

LEVITICUS

The Worship & Walk of a Nation

Bible Study

INTRODUCTION

Leviticus is God's guidebook for His newly redeemed people, showing them how to worship, serve, and obey a holy God. Fellowship with God through sacrifice and obedience show the awesome holiness of the God of Israel. Indeed, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (19:2).

Leviticus focuses on the worship and walk of the nation of God. In Exodus, Israel was redeemed and established as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Leviticus shows how God's people are to fulfill their priestly calling.

KEY PEOPLE IN LEVITICUS

Moses—prophet and leader who acted as God’s mouthpiece to explain His law to Israel (1:1; 4:1; 5:14; 6:1–27:34)

Abihu—son of Aaron, in training to become a priest, died because of disobedience to the Lord’s commands (8:36; 10:1, 2)

Aaron—Moses’ brother and first high priest of Israel (1:7; 2:3, 10; 3:5, 8, 13; 6:9–24:9)

Eleazar—son of Aaron who succeeded him as high priest of Israel (10:6–20)

Nadab—son of Aaron, in training to become a priest, died because of disobedience to the Lord’s commands (8:36; 10:1, 2)

Ithamar—son of Aaron who also became a priest (10:6–20)

THEME AND PURPOSE

The clear theme of Leviticus is holiness (11:45; 19:2). It teaches that one must approach a holy God on the basis of sacrifice and priestly mediation, and that one can only walk with a holy God on the basis of sanctification and obedience. God's chosen people must approach Him in a holy manner.

THEME AND PURPOSE CONTINUED...

Leviticus was written to show Israel how to live as a priestly kingdom and a holy nation in fellowship with God. It provides a guide for worship, a law code, and a handbook on holiness for the priests. In Genesis man was ruined and Israel was born; in Exodus people were redeemed and Israel delivered; in Leviticus people were cleansed and Israel consecrated to the service of God.

BACKGROUND AND SETTING

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 established, which is where Leviticus fits in. Exodus 19:6 called Israel to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Leviticus in turn was God's instruction for His newly redeemed people, teaching them how to worship and obey Him.

BACKGROUND AND SETTING CONT...

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 (belief in many gods) and pagan ritual is demonstrated 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.

BACKGROUND AND SETTING CONT...

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 (God) had occupied his palace (the tabernacle), instituted His law, and declared Himself a covenant partner with His subjects.

KEY DOCTRINES IN LEVITICUS

SACRIFICE

GOD REQUIRED SACRIFICES FROM
THE PEOPLE TO ATONE FOR SIN

(1:3, 9-13; 16:3; 17:8; 19:5; EX.
29:34; DEUT. 16:5, 6; JUDG. 11:31;
PS. 66:13-15; MATT. 5:23, 24; ROM.
8:3; 12:1; HEB. 2:17; 1 JOHN 2:2)

KEY DOCTRINES IN LEVITICUS

HOLINESS

THE ATTRIBUTE THAT SUMMARIZES
GOD'S PERFECT CHARACTER;
ISRAEL WAS CALLED TO BE HOLY
AS GOD IS HOLY (11:44, 45; 19:2;
20:7, 26; 21:6-8; EX. 6:7; 19:6; PS.
22:3; 99:5; IS. 41:14-16; 1 THESS.
4:7; 1 PETER 1:14-16)

KEY DOCTRINES IN LEVITICUS

OFFERINGS

FORMS OF WORSHIP TO GOD, TO
GIVE EXPRESSION OF THE
PENITENT AND THANKFUL HEART

(1:1-17; 2:1-16; 3:1-17; 4:1-5:13;
5:14-6:7; GEN. 4:4, 5; DEUT. 16:10; 1
KIN. 18:33-40; JOB 42:8; 2 COR.
5:21; 2 TIM. 4:6)

KEY DOCTRINES IN LEVITICUS

ISRAEL AS GOD'S HOLY NATION

THE PEOPLE THROUGH WHOM
CHRIST WOULD ENTER THE WORLD
(26:42-46; GEN. 15:12-21; EX. 19:5,
6; 2 SAM. 7:13; 23:5; HEB. 8:6-13)

KEY WORDS IN LEVITICUS

Offering: Hebrew qorban—2:3; 4:35; 6:18; 7:14, 33; 9:4; 10:14—this Hebrew word is derived from the verb “to bring near” and literally means “that which one brings near to God.” The fact that the Israelites could approach to present their gifts to God reveals His mercy. Even though the people were sinful and rebellious, God instituted a sacrificial system in which they could reconcile themselves to Him. The sacrifices foreshadowed Jesus’ death on the cross, the ultimate offering, the offering that ended the need for any others. Through Christ’s sacrificial death, we have once for all been reconciled to God (Heb. 10:10–18). An appropriate response to Jesus’ death for us is to offer our lives as living sacrifices to God (Rom. 12:1).

KEY WORDS IN LEVITICUS

Memorial Portion: Hebrew ṣazkarah—2:2, 9, 16; 5:12; 6:15; 23:24; 24:7—a memorial portion of a grain offering was a representative portion burnt on the altar in place of the whole amount. The rest was a gift to the priest, to support him in his ministry. The word for memorial portion is related to the Hebrew verb zakar, which means “to remember.” It signifies the worshiper’s remembering of God’s gracious character and generosity, especially God’s remembering and blessing of the worshiper.

KEY WORDS IN LEVITICUS

Blood: Hebrew dam—1:5; 3:17; 4:7; 8:15; 9:9; 16:18; 17:10; 20:11—related to the Hebrew word *ḏadom*, which means “red” (Gen. 25:30) and refers to blood. This may be the blood of animals (Exodus 23:18) or human beings (Gen. 4:10). The word blood may also represent a person’s guilt, as in the phrase “his blood shall be upon him”; that is, he is responsible for his own guilt (20:9). The OT equates life with blood (Gen. 9:4; Deut. 12:23), which vividly illustrates the sanctity of human life (Gen. 9:6). According to the NT, “without shedding of blood there is no remission” of sin (Heb. 9:22). Thus the emphasis on blood in the OT sacrifices pointed to the blood that Christ would shed, i.e., the life that He would give on our behalf (Rom. 5:9; 1 Cor. 11:25, 26).

KEY WORDS IN LEVITICUS

Jubilee: Hebrew yobel—25:9, 12, 30, 40, 54; 27:18, 24—literally means “ram” or “ram’s horn” (Ex. 19:13; Josh. 6:5). The term is associated with the Year of Jubilee in Leviticus 25:10 and Numbers 36:4. The fiftieth year was a “jubilee” year for the Hebrews, marked by the blowing of a trumpet (25:9). During that year, the Israelites were instructed to practice freedom and liberty: debts were canceled; slaves were freed; the land rested; family property was redeemed (25:10–17). The fact that Jesus quoted Isaiah 48:8, 9 seems to indicate that Jesus equated His earthly ministry with the principles of the Year of Jubilee (Luke 4:18, 19).

GOD'S CHARACTER IN LEVITICUS

God is accessible—
16:12–15

God is glorious
—9:6, 23

God is holy
—11:44–45

God is wrathful
—10:2

Survey of Leviticus

It has been said that it took God only one night to get Israel out of Egypt, but it took forty years to get Egypt out of Israel. In Exodus, Israel is redeemed and established as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation; and in Leviticus, Israel is taught how to fulfill their priestly call. They have been led out from the land of bondage in Exodus and into the sanctuary of God in Leviticus. They move from redemption to service, from deliverance to dedication. This book serves as a handbook for the Levitical priesthood, giving instructions and regulations for worship. Used to guide a newly redeemed people into worship, service, and obedience to God, Leviticus falls into two major sections: (1) sacrifice (1–17), and (2) sanctification (18–27).

Survey of Leviticus - Sacrifice

Sacrifice (1-17): This section teaches that God must be approached by the sacrificial offerings (1-7), by the mediation of the priesthood (8-10), by the purification of the nation from uncleanness (11-15), and by the provision for national cleansing and fellowship (16-17). The blood sacrifices remind the worshipers that because of sin the holy God requires the costly gift of life (17:11). The blood of the innocent sacrificial animal becomes the substitute for the life of the guilty offerer: “without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9:22).

Survey of Leviticus - Sacrifice

Sanctification (18-27): The Israelites serve a holy God who requires them to be holy as well. To be holy means to be “set apart” or “separated.” They are to be separated from other nations unto God. In Leviticus the idea of holiness appears eighty-seven times, sometimes indicating ceremonial holiness (ritual requirements), and at other times moral holiness (purity of life). This sanctification extends to the people of Israel (18-20), the priesthood (21-22), their worship (23-24), their life in Canaan (25-26), and their special vows (27). It is necessary to remove the defilement that separates the people from God so that they can have a walk of fellowship with their Redeemer.

COMPARING EXODUS TO LEVITICUS

Exodus

Pardon

God's Approach to Man

Man's Guilt

Salvation

A Great Act

Leviticus

Purity

Man's Approach to God

Man's Defilement

Sanctification

A Long Process

CHRIST IN LEVITICUS

GOD'S EXPLICIT INSTRUCTIONS ABOUT OFFERINGS WITHIN LEVITICUS POINT TOWARDS THE FINAL SUBSTITUTIONARY SACRIFICE OF CHRIST. BECAUSE THE SACRIFICES OF THE PEOPLE REPRESENTED ONLY TEMPORARY REMOVAL OF ISRAEL'S SINS, THEY NEEDED TO BE REPEATED CONTINUALLY. JESUS LIVED A PERFECT LIFE ON EARTH AND PRESENTED HIMSELF AS THE FINAL SACRIFICE FOR ALL HUMANKIND. IN CONTRAST TO THE OT PASSOVER FEAST CELEBRATED ANNUALLY, BELIEVERS CONSTANTLY CELEBRATE THE "FEAST" OF THE NEW PASSOVER—JESUS CHRIST, THE PASSOVER LAMB (1 COR. 5:7).

THE LEVITICAL OFFERINGS

Burnt Offering (olah, Heb.): a. Sweet aroma; b. Voluntary.

Scripture References

Lev. 1:3–17; 6:8–13.

Purpose

Purging of sinful acts by the worshipper.

Application

We must pursue moral purity.

THE LEVITICAL OFFERINGS

Grain Offering (minhah, Heb.): a. Sweet aroma; b. Voluntary.

Scripture References

Lev. 2:1–16; 6:14–18; 7:12, 13.

Purpose

Giving the best from a person's property

Application

We must offer excellent effort and service.

THE LEVITICAL OFFERINGS

Peace Offering (shelem, Heb.): a. Sweet aroma; b. Voluntary.

Scripture References

Lev. 3:1–17; 7:11–21, 28–34.

Purpose

Expressed praise to God and fellowship with others.

Application

We must commit to prioritize relationships.

THE LEVITICAL OFFERINGS

Sin Offering (hattat, Heb.): a. Non-sweet aroma; b. Compulsory.

Scripture References

Lev. 4:1–5:13; 6:24–30.

Purpose

To atone for sin when restitution was impossible.

Application

We must request forgiveness when we are wrong.

THE LEVITICAL OFFERINGS

Trespass Offering ('asham, Heb.): a. Non-sweet aroma; b. Compulsory.

Scripture References

Lev. 5:14–6:7; 7:1–7.

Purpose

Made for unintentional or lesser offenses.

Application

We must desire to maintain communication and momentum.

THE FEASTS AND CHRIST'S FULFILLMENT

The Feasts (Leviticus 23)	Christ's Fulfillment
Passover (March/April)	Death of Christ (1 Corinthians 5:7)
Unleavened Bread (March/April)	Sinlessness of Christ (1 Corinthians 5:8)
Firstfruits (March/April)	Resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:23)
Pentecost (May/June)	Outpouring of Spirit of Christ (Acts 1:5; 2:4)
Trumpets (Sept./Oct.)	Israel's Regathering by Christ (Matthew 24:31)
Atonement (Sept./Oct.)	Substitutionary Sacrifice by Christ (Romans 11:26)
Tabernacles (Sept./Oct.)	Rest and Reunion with Christ (Zechariah 14:16-19)