

Introduction to Leviticus

God communicates to Moses from the “tabernacle of meeting” (1:1; Ex. 34:7).

1-7 – Various Sacrifices

8-10 – The Priesthood

11 – Laws on Food

12 – Laws on Childbirth

13-14 – Dealing with Leprosy

15 – Sanitation

16 – The Day of Atonement

17 – The Significance of Blood

18 – Israel’s Sexual Ethic

19-20 – Various Moral Laws and Consequences for Breaking the Law

21-22 – Priestly Conduct

23 – Feast Days

24:1-9 – Tabernacle Lamps and Bread

24:10-23 – Law on Blasphemy

25 – Sabbaths, Jubilee, Property Laws, Dealing with Fellow-Men

26 – Blessing and Cursing

27 – Property Laws

The book repeatedly emphasizes the holiness of Israel. “Holy” is found in 78 verses.

11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7, 26

Holy means sacred or set apart.

“The book of Leviticus contains the laws which are to govern the organized people of God in their religious and civil life.” From *An Introduction to the Old Testament* by Edward J Young

“Leviticus might be called a training manual. It was the manual to be used by the priests to instruct Israel relative to the laws which God had given” From *Getting Acquainted with the Old Testament*, Vol. 1 by Charles Pledge

“The book of Leviticus is probably the least read and the least understood book of the Old Testament, for the sacrificial system which is its central feature is wholly foreign to most people in the contemporary world. At the same time, it is one of the very important books in the Old Testament, for the forms of Israel’s worship were central to their faith.” From *An Introduction to the Old Testament and Its Study* by Robert Cate

Leviticus

1 – The Burnt Offering

- Male, without blemish, free-will. To make atonement (v. 4). Atonement means to cover, to purge, to make reconciliation. Used 51 times in Leviticus.
- A variety of animals accepted – bull, sheep, goat, turtledove, pigeon (v. 5, 10, 14).
- All of it burnt on the altar (v. 9, 13, 17). Notice “he” in verses 3-17. While the one bringing the sacrifice was to kill the animal (v. 5, 11), the priests were to handle the blood, fire, and the offering (v. 5-9, 11, 15).

2 – The Grain Offering

- KJV refers to this as a meat offering (NKJ – grain). Meat offering or grain offering literally translated means, “The offering of a gift.”
- These are baked in oven (v. 4) or baked in a covered pan (v. 7). They were to be unleavened (v. 4-5, 11).
- They are made of fine flour, oil, frankincense (v. 1).
- A handful was offered to God and the rest was for the priests (v. 1, 10).
- There was also a “first-fruits” offering (v. 12, 14-16).
- Salt was also a part of the offerings (v. 13). In the ancient near-east, salt was valuable as a preservative. The “covenant of salt” refers to God’s faithfulness to His word – Num. 18:19; 2 Chr. 13:5.

3 – The Peace Offering

- From the herd (collective term for cattle), male or female (v. 1, 6), or a goat (v. 12). A free-will offering.
- Again, the one offering the animal was to kill it (v. 2, 8, 13). The priests were to deal with the blood, altar, and burning (v. 5, 8, 13, 16).
- The fat and blood were strictly offered to God (v. 17).

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4 – The Sin Offering

- For an individual's unintentional sin (v. 2). Priests included (v. 3). Offer a young bull and the anointed priest would deal with the blood (v. 4-7). Fat, kidneys, whatever is attached to the liver was to be burned on the altar (v. 8-10). The hide, flesh, head, legs, and intestines were all to be burned outside the camp (v. 11-12).
- A congregational unintentional sin (v. 13). Same process of offering to be followed (v. 14-21). Notice, the sin may have been unintentional, but was able to become known (v. 14, 23, 28). It would become known based on further knowledge or perhaps consequences.
- A ruler's unintentional sin (v. 22). A male kid of the goats (v. 23). Same offering process (v. 24-26).
- A sin of any soul (v. 27). A female kid of the goats or lamb (v. 28, 32).
- Each of these sacrifices offered forgiveness (v. 20, 26, 31, 35). The Hebrew term means to free, release, or pardon. There are about 6 terms in these chapters describing sin. Miss the mark, err, wander, indiscretion, guilt, offence, treachery. What about Hebrews 10:1-4?

5 – The Trespass Offering

- If you knew of a violation of the law, you had to report it (v. 1). Guilt of uncleanness once it was discovered (v. 2-3). Thoughtless vows (v. 4). When the sin was recognized, it had to be confessed and sacrifice (female lamb or goat) had to be made (v. 5-6).
- Doves or pigeons could be used if he could not afford a lamb or goat (v. 7-10). If that was too much, a grain offering could be made (v. 11-13).
- Unintentional sin regarding holy things (gifts, sacrifices to be offered). A ram was to be offered, as well as restitution for the holy thing.
- Ignorance was not an excuse (v. 17-19).

6-7 – Various Offerings.

- Lying and fraud (v. 1-7). A ram (v. 6) along with restitution, plus 1/5 of the value of the thing lost or stolen.
- How the priest was to perform the burnt offering (6:8-13).
- How the priest was to perform the grain offering (6:14-23). 1 Corinthians 9:8-14
- How the priest was to perform the sin offering (6:24-30).
- How the priest was to perform the trespass offering (7:1-10).
- How the priest was to perform the peace offering (7:11-21). Offerings could become unclean and had to be burned (7:19). An unclean person could not eat the offerings (7:20-21).
- Fat and blood not to be eaten (7:22-27).
- The priestly portions (7:28-36).
- The timing of these instructions (7:37-38).

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8 – Aaron and His Sons Consecrated

- Moses serves as the initiator of these acts of consecration. A point of emphasis in this section is “as the Lord commanded” (v. 4-5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 29, 36).
- This process included the garments, anointing oil, bull, two rams, unleavened bread (v. 1-3).
- They were washed with water and dressed (v. 6-9, 13; Ex. 29:4), anointed (v. 10-12).
- The bull was offered to consecrate the altar (v. 14-17), one ram was offered as a burnt offering (v. 18-21), and a second ram was offered as a consecration offering (v. 22-29). After this, Aaron and his sons could offer sacrifice to God. Aaron and his sons are then anointed with oil and blood (v. 30).
- Aaron and his sons were to eat their portion of the offering and burn the leftovers (v. 31-36).

9 – Aaron and His Sons Being Their Service

- They were to remain in the tabernacle of meeting for seven days (8:33) and to begin their service on the eighth. Offer a young bull for themselves (v. 2), a kid, a calf, and a lamb as a burnt offering, and a bull, a ram, and grain/oil offering (v. 3-4).
- These were for the priests and the people (v. 7).
- Hebrews 5:1-4
- The priest’s offering done (v. 8-14). The offering for the people done (v. 15-21).
- Aaron and Moses go into the tabernacle of meeting, come out, and the glory of the Lord appears to all the people and the burnt offering was consumed by God (v. 22-24).

10 – Nadab and Abihu and Priestly Conduct

- They had just been consecrated for this service. They used the proper censer and incense. The problem was with the fire they offered – it was profane. The only fire revealed was the fire for the day of atonement (16:12).
- The fire was strange (KJV) or profane (NKJ). The Hebrew term refers to people from another location (strangers) and/or loathsome (regarding a thing).
- Similar to the events of Acts 5:1-11.
- God and His will must be regarded as holy. I do not have the right to presume upon God! Aaron’s response is telling (v. 3b). Exodus 6:16-22 tells of this family (v. 4-5). Mishael and Elzaphan were cousins of Nadab and Abihu. While Israel mourned, the priests were to maintain their responsibilities (v. 6-7).
- Verses 8-11 are significant in the discussion of the Christian and alcohol.
- While the offerings of God were interrupted, the process had to go on (v. 12-15).
- Eleazar and Ithamar fulfilled their duty in offering, but Aaron was in no condition to eat (v. 16-21).

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11 – Dietary Restrictions

- The Hebrews were allowed to eat any animal that had a cloven hoof and chewed the cud. Animals that did one but not the other were considered "unclean" and could not be eaten (camels, rock badger, hares, pigs).
- Everything in the water that had fins and scales could be used for food. Anything without fins and scale was to be considered "detestable."
- God forbid the eating of certain birds: eagles, bearded vultures, black vultures, kites, falcons, ravens, ostriches, nighthawks, sea gulls, hawks, little owls, cormorants, short-eared owls, barn owls, tawny owls, carrion vultures, storks, herons, hoopoes, and bats.
- Insects with wings that walked on 4 legs were not to be eaten, except for insects with jointed legs above their feet (locust, cricket, and grasshopper).
- Animals that walked on all fours on their paws were unclean. Moles, rats, mice, great lizards, sand lizards, and chameleons were unclean. Not only were the Israelites not to eat these animals, birds, and insects but they were forbidden from touching their carcasses.
- If a person touched their carcasses, he/she would be considered "unclean" until the evening.
- Additionally, anything an unclean animal's carcass touched (wood, clothing, skin, bags, etc.) would be considered unclean until the evening and had to be washed in water. If a carcass fell into an earthen jar or pot, the vessel was to be broken. If a clean animal died of natural causes (not slaughtered), and it was touched, carried, or eaten, those who contacted it were unclean until the evening and were required to wash their clothes.
- Animals that crawled on their stomachs (snakes and worms) and insects with "many legs" (caterpillar and centipede) were not to be eaten.
- These laws were designed to consecrate the people of Israel and to make them a distinct people among the nations – 11:43-45.

12 – Rituals After Giving Birth

- 1-4 – Purification after giving birth to a son – mother unclean for 7 days, son circumcised on 8th day, and her purification lasted another 33 days before she could touch any holy thing or come to the tabernacle.
- 5 – Purification after giving birth to a daughter – mother unclean for 14 days, purification continued for 66 more days.
- 6-8 – Sacrifice following purification – bring to priest a lamb, a pigeon or dove as a sin offering. She would then be cleansed from the birthing process.
- Luke 2:21-24

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13-14 – Communicable Skin Diseases and Their Treatment

- Suspicious swelling, spots, or breaking of the skin was to be inspected by priests. Distinctions were to be made between scars, burns, skin spots, and leprosy.
- If hair around sore turned white and was more than a superficial wound, it was diagnosed as leprosy and the patient was unclean.
- If symptoms were not like this, they were to be quarantined for 7 days and reinspected. If no change, quarantined for another 7 days. If sore was faded or scabbed over, patient was clean.
- Anyone with a raw sore was to be inspected by the priest. Those diagnosed with leprosy were to live alone and outside of the camp. Requirements – 13:45-46.
- Infected clothes were to be burned.
- 14 contains instructions on how to cleanse one who was healed of leprosy and their house.

15 – Laws Regarding Bodily Discharges

- 15:1-15 – A male's bodily discharge. Anything/anyone he touched or who touched him was unclean. Unclean seven days, sacrifice, and wash on eighth day.
- 15:16-18 – An emission of semen.
- 15:19-24 – Laws regarding menstruation.
- 15:25-33 – An emission of blood not connected to menstruation.

16 – The Day of Atonement

- Atonement (kaphar) – to appease, put off, reconcile; to pardon or purge.
- The Most Holy Place could only be entered at a very specific time and there were sacrifices for the day (16:1-11). He was to be wearing the holy garments with the blood of a young bull.
- Two goats - one goat killed and blood sprinkled for atonement. One goat used as the scapegoat and it sent out into the wilderness (16:20-22). It signified the pardoning of sin.
- It was in the 7th month, on the 10th day (v. 29-34). October 1-2, 2025 – Yom Kippur. It was also a “sabbath of solemn rest” (v. 31). Notice the “stranger” (v. 29). This was a non-Jew living among them – alien, sojourner.

17 – The Sanctity of Blood

- This chapter covers the shedding of blood and the improper treatment/use of it. Blood of sacrifice must be brought to the tabernacle, to the priest so he can properly offer it to God.
- If not, you were cut off from the people.
- From verse 7 we learn that some in Israel were accustomed to sacrificing to a goat-demon.
- The stranger also responsible (v. 8, 10, 12-13, 15).
- Laws regarding hunting and trapping animals and what to do with the blood (v. 13-16).

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18 – Laws on Sexual Morality

- 18:1-5 and 18:24-30 are stern warnings against adopting the sexual ethic of either Egypt or Canaan.
- All the sexual perversions listed are called abominations (v. 26-30). Literally, things that are disgusting.
- The land was defiled (polluted). To uncover the nakedness of someone was a euphemism for sexual intercourse. Specifics forbidden:
 - Incestuous relations - parents, step-parents, step-sisters, daughters-in-law, aunts, uncles, sisters-in-law, two sisters while one is still alive (v. 6-18).
 - Other kinds of sexual relations forbidden: during menstruation, neighbor's wife, homosexuality, bestiality (v. 19-20, 22-23). Multiple ancient sources reference all these types of sexual perversions as being common, especially in Egypt.
 - Spiritual fornication (v. 21). 2 Kings 16; 2 Chronicles 33
- The LGBTQIA+ movement is our modern equivalent to these perversions. Don't use the OT to condemn behavior that is also condemned in the NT. Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9
- The promised land is personified as a person who becomes defiled and begins to vomit.

19 – Various Laws for Israel

- The point of these laws is stated in verse 2. There are constant reminders throughout – “I am the Lord your God” (v. 3-4, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 25, 28, 30-32, 34, 36-37). There are horizontal laws (man-to-man) and vertical laws (man-to-God). Most are straightforward and need no comment (v. 3-18, 20-22, 26, 29-36).
- Verse 19 – Why? It has been suggested that these types of restrictions enforced the idea of Israel's separation from other nations – no mixing. Deuteronomy 22:9-11. It could also be emphasizing God's original design of form and distinction in creation.
- Verses 23-25 – Why? Perhaps indulging to quickly on crops would cause a food shortage. Perhaps to teach the people to be grateful and appreciate the produce as a gift from God (v. 24).
- Verse 26 – enchantment and soothsaying would be comparable today to horoscopes, astrology, tarot cards. In pagan cultures, such as Rome, these were used as methods of learning the will of the gods. (Deut. 18:9-14; Isa. 47:12-15). These present themselves as substitutes for God to serve as spiritual guides (Gal. 5:20; Rev. 21:8 and φαρμακεία). From spiritanddestiny.com – *“Divination is an ancient practice of energetic communication, serving as a bridge between our world and the spiritual realm. It's one of the best rituals to tap into our intuition and connect with our guides. Throughout history, cultures worldwide have sought knowledge, guidance, and messages from higher consciousness using various divination tools, from the I Ching in China to the Runes of Norse tribes and the cowrie shells in African and Caribbean traditions.”*
- Verses 27-28 – Why? It is said that certain hairstyles in Arab countries were used to honor their local gods. The restrictions on cutting and marking have to do with bodily disfigurement for the dead (Deut. 14:1-2).

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20 – Punishments for Breaking Various Laws

- “Put to death” appears ten times.
- 20:7-8, 26 states the purpose of these laws and punishments.
- Death penalty for child sacrifice (20:1-3), cursing parents (20:9), adultery (20:10), incest (20:11-12), homosexuality (20:13), marrying a daughter and mother (20:14), bestiality (20:15-16), necromancy (20:27).
- The command to distinguish between clean and unclean foods (20:25).

21-22 – Laws for the Priesthood

- 21:1-9 – The holiness of the priesthood.
- 21:10-15 – The holiness of the high priest.
- 21:16-24 – Priests with blemishes.
- 22:1-16 – Holy food from the tabernacle.
- 22:17-33 – Requirements of animals for sacrifice.

23 – Feast Days

- These days are referred to as holy convocations (a formal assembly).
- 23:3 – Sabbath – every seventh day (Saturday).
- 23:4-8 – Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover). March/April. 14th day of first month. On the 15th day started a week-long observance. Eat unleavened bread. Numbers 9:1-14
- 23:9-14 – Feast of First-fruits (March/April). Israelites were to bring a sheaf (a bundle of tied grain stalks) to be offered on the Sabbath. Offer a 1-year-old male lamb, flour, and a drink offering. They could not eat of the new harvest of grain until these were offered.
- 23:15-22 – Feast of Weeks (Pentecost). 50 days after their offering of first-fruits (June). Always landed on the first day of the week. 2 loaves of bread, 7 lambs, 1 bull offered as burnt offerings. 1 male goat as sin offering. 2 male lambs as peace offerings.
- 23:23-25 – Feast of Trumpets. 1st day of 7th month (late September). A day of rest.
- 23:26-32 – The Day of Atonement. 10th day of 7th month (early October). High Priest entered Most Holy place with offering for self and all the people (Lev. 16). Verse 29 and “affliction” has been traditionally understood as a day of fasting. No work to be done.
- 23:33-44 – Feast of Booths. Began on 15th day of 7th month and lasted 7 days (mid-October). Offerings – 23:40. To be done for 7 days. 1st day and 8th day were Sabbaths. Israelites built temporary booths as a reminder of being led out of Egypt and living in the wilderness.

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24 – Lamps, Bread, Blasphemy, and Punishment

- 24:1-4 – Caring for the light source in the tabernacle.
- Lamps placed in holy place, right outside of the most holy place. Exodus 27:20-21
- 24:5-9 – The Showbread. 1 cake (loaf) for each tribe. To remain in place for a week and then eaten by the priests.
- 24:10-16, 23 – The Punishment for Blasphemy. Literally “to pronounce God’s name in contempt.” Exodus 3:14-15; 20:7.
- Curse – to treat lightly.
- 24:17-22 – Various Laws and Penalties. These verses emphasize the necessity of justice and punishment for crime. Murder, killing someone’s animal, injuring others.
- These laws applied both to Israelites and the strangers.
- Verses 19-20 are called the law of retaliation. These did not permit private revenge from an injured person. All crimes had to be adjudicated in Israel. This was to serve as a deterrent to crime in Israel. Deuteronomy 1:16-18.

25 – Sabbaths, Property, and Slavery

- 25:1-7, 18-22 – The Sabbath year. Farm for six years and let land rest on 7th. Exodus 23:10-11. Whatever grew on its own was to be food for that year. This would teach them to rely on God for their necessities (v. 21-22). 2 Chronicles 36:20-21.
- 25:8-17 – The Year of Jubilee (the blast of a horn). They were to blow a trumpet on the Day of Atonement at the end of forty-nine years. Every fiftieth year this was to be observed. It was a year of liberty for the poor. It was also another Sabbath rest for the land (v. 11-12).
- The Promised Land was initially divided among families and it was to remain theirs. The Law of Moses did allow the lease of property or of themselves to others if they became poor. The Year of Jubilee returned everything to its original status.
- If someone leased their land after Jubilee, they were to price it according to the number of years until the next Jubilee.
- 25:23-38 – Redemption of Leased Property and Sold Houses. If one became poor, he could lease his land (v. 25-28). If he chose, he could buy it back or, a near relative could redeem it. If not bought back, it would be returned in Year of Jubilee.
- If one sold a house within a walled city, the seller could redeem it within a year. If not, it was the buyers forever (v. 30). Outside a walled city had to be returned in Year of Jubilee (v. 31).
- House of Levite sold had to be returned in Year of Jubilee (v. 32-33).
- 25:35-38 – Assisting the poor. Do not charge interest.
- 25:39-46 – The poor could sell themselves into servitude. Serve until Year of Jubilee. Treatment – v. 43. Hebrews were permitted to buy slaves from countries around them.
- 25:47-55 – An Israelite could sell himself to a stranger living in Canaan. Could be redeemed by close relative or himself based on time to Year of Jubilee. A hired servant, not chattel slavery (v. 53). To be released in Year of Jubilee.

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26 – Blessing and Cursing

- Similar to Deuteronomy 28.
- 26:1-13 – The blessings of obeying the covenant given by God. There is only one God (v. 1-2).
- Blessing of seasonal and food needs (v. 3-5). Enemies will be defeated (v. 6-8). Intimate fellowship with God (v. 9-13).
- 26:14-39 – Curses of failing to obey God. Results of disobedience – anxiety, fear, pestilence, famine, and defeat (v. 14-17). Further disobedience would lead to a multiplication of those things (v. 18-26).
- Ultimately, their stubbornness could lead to death and removal from the land (v. 27-35). Cannibalism is specifically mentioned (v. 29) – 2 Kings 6:24-29; Lam. 4:10; Eze. 5:7-10.
- Threat of captivity (v. 36-39).
- If they were to repent, God would restore them (v. 40-46).

27 – Laws of Dedication to the Lord

- One shekel was approximately half an ounce.
- These vows or dedications were not commanded, but when done, were to be done in a specific way.
- An Israelite could vow/dedicate himself or anyone/thing that belonged him to God. There were set prices to redeem a person (v. 1-8), an animal (v. 9-13), a house (v. 14-15), a field of his own possession (v. 16-21), or one he bought (v. 22-25).
- Firstborn animals already belonged to God and could not be dedicated (v. 26-27).
- No thing that was a “devoted” (given irrevocably) thing could be sold or redeemed. They belonged to God (v. 28-29). Samuel is a good example of this (1 Sam. 1:9-11).
- The law of tithing (v. 30-33). Every tenth animal was dedicated to God (v. 32). It belonged to God and could not be redeemed.