



STUDY GUIDE



LEVITICUS

The book of Hebrews provides a multifaceted portrait of how Jesus is beyond all human assumptions. But, there is a problem.

The rich imagery of the book assumes the reader knows the inner workings of the roles and rituals found deep within the first five books of the Old Testament. It can be like walking into a dark room feeling around with no reference for what our hands might actually be touching. So, in order to pull back the curtain and to counteract some of our modern presuppositions, this three session series on Leviticus serves as a preamble to our Hebrews series. It is a quick primer to illuminate the ancient world of the Israelite worldview and worship, so that the imagery and conclusions within the book of Hebrews are given the proper energy to burst into view.

Welcome to a quick study of Leviticus.

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SESSION ONE

LEVITICUS 10:10–11 (ESV)

¹⁰ You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean, ¹¹ and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them by Moses.”

LEVITICUS 11:46–47 (ESV)

⁴⁶ This is the law about beast and bird and every living creature that moves through the waters and every creature that swarms on the ground, ⁴⁷ to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean and between the living creature that may be eaten and the living creature that may not be eaten.

LEVITICUS 12:1–2 (ESV)

¹ The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If a woman conceives and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days. As at the time of her menstruation, she shall be unclean.

LEVITICUS 13:1–3 (ESV)

¹ The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ² “When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling or an eruption or a spot, and it turns into a case of leprous disease on the skin of his body, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests, ³ and the priest shall examine the diseased area

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on the skin of his body. And if the hair in the diseased area has turned white and the disease appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a case of leprous disease. When the priest has examined him, he shall pronounce him unclean.

LEVITICUS 14:33–36 (ESV)

³³ The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ³⁴ “When you come into the land of Canaan, which I give you for a possession, and I put a case of leprous disease in a house in the land of your possession, ³⁵ then he who owns the house shall come and tell the priest, ‘There seems to me to be some case of disease in my house.’ ³⁶ Then the priest shall command that they empty the house before the priest goes to examine the disease, lest all that is in the house be declared unclean. And afterward the priest shall go in to see the house.

LEVITICUS 15:1–5 (ESV)

¹ The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ² “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When any man has a discharge from his body, his discharge is unclean. ³ And this is the law of his uncleanness for a discharge: whether his body runs with his discharge, or his body is blocked up by his discharge, it is his uncleanness. ⁴ Every bed on which the one with the discharge lies shall be unclean, and everything on which he sits shall be unclean. ⁵ And anyone who touches his bed shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening.



INTRODUCTION

Several chapters in the Book of Leviticus can leave a modern Western person scratching their head. The categories of clean and unclean have no clear comparison in our culture. While it is not a law, we would not take a cheeseburger and fries into the bathroom to eat, because it just doesn't seem right. But imagine having a loved one pass away and you need to prepare the body and move it. Or imagine you find a boil or spot on your skin or you discover you have some flakes in your scalp. Or maybe you have a baby. In ancient Israel, each could require a purification ritual. We should consider what can be learned about God from these seemingly strange rules and rituals.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to be pure? For example, what does 24 carat gold mean? If someone said “I am pure” what might that mean?
2. Describe what the word “holiness” means in our culture. Now, define what you think “holiness” means when describing God. Reading Psalm 99, how would you classify God’s holiness?
3. Read Leviticus 15:1-12. There are several ways a person could be unclean. Skin disease, clothes that were unclean, bodily discharges. Was it sinful to be unclean? What does ritual impurity have to do with God’s presence? Explain.
4. What would an Israelite do to remove uncleanness or ritual impurity?
5. Read Leviticus 1:1-3, 1:10, 3:1, 6. What is the recurring requirement for the sacrifices? Why might sacrifices need to have this quality?

6. Read Leviticus 5:1-15. What is the purpose of the priesthood in this process? Now read Leviticus 9:1-24. How does the priesthood stay holy and pure?
7. From this session, how would you describe the process and purpose of being cleansed? Who mediates the process? What is the ultimate purpose of this spiritual cleansing?
8. Read Romans 12:1. Considering this verse is steeped in ancient practices, including Israelite practices from the Old Testament, what is Paul saying about holiness and sacrifice? Who is the sacrifice in the word imagery of the verse?
9. From 1 Peter 1:13-16, what does a Christian's holiness look like? Does this describe you? Why/why not?
10. In the Old Testament Law, sacrifices came at a cost to the individual who brought the offering, whether it was an offering of thanksgiving or an offering for breaking God's rules. If a Christian's spiritual act of worship is sacrifice, meaning it costs us something, what does it cost you as a Christian?



Imagine a child who has been playing at the park. When the child arrives home, you realize that it has been raining and he is covered in mud, or maybe something worse because of the stench rolling off him. If you don't intervene, that dirt and smell will end up tainting everything. The kitchen, the sofa, the child's bed, everything.

God is perfect and holy, totally unique. To bring uncleanness or impurity into His presence is dangerous, not for Him, but for you. The Old Testament sacrificial system and priesthood were designed to cleanse people so they could be within God's holy presence, but it was a neverending cycle such that even the priests who would make atonement for the people needed to be cleaned as well.

You and I are like that child who tries to find happiness in the stink of the world, careless about how that filth makes God's Creation unclean. Who could break the cycle of sacrifice? Who could make us clean permanently? One divine and immeasurable sacrifice. A Gift from above. Christ as the perfect human and the divine Son, in one gracious all-encompassing sacrifice, atones for unclean, impure humans, and gives us His Spirit cleansing us and reminding us how we are to live in His presence. This is how far God's love will go. How are you still splashing around in the mud of the world? Do you know you have been lifted from the filth into His glorious light?

SESSION TWO

LEVITICUS 16 (ESV)

¹The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died, ²and 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. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat. ³But in this way Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with a bull from the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. ⁴He shall put on the holy linen coat and shall have the linen undergarment on his body, and he shall tie the linen sash around his waist, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water and then put them on. ⁵And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.

⁶“Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. ⁷Then he shall take the two goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting. ⁸And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel. ⁹And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and use it as a sin offering, ¹⁰ but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.

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¹¹“Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. He shall kill the bull as a sin offering for himself. ¹²And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil ¹³and put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die. ¹⁴And he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat on the east side, and in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.

¹⁵“Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. ¹⁶Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses. ¹⁷No one may be in the tent of meeting from the time he enters to make atonement in the Holy Place until he comes out and has made atonement for himself and for his house and for all the assembly of Israel. ¹⁸Then he shall go out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and some of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar all around. ¹⁹And he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it and consecrate it from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel.

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CONTINUED

²⁰“And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. ²¹And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. ²²The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.

²³“Then Aaron shall come into the tent of meeting and shall take off the linen garments that he put on when he went into the Holy Place and shall leave them there. ²⁴And he shall bathe his body in water in a holy place and put on his garments and come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people and make atonement for himself and for the people. ²⁵And the fat of the sin offering he shall burn on the altar. ²⁶And he who lets the goat go to Azazel shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp. ²⁷And the bull for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy Place, shall be carried outside the camp. Their skin and their flesh and their dung

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shall be burned up with fire. ²⁸And he who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp.

²⁹“And it shall be a statute to you forever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you. ³⁰For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins. ³¹It is a Sabbath of solemn rest to you, and you shall afflict yourselves; it is a statute forever. ³²And the priest who is anointed and consecrated as priest in his father’s place shall make atonement, wearing the holy linen garments. ³³He shall make atonement for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. ³⁴And this shall be a statute forever for you, that atonement may be made for the people of Israel once in the year because of all their sins.” And Aaron did as the LORD commanded Moses.



INTRODUCTION

The Torah, also known as the Pentateuch or the first five books in your Bible, is at the core of ancient Israelite faith. At the center of the five books is the Book of Leviticus. At the center of that book is an essential ritual that is hard for modern people to understand. Two goats. One dies. The other is cast out.

All of this for the purpose of cleansing the priesthood and the people of Israel from sin and impurity. It happens every year at a set time.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Genesis 6:14. The word translated “cover” in this verse is from the word root that translates to “atone.” How can this help us fill out the word’s meaning?
2. Discuss the story of the relationship between Jacob and Esau (Genesis 27-28) and read Genesis 32:20. The word translated “appease” in this verse is also the word root that is translated “atone.” How does this context and use of the word help us understand what atonement means?
3. Consider the questions from the last session about impurity which is not necessarily sin. Why might atonement be required by God?
4. Read Leviticus 16:1-2 and go back and read Leviticus 10:1-8. What event led to this instruction? What does this tell us about God’s presence?
5. Compare Exodus 28 with Leviticus 16:4-5. What are the differences in Aaron’s dress? Why the difference?

6. Read Leviticus 16:16-17. What is at the heart of this annual event?
7. Identify the places and order that Aaron is supposed to apply the blood. What direction is he going?
8. Reading Leviticus 16:8, 20-22, what is the purpose of the second goat? Is it a sacrifice to the LORD? Explain.
9. In the Gospel of John (1:29), John the Baptist gives Jesus a name. How might this name be related to the Day of Atonement? What other event in Israel's history might also be mashed up in this name?
10. How does Jesus represent both goats from the Day of Atonement? What are the implications for you as you live today?



God's presence is straight-up dangerous. The story of Aaron's sons proves the point. But God, also full of mercy, provides ways for His people to approach Him. Throughout the year they can make sacrifices that bring purification for sin and uncleanness which is not sin, all of which cannot persist in God's presence. But the Day of Atonement marks the depth of God's love and justice—impurity and sin can be covered, whether known or unknown, for priests and common people.

The symbolism is rich. The high priest gets clean and humble in dress. He covers himself in a cloud of sweet smelling camouflage so the LORD's presence won't destroy him, and then creates a path of redeeming blood from God's mercy seat inside, through a curtain of warrior cherubim, and continues the path outside to the altar where all of the sacrifices are made. And in an act of completion, he lays the annual sum total of Israel's sin on a second goat, sending it away. It's like a dump truck full of the evil of God's people sent back to where the serpent crawled in from, the desert wilderness. None of it belongs in the presence of the Almighty, so every year this ritual takes place.

So what does all of this mean for the Christian? Jesus the Christ, in all of His beauty, removes His crown and royal attire, condescends to take on flesh, and leaves a redeeming path of His own blood to purify us from all unrighteousness. He is executed outside of the city, without dignity. Innocent. Alone. And like a magnet, He draws every last bit of our toxic waste to Himself in order to put it all to death in one act of merciful, loving justice. So, Christian, what should our response be? How much change is enough? How much thankful obedience is called for?

SESSION THREE

EXODUS 40

¹The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²“On the first day of the first month you shall erect the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. ³And you shall put in it the ark of the testimony, and you shall screen the ark with the veil. ⁴And you shall bring in the table and arrange it, and you shall bring in the lampstand and set up its lamps. ⁵And you shall put the golden altar for incense before the ark of the testimony, and set up the screen for the door of the tabernacle. ⁶You shall set the altar of burnt offering before the door of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, ⁷and place the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it. ⁸And you shall set up the court all around, and hang up the screen for the gate of the court.

⁹“Then you shall take the anointing oil and anoint the tabernacle and all that is in it, and consecrate it and all its furniture, so that it may become holy. ¹⁰You shall also anoint the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and consecrate the altar, so that the altar may become most holy. ¹¹You shall also anoint the basin and its stand, and consecrate it. ¹²Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and shall wash them with water ¹³and put on Aaron the holy garments. And you shall anoint him and consecrate him, that he may serve me as priest. ¹⁴You shall bring his sons also and put coats on them, ¹⁵and anoint them, as you anointed their father, that they may serve me as

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priests. And their anointing shall admit them to a perpetual priesthood throughout their generations.”

¹⁶This Moses did; according to all that the LORD commanded him, so he did. ¹⁷In the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was erected. ¹⁸Moses erected the tabernacle. He laid its bases, and set up its frames, and put in its poles, and raised up its pillars. ¹⁹And he spread the tent over the tabernacle and put the covering of the tent over it, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

²⁰He took the testimony and put it into the ark, and put the poles on the ark and set the mercy seat above on the ark.

²¹And he brought the ark into the tabernacle and set up the veil of the screen, and screened the ark of the testimony, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

²²He put the table in the tent of meeting, on the north side of the tabernacle, outside the veil, ²³and arranged the bread on it before the LORD, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

²⁴He put the lampstand in the tent of meeting, opposite the table on the south side of the tabernacle, ²⁵and set up the lamps before the LORD,

as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²⁶He put the golden altar in the tent of meeting before the veil, ²⁷and burned fragrant incense on it, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

²⁸He put in place the screen for the door of the tabernacle.

²⁹And he set the altar of burnt offering at the entrance of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, and offered on it the

SESSION THREE

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burnt offering and the grain offering, as the LORD had commanded Moses. ³⁰He set the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it for washing, ³¹with which Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet. ³²When they went into the tent of meeting, and when they approached the altar, they washed, as the LORD commanded Moses. ³³And he erected the court around the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the screen of the gate of the court. So Moses finished the work.

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³⁴Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁶Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. ³⁷But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. ³⁸For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.



INTRODUCTION

There is a place for all of the Levitical rituals. The thanksgiving offerings. The burnt offerings. The Day of Atonement. It was called the Tabernacle or the Tent of Meeting. It was a structure that included a tented courtyard with one entry at the East and a smaller enclosed tent in the middle toward the back. In that enclosed structure was an area for the bread of the presence, the tree-like lampstand, and an incense altar. All three were kept full 24x7 by the priesthood.

But behind the veil, through the angelic guardians was the Most Holy Place where the God of Israel would manifest His presence.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Exodus 25:8-9. What is the purpose of the tabernacle as God revealed it to Moses? What is the very next instruction? Now read Exodus 25:22. What is the significance of this object?
2. Read Exodus 26. How does Moses receive these instructions? Read Exodus 25:8-9 again and 25:40. How did Moses experience the instructions?
3. Compare Exodus 26:31-34 with Genesis 3:22-24. Describe the common imagery. What other imagery from Exodus 26 might provide a connection?
4. Read Exodus 33:1-3. What happened just before this in Exodus 32? What is the problem identified in these passages and how might they relate to the purpose of the tabernacle?
5. Read Exodus 29:38-46. What happens in the tabernacle? What is the work that the priests do there and what does it achieve?

6. Quickly scan Numbers 2 and 3 for the locations of tribes and family groups. What is the major point of the tribe locations?
7. In 2 Kings 6 and 2 Chronicles 3, we read of King Solomon building the Temple in Jerusalem. How does it compare to the tabernacle? What eventually happens to that temple and why?
8. Read Mark 11:15-18. Jesus does not like the activity happening in the Temple courts. What is the problem?
9. In John 1:14, the word “dwelt” actually is a verbal form of the Greek word for “tent.” Seems odd. What might this mean in the context of our session? Read John 2:18-23. How does this relate?
10. When Jesus dies, three of the Gospel accounts report that the temple curtain was torn in two (Matthew 27:31; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). This is the curtain with cherubim on display and separates the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. What are the possible implications?



From the very beginning of the biblical story, God was present with his image bearers (Genesis 3:8), in fact, He wanted to be at the center of every thought, decision, and action. Later in the biblical story, this became the purpose of the tabernacle, the tent at the center of Israelite worship. We think of tents as tools to keep us safe from the elements when we are camping, but this tent is different. It is designed as a sacred place in the middle of Israel where they could relate to the One who saved them, the One who made them different. There they could find forgiveness, purification, and closeness to God. The tent was a reminder of the Garden story, both of God's goodness, but also a reminder of the distance created by human rebellion. Actually, this tent was also designed to protect the people around it, but not from the elements. It is the place where God's holy and powerful presence was manifest among His people. The Jerusalem temples that followed were no different except they could not move.

But there was a problem. Ever since creation, the Bible tells a story of God's people finding ways of ignoring or otherwise dishonoring that presence. No matter how many sacrifices were performed by the priests, they couldn't stop the cycle. God's holy and just presence would eventually destroy his people. The demands of God's justice would need to be satisfied by One powerful enough to be faithful to the end. This is why Jesus "tabernacled" among us. This is why when Jesus breathes for the last time, the temple curtain is torn in two. God's presence has left the building. He has indelibly connected Himself to His image bearer through the Perfect Son of God. You enjoy this benefit Christian. The presence of the living God with you, in you. Forgiveness, purification, closeness. Forever. Is that presence still dangerous?

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