

Title: The Book of Leviticus

Text: Leviticus 16

Main Point: To understand the worship and ways of God in Leviticus.

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Series: The Beginning of the Book

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of our new series, “The Beginning of the Book,” is to provide you with an overview of the first books of the Bible. Today’s book is Leviticus. Similar to my outline for Exodus, I will use the following outline for the book of Leviticus:

- First, I will cover the historical and biographical details regarding the book of Leviticus.
- Next, I address the book’s major themes.
- Finally, I want to offer reasons Christians should invest time in Leviticus.

Historical and Biographical Details

1. The title of the book, “Leviticus,” comes into English from the Latin, which derived its title from the Greek Septuagint translation *Leutikon*. However, the book is not about the Levites but rather about how the Levites (ancient priests for God’s people) used the book to lead God’s people in worship and the ways of God.
 - 1.1. Unlike the Greek and Latin, “The Hebrew title of the book is *wayyiqra*, the first word of the text meaning ‘And He called.’ The Greek title appearing in the Septuagint is *Leutikon* (meaning ‘that which pertains to the priests’), from which the Latin Vulgate version derived the title Leviticus. The title is somewhat misleading, for although the book deals extensively with the priests and their various tasks, it must be remembered that all Israelites were to know and keep the Law.” (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nelson’s Complete Book of Bible Maps & Charts: Old and New Testaments, Rev. and updated ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996).
2. The book of Leviticus covers approximately one month during Israel’s time at Mount Sinai. I arrive at this calculation by comparing Exodus 40:1, 17 with Numbers 10:11. The tabernacle was erected on the first day of the first month of the second year (after leaving Egypt), and Israel left Sinai the second month of the second year. Leviticus begins at 1:1 with God speaking to Moses from the completed tabernacle and ends at Mount Sinai (27:34). Since Israel left Sinai in the second month of the second year, Leviticus is between the month after the tabernacle’s completion and the departure from Sinai the next month.
3. I follow those who support Moses as the author of Leviticus. In Leviticus, the ESV states “The Lord spoke to Moses” 33 times. Then Moses writes what God spoke to him.
4. Israel arrives at Mount Sinai in Exodus chapter 19 and leaves in Numbers 10:11. The ESV gives fifty-eight chapters (Exodus 19-Leviticus-Numbers 10:11) to the eleven months Israel spends at Sinai. At this time, God shapes the new nation to acquire the land (modern-day Israel), to know how to worship Him, and to live in His favor.
5. A basic outline of the book divides into two sections: one, chapters 1-17 explaining how to worship God (Old Testament covenant); and two, chapters 18-27, explaining how to live in God’s favor.

- 5.1. The Holman Bible Handbook provides a more detailed outline. (David S. Dockery, ed., Holman Bible Handbook (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1992), 151.)
- 5.1.1. The Need for Sacrifice (1:1–7:38)
 - 5.1.2. The Need for Priestly Mediators (8:1–10:20)
 - 5.1.3. The Need for Separation between the Clean and the Unclean (11:1–15:33)
 - 5.1.4. The Need for a Day of Atonement (16:1–34)
 - 5.1.5. The Need for Holy Living (17:1–25:55)
 - 5.1.6. The Blessing and Curse (26:1–46)
 - 5.1.7. Offerings of Dedication (27:1–34)
- 5.2. “Leviticus begins with the people of Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai. The glory of the Lord had just filled the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34–38) and God now tells Moses to instruct the Levitical priests and the people of Israel concerning sacrifices, worship, the priesthood, ceremonial cleanness, the Day of Atonement, feasts and holy days, and the Year of Jubilee. The central message is that God is holy and he requires his people to be holy. The book also shows that God graciously provides atonement for sin through the shedding of blood. Traditionally, Jews and Christians recognize Moses as the author, writing sometime after the giving of the Law.” (The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2025), Le.)

Major Themes in the Book

Leviticus centers on the holiness of God and how an unholy people can acceptably approach Him and remain in continued fellowship (through various sacrifices). The way to God is only through blood sacrifice, and the walk with God is only through obedience to His Laws (holiness). The word “holy” occurs ninety times in Leviticus, and the word “sanctify” seventeen times. The Hebrew root q-d-sh, “holy” (in adjective, noun, and verb forms), appears 152 times in Leviticus.

The Day of Atonement, Leviticus 16

1. As noted above, holiness is a major theme of the book. A holy people need a means to deal with sin, something unholy. I believe the Day of Atonement is the central piece of the Old Testament covenant for helping a sinful people be holy. It is also the primary sacrifice for helping sinful people become righteous.
 - 1.1. It occurred once a year, in the fall, mid-September through mid-October. It later became the most important day in the Jewish calendar, known as *Yom Kippur*. Leviticus 16 outlines God’s expectations for becoming a holy people and for obtaining holiness.
 - 1.1.1. We are immediately introduced to the consequences when sin encounters a holy God: “The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died, and the LORD said to Moses, ‘Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time

into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die” (Leviticus 16:1-2).

- 1.2. A “sin offering” was a recurring theme in the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 15, 25, 27). “A sin offering was a sacrifice made according to the Mosaic Law that provided atonement for sin. The Hebrew phrase literally translates as “fault offering,” and the sacrifice addressed unintentional or inadvertent transgressions. The ritual involved specific procedures centered on blood manipulation. (Got Questions Ministries, *Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2014–2021)).

“The sin offering functioned as the primary blood atonement offering through which worshipers received forgiveness and addressed any contamination they may have caused to the tabernacle. Sin offerings occurred on regular monthly occasions, at various annual festivals, and especially on the Day of Atonement.” (Richard E. Averbeck, “Offerings and Sacrifices,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 577).

- 1.3. Another term linked to the sin offering was “blood” (Leviticus 16:14, 15, 18, 19, 27). “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life” (Leviticus 17:11). **“Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Hebrews 9:22).**

- 1.4. The Old Testament covenant dealt with forgiveness, not payment, for sins. Only the New Testament explains that full payment for sins is available through Jesus Christ. We know from the New Testament that sin requires payment: “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

2. **No person seeking peace, joy, and contentment can ignore sin; unity with God requires its removal. Too many struggle with anxiety, depression, broken relationships, and confused thinking because they either do not understand or have not dealt with its power. Holiness is not possible without atonement.**

3. Sin requires atonement.

- 3.1. Atonement occurs sixteen times in chapter 16.

- 3.2. כִּפֵּר (kipper) is the primary Hebrew word translated into English as “atonement.” The word literally means “at one-ment.” It is the state of being reconciled in a broken relationship. In a theological context, it represents a sinner being reconciled with God. In such a context, the person should consider two primary ideas contained in atonement: One, its relational aspect: how a relationship with God is restored or reconciled; two, the means for restoration.

- 3.3. **Leviticus 19:22, “And the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering before the LORD for his sin that he has committed, and he shall be forgiven for the sin that he has committed.”**

- 3.4. The New Testament explains the means for restoration (forgiveness and payment for sin). In one, forever sacrifice, Jesus fulfilled the Day of Atonement. **Hebrews 7:26-27, “For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above**

the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.”

The Christian and the book of Leviticus

1. The book of Leviticus helps the Christian understand sin and its barrier to holiness.
2. The book of Leviticus helps the Christian grow in worshipping Jesus by understanding His gift of payment for personal sin.
3. The book of Leviticus helps Christians better understand the practice of holiness.
4. The Day of Atonement helps the Christian understand that sin is a barrier to a strong relationship with God. Christians understand that unity with God requires constant confession, repentance, and forgiveness.
 - 4.1. Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
 - 4.2. 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”