or the holiness of God	Priest received the meat

Chart by Roger Cotton, *They Spoke from God*, 293.

## FEASTS & HOLY DAYS

\*\* The Jewish calendar is lunar & so the months do not match our exactly

Holy Day	Scripture	Frequency	Date	Description
<b>Sabbath</b>	Exod. 16:23-30; 20:8-11; 31:13; Deut. 5:12-15	Weekly	7 <sup>th</sup> day	Day of no work, commemorating God's work in creation & redemption
<b>New Moon</b>	Num. 28:11-15; Exod. 34:22; Num. 10:10	Monthly	New moon	Celebrates beginning of month
<b>Passover</b>	Exod. 12:1-13:10; Lev. 23:9-14	Annual (spring)	1 <sup>st</sup> month of the religious year (Nisan or Abib = March/April)	Evening meal commemorating the exodus, God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Ingredients: lamb, unleavened bread (no yeast), bitter herbs. Note that Christ as crucified on Passover.
<b>Unleavened Bread</b>	Exod. 12:17	Annual (spring)	Week following Passover	Week commemorating the deliverance from Egypt, with no yeast allowed
<b>Weeks (NT Pentecost)</b>	Lev. 23:15-22; Num. 28:26; Deut. 16:9	Annual (spring)	50 days after Passover (May/June)	Day of worship in gratitude for the wheat harvest
<b>Trumpets</b>	Num. 29:1-7	Annual (fall)	1 <sup>st</sup> day of 7 <sup>th</sup> month (Sept/Oct)	Signaling beginning of the 7 <sup>th</sup> month, culminating the sacred year & beginning the new agricultural or civil year. Similar to U.S. New Year's Day
<b>Day of Atonement</b>	Lev. 16:1-34; 23:26-32; Num. 29:7-11	Annual (fall)	10 <sup>th</sup> day of 7 <sup>th</sup> month	<b>Not a feast! The only required fast.</b> Day of mourning over one's sins & the high priest sacrificing to provide a fresh start for the whole nation.
<b>Booths (Tabernacles, Ingathering)</b>	Exod. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:40-41	Annual (fall)	15 <sup>th</sup> -21 <sup>st</sup> of 7 <sup>th</sup> month (Sept/Oct)	Week of living in shelters of branches commemorating with great joy God's provisions on the journey to the Promised Land & following. Similar to U.S. Thanksgiving
<b>Sabbath Year</b>	Exod. 21:1-6; 23:10-11; Lev. 25:1-7; Deut. 15:1-18; 31:10-31	Periodic	Every 7 <sup>th</sup> year	A year of rest. No sowing or reaping except for personal use. Land left fallow; produce belonged to the poor. Debts were cancelled; Hebrew slaves freed.
<b>Jubilee</b>	Lev. 25:8-55	Periodic	Every 50 <sup>th</sup> year	Same as Sabbath Year, plus land restored to families from which it had been purchased or taken.

Chart by Roger Cotton, *They Spoke from God*, 301.

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## OBSERVATION WORDS

- **God** – Different ways He’s referenced & what you learn about Him
- **Jesus** – When & how is He present? What types/symbols represent Christ in the text?
- **Holy Spirit** – When He’s named directly, what He does, note miracles, etc.
- **Holy/Holiness** – How are things holy? How is holiness maintained?
- **Offering/Sacrifice** – What kind of sacrifice/offering? What do you learn about them? Is there a difference between the two?
- **Priest** – What is the priest’s role, requirements, actions, differences, etc.
- **Festival/Feast** – What is the purpose, foreshadowing, etc.
- **Sin/Iniquity** – What is it, kinds, results, etc.
- **Atonement/Atoning** – purpose, what accomplishes it, etc.

## SUMMARY QUESTIONS

- What did the Lord teach YOU through what you read?
- What do you learn about God the Father? Where is Jesus & the Holy Spirit represented in the book?
- What are the purposes/reasons for the different sacrifices & offerings? What was the result? (Hint: Lev. 1:4)
- What are some of the consistent requirements for offerings & gifts?
- What different categories of sins are mentioned (ch. 4) & what would be some examples of each?
- What accommodations are made for the poor when it comes to sacrifices & what does this teach us about God & His forgiveness?

- Why did some things require restitution? What was the purpose of restitution & what does it demonstrate?
- Ch. 10 (Nadab & Abihu) – What does this teach you about the holiness of God? Why are some told not to mourn?
- What do the various dietary & ceremonial laws teach reinforce about God & His people?
- How do the forbidden sexual practices reveal the heart of God & His expectations for relationships? What does this all mean for today?
- Why were high priests called to a higher standard? Is this transferrable at all to the church today? If so, give scriptural evidence

### **KEY WORD**

How would you summarize what you've read into one word or very short phrase? Why did you choose that?

### **KEY VERSE & CHAPTER**

Like key words, key verse & chapter reflect something that stood out to you from the book. It may be a means of summarizing the book, or it may be something that the Lord taught you through that verse & chapter. So, what are they for you?

## ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT TIME WE MEET

### *In addition to the normal reading of Leviticus*

Explain the law given in the following passages, identify the principle behind the law, and a practical application of that principle for today. **Please write out (or print out) your answers on a separate sheet of paper and turn in.** You can do it in the format below, or just make sure the information is included in what you write out.

If you get stuck or have questions, ask for help!

- Lev. 6:1-5
  - Description:
  - Principle:
  - Application:
  
- Lev. 15:1-12
  - Description:
  - Principle:
  - Application:
  
- Lev. 17:8-9
  - Description:
  - Principle:
  - Application:
  
- Lev. 24:1-4
  - Description:
  - Principle:
  - Application: