



Wednesday Bible Education  
*Biblical Theology*  
Lesson 4: Leviticus

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## REVIEW

*Questions from last week's lesson:*

1. What is Exodus about?
2. How does Exodus help us today?

*Answers:*

1. Exodus narrates the famous deliverance of Israel from Egypt with the ten plagues and the Red Sea crossing. Moses leads the children of Israel out of Egypt to encamp at the foot of Mount Sinai, where they remain for the rest of the book. At Mount Sinai, Israel receives the ten commandments and other laws from God through Moses going up and down the mountain to receive from God and give to the people. Israel also receives the instructions for building the tabernacle, which is completed by the end of the book. Exodus is about the sovereign supremacy and glory of God. Exodus shows God (Yahweh) exalted above all powers in Heaven and earth, sovereignly working to save his chosen people for his own glory.
2. Understanding Exodus helps us understand who God is and realizing he does not change means he is the same in the New Testament and today as he is in the book of Exodus. Exodus gives a perspective of seeing God working in history to accomplish his purpose and fulfill his promises. Exodus helps us understand how to fear God and what it means to be his holy people. In this book we also see Christ as our Passover who was killed for us and to understand redemption from slavery to sin and salvation from the just wrath of God.

## INTRODUCTION

**W**hat is the book of Leviticus about? We usually think of the laws of the Mosaic covenant when we think about Leviticus. Leviticus contains various statutes of the law relating to the offerings and sacrifices of the tabernacle, ritual purity, the priesthood, and tabernacle service. Leviticus records the laws for the Day of Atonement, the annual sacrifice for the atonement of the sins of Israel. Leviticus is about the presence of God. Since God is holy, his presence requires holiness, and unholiness coming into his presence meets death. For God's people to dwell in his presence requires obedience, sacrifice, atonement, and priestly mediation.

In this lesson, we will look at Leviticus as a whole book. We will consider the contents of the book, the biblical context of the book, as well as the meaning and message of Leviticus for modern readers. The biblical theology of Leviticus connects it with the rest of Scripture by adding to the expectation of Christ, the Messiah, and his coming kingdom. This will help us to see how it fits into the big picture of the Bible's main story.

## OBSERVATION

Leviticus is the third book of the Pentateuch, third book of the law, and third book of the Old Testament. Leviticus continues the narrative from the end of Exodus. Genesis and Exodus are primarily historical narrative in structure, moving from event to event and place to place. Leviticus differs from these first two books in structure, since it is primarily instruction and contains little narrative. There are few events in Leviticus and the entire book happens in one place. Leviticus takes place within a month of finishing the tabernacle at the end of Exodus. Israel is still encamped at Sinai, and would in fact spend a year encamped there. The structure of the book is summarized well by considering bookend verses in Leviticus 1:1, "the Lord ... spake ... saying," and Leviticus 27:34: "These are the commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses for the children of Israel in mount Sinai." The book is primarily one long session of instruction.

Within the instructions of Leviticus we find laws for the sacrifices and offerings of the tabernacle. We find various regulations concerning the priests and their duties. We find the purity laws, or the laws of clean and unclean. The name Leviticus means pertaining to the Levites, and the book focuses on the use of the tabernacle in worshiping God and cleansing the people.

*A brief outline of Leviticus:*

1. Chapters 1-7 Contain the laws of the sacrifices and offerings
2. Chapters 8-16 Contain the laws of the priests
3. Chapters 17-27 Contain the laws of holiness and purity for all Israel

## INTERPRETATION

Leviticus is a common book where people grab random verses in order to mock and nullify the whole Bible. Even professing Christians will sometimes use Leviticus in similar fashion to nullify the Old Testament. Doing so demonstrates a person does not understand the Bible, nor do they take the holiness of God seriously. Leviticus 10:1-3 is one event narrated in the book showing the seriousness of sin to a holy God. There we read of Nadab and Abihu offering strange fire before the Lord and fire from God consuming them. While many may look at Leviticus and laugh about shaving your beard, eating shrimp, wearing poly-cotton blend clothing, or eating a steak rare, breaking these laws was sin against God and resulted

in death. Such irreverence misses the point of Leviticus and overlooks the gracious provision God made for atoning for sin and purifying uncleanness, which pointed to the ultimate sacrifice for sins, Jesus Christ.

In about the middle of the book are the laws concerning the annual Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:1-34). A sacrifice was to be made to atone for the sins of the twelve tribes of Israel. The high priest had to offer first for himself and his house before he could offer for the people. On this one day every year, the high priest would go into the Holy of Holies, which was separated by a large curtain from the Holy Place inside the tabernacle.<sup>1</sup> The Holy of Holies held the Ark of the Covenant with the mercy seat on the lid of the ark. The mercy seat was where God's glory abode between the cherubim. The priest had to sprinkle the blood from the slain goat to make atonement for Israel. The second goat was not slain, but the priest would lay his hands on its head and confess the sins of Israel and the goat was released into the wilderness. So the goat was put outside the camp representing the penalty for sin and breaking God's law, which was removal from the land.

The mosaic covenant had inherent flaws by God's design. The writer of Hebrews points some of these out in order to show it was the old covenant and was never intended to take away sin, but full redemption was provided in the new covenant (Hebrews 10:1-4). Even though the sacrifices were performed perfectly according the levitical laws, they did not remove sin but rather perpetuated the remembrance of sin. Leviticus taught Israel to look for a better tabernacle, better priest, better mediator, better sacrifice, better atonement, and better covenant. It taught them to look for the Messiah (Hebrews 9:22-28).

Leviticus reveals the conditional nature of the mosaic covenant by which Israel could remain in the abrahamic covenant and enjoy its blessings. Leviticus 26:1-46 enumerates the blessings that would come on them for keeping the covenant, but also lists the curses that would come upon them for breaking it. The penalty for breaking the covenant was chastening from God and ultimately being scattered from the land. The broken covenant would not mean the failure of the abrahamic covenant though (Leviticus 26:42-45). The promises of the abrahamic covenant would be fulfilled through the new and better covenant. This points to the coming kingdom and future restoration and salvation of Israel. Jesus Christ is the one son of Jacob who would perfectly keep the mosaic covenant and die as a sacrifice for sin, making atonement for all who will repent of their sin and trust in him, and who will gather the people and establish his kingdom in the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

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<sup>1</sup> The practice of tying a rope to the ankle of the high priest before he entered the Holy of Holies so his body could be pulled out were he to die, is found neither in Scripture nor in history. The earliest mention I am aware of was in the 13th century, more than 1,100 years after the temple was destroyed. The story of this practice is a myth without credible foundation.

## APPLICATION

What applications do modern readers take from Leviticus? Leviticus may be one of the least read books in the Bible. It is full of obscure laws and regulations particularly related to the tabernacle, and we have no tabernacle today. The message of Leviticus is not for us to try to keep the levitical laws today, but there are at least three important helps for us from Leviticus.

1. Understanding Leviticus gives us a humbling sense of God's holiness and the purity of his presence. Rather than setting the laws of Leviticus aside as irrelevant, we should grasp something of the righteousness of God and the justice of his wrath against sin. The law reveals the holiness of God and gives the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20). Grasping these truths will increase our reverence for God.
2. Understanding Leviticus will help us understand how we fall short of his standard of righteousness. Consider Paul's word to the church at Rome (Romans 3:10-20). We will all face the presence of God one day and if we are going to survive it, we must be holy before him. If we are judged by the laws of Leviticus, we will be found wanting and cast into the Lake of Fire to suffer eternal punishment. We might make light of a law that would forbid us from eating shrimp or wearing blended fabric clothing, but breaking the law in the least point is to be guilty of the whole and thereby merit death (James 2:10-11). The only way to stand in God's presence is for Jesus Christ to have taken your place, suffered the penalty due your sins, and given you his perfect righteousness.
3. Understanding Leviticus will increase our love for Christ in grasping the penalty for sin he took on himself (Hebrews 13:11-12; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ is the one man who has kept the whole law, yet suffered the full penalty of the law as a law breaker so that all who believe in him and repent of their sins are delivered from God's judgment.

## CONCLUSION

Leviticus teaches us about God's holy presence and the holiness required for all who will come into his presence. All the laws and rites of the tabernacle are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who is the tabernacle of God among men.

## ABOUT THIS STUDY

This series is a study in biblical theology going book by book through the entire Bible. Each lesson typically covers one book of the Bible, though occasionally covers more than one book when the books are short. This PDF is provided for personal study, small group study, or use in a church class. Unless otherwise noted, all lessons have been prepared by Jeff Short, the pastor of Harmony Baptist Church.

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