**Leviticus**

**Book Summary**
The book of Leviticus is a book concerned with the Israelite cultus, i.e., system of worship and sacrifice. In many ways, it is a further development of the Law set forth in Exodus (1:1). The focus of this book is priestly; yet it is not only a handbook for the priests but a worship manual for all Israel. Leviticus, accordingly, is a book of detail, chiefly concerned with the how’s, when’s, where’s, who’s, and why’s of the various sacrifices. At the core of these ritual and ceremonial procedures and practices is a message concerned with purity. This is a book which speaks to the twin themes of worship and holiness. Leviticus teaches God’s people how they are to approach Him and live pleasing in His sight. Its summary imperative is to “be holy”: “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (19:2).

**How the Pentateuch Works Together**

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<tr>
<th>GENESIS</th>
<th>EXODUS</th>
<th>LEVITICUS</th>
<th>NUMBERS</th>
<th>DEUTERONOMY</th>
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<td>Origins of the Nation</td>
<td>Deliverance of the Nation</td>
<td>Worship of the Nation</td>
<td>Life of the Nation</td>
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<td>Theocracy</td>
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<td>Born</td>
<td>Established</td>
<td>Threatened</td>
<td>Constituted</td>
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**Literary Features**
Leviticus is essentially a narrative document, that relates the events that transpired in the life of the Israelites while the nation camped at the base of Mt. Sinai. However, most of the material in the book is legal in genre. The legal sections serve to prepare the reader to understand the narrative sections (not only in Leviticus, but also in Numbers and the rest of the Bible). As David Damrosch writes about Leviticus: “The story exists for the sake of the laws which it frames.” (“Leviticus” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, p. 66)

There are two clear narrative sections (8-10; 24:10-23). However, the hinge chapter in the book, chapter 16, reads as narrative — even though it is actually legal material. As a whole, this book, like the rest of the Torah, is theological instructional history.
Outline

by Dr. Thomas Constable (former faculty, DTS)

I. The public worship of the Israelites (1-16)
   A. The laws of sacrifice (1-7)
      1. The burnt offering (1)
      2. The meal offering (2)
      3. The peace offerings (3)
      4. The sin offerings (4:1-5:13)
      5. The trespass offerings (5:14-6:7)
      6. Instructions for the priests concerning the offerings (6:8-7:38)
   B. The institution of the Aaronic priesthood (8-10)
      1. The consecration of the priests and the sanctuary (8)
      2. The entrance of Aaron and his sons into their office (9)
      3. The sanctification of the priesthood (10)
   C. Laws relating to ritual cleanliness (11-15)
      1. uncleanness due to contact with certain animals (11)
      2. uncleanness due to childbirth (12)
      3. uncleanness due to skin and covering abnormalities (13-14)
      4. uncleanness due to bodily discharges associated with reproduction (15)
   D. The Day of Atonement (16)
      1. Introductory information (16:1-10)
      2. Instructions concerning the ritual (16:11-28)
      3. Instructions concerning the duty of the people (16:29-34)

II. The private worship of the Israelites (17-27)
   A. Holiness of conduct on the Israelites’ part (17-20)
      1. Holiness of food (17)
      2. Holiness of the marriage relationship (18)
      3. Holiness of behavior toward God and man (19)
      4. Punishments for serious crimes (20)
   B. Holiness of the priests, gifts, and sacrifices (21-22)
      1. The first list of regulations for priests (21:1-15)
      2. The second list of regulations for priests (21:16-24)
      3. The third list of regulations for priests (22)
   C. Sanctification of the Sabbath and the feasts of Yahweh (23)
      1. The Sabbath (23:1-3)
      2. The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread (23:4-8)
      3. The Feast of Firstfruits (23:9-14)
      4. The Feast of Pentecost (23:15-22)
5. The Feast of Trumpets (23:23-25)
6. The Day of Atonement (23:26-32)
7. The Feast of Tabernacles (23:33-44)
D. The preparation of the holy lamps and showbread (24:1-9)
E. The punishment of a blasphemer (24:10-23)
F. Sanctification of the possession of land by the sabbatical and jubilee years (25)
   1. The sabbatical year (25:1-7)
   2. The Year of Jubilee (25:8-55)
G. Promises and warnings (26)
   1. Introduction to the final conditions of the covenant (26:1-2)
   2. The blessing for fidelity to the law (26:3-13)
   3. The warning for contempt of the law (26:14-33)
   4. The objective of God's judgments in relation to the land and nation of Israel (26:34-46)
H. Directions concerning vows (27)
   1. Vows concerning persons (27:1-8)
   2. Vows concerning animals (27:9-13)
   3. Vows concerning other property (27:14-29)
   4. The redemption of tithes (27:30-34)

Theological Themes Developed

Holiness
The central theme of the book is holiness. The word "holy" (Heb. kodesh) occurs over 150 times in Leviticus, more than in any other book of the Bible. Leviticus presents the holy LORD as present in the midst of his people (Ex. 40:34; Lev. 1:1). The people of Israel must therefore properly address their sin and impurity and must strive for personal holiness. In order to approach God, worshipers must be wholehearted in their devotion (1:1-6; 6:7; 22:17-30). The book intends to show how Israel was to fulfill its covenant responsibility to be ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ (Exod. 19:6; Lev. 26:5). Leviticus was intended for the entire Israelite community, for at least two reasons: 1) that people would know and value their covenant privileges and responsibilities before God, and 2) that priests could not gain oppressive power over the people with any monopoly on the knowledge of how to approach God.

Atonement & the Sacrificial System
The priests are called to be intercessors and spiritual leaders. As such, they bear a heavier responsibility than do the rest of the community (chs. 4 and 21). In addition to the outward holiness that the priests are granted when ordained, they are constantly commanded to maintain inner holiness (chs. 8; 9; 10; 21).

Atonement is the chief function of the priests and of the sacrificial system. Atonement is a gracious act of the Lord by which sins and impurities can be dealt with (17:11). As seen in the Day of Atonement ritual (ch. 16), the total cleansing of sins and uncleanness is done when the innermost part of the tent of meeting is purified. Ultimate purification of uncleanness is impossible from the human side.
Types of Sacrifices in Leviticus

<table>
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<tr>
<th>OFFERING</th>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
<th>GOD’S PORTION</th>
<th>PRIEST’S PORTION</th>
<th>SYMBOLISM</th>
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<tr>
<td>Burnt Offering (1:1-17)</td>
<td>Worship toward God (a “pleasing aroma”)</td>
<td>All that is burned.</td>
<td>Skins (7:8)</td>
<td>Christ was offered up for us.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grain Offering (2:1-16)</td>
<td>All except when it is first-fruits.</td>
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<td>Remainder (6:16-18)</td>
<td>Jesus is the Bread of Life.</td>
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<td>Peace Offering (3:1-17)</td>
<td>All that is burned.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Breast and right shoulder (7:31-32)</td>
<td>Jesus has a ministry of reconciliation to bring us back to God.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sin Offering (4:1-5:13)</td>
<td>Sacrifice for Sin</td>
<td>Fat burned outside the camp.</td>
<td>Only eaten by priest if he has not entered the Tabernacle (6:30)</td>
<td>Sin is not permitted into the presence of God. But Jesus dies “outside the camp” (Heb. 13:11-13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guilt Offering (5:14-6:7)</td>
<td>Fat, kidneys, liver, etc.</td>
<td>Eaten by males in priest’s family</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sin requires death.</td>
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Purity

“Holy” means pure, unblemished, clean, blameless. The opposite of holy is unclean. It is in contrast with God’s holiness that we can understand man’s sinfulness. Leviticus reveals the standards by which sinful redeemed Israelites could have fellowship with a holy God. These standards and regulations point out the vast difference between the character of man and the character of God.

Principles Involved in the Old Testament Sacrificial System (William D. Barrick, Th.D)

1. Old Testament sacrifices were to be offered by believers only. Those believers were indoctrinated and obedient (i.e., they exhibited right teaching and right behavior): Israelite believers: Leviticus 1:2-3; 2:1 and foreign believers: Leviticus 17:8; 22:18, 25; Numbers 15:14-16; Isaiah 56:6-8
2. Old Testament sacrifices were to be the outward demonstration of a vital faith. Without faith the sacrifices were worthless (cf. Hebrews 11:4): 1 Samuel 15:22-23; Psalm 51:15-19; Isaiah 1:11-15; Micah 6:6-8
3. Old Testament sacrifices did not save from sin nor forgive sins. The Levitical sacrifices included no provision for the sinful nature of mankind. The animal sacrifices were insufficient to atone for the sins of human beings—only a human life could atone for a human life: Compare Leviticus 1:3 with Psalm 49:5-9; Galatians 3:10-14; Hebrews 10:1-18; 1 Peter 1:18-19
4. Old Testament sacrifices did not take care of every sin—especially willful, defiant sin. Many sins required capital punishment—no sacrifice would avail for such sin. (Note: That no sacrifice was available for capital offenses does not mean that God did not or could not forgive capital offenses. The legal consequences required death. Such consequences should not be confused with one’s ultimate spiritual relationship to God.): Leviticus 24:10-23; Numbers 15:30
5. Old Testament sacrifices had fellowship with God as their chief object. They outwardly symbolized forgiveness for sins, which resulted in continued communion with the covenant-keeping God of Israel: Exodus 29:42-43; 30:36

7. Old Testament sacrifices declared, emphasized, and magnified God's holiness, righteousness, love, grace, mercy, and sovereignty: Psalm 119:62; Nehemiah 9:13; Matthew 23:23; Romans 7:12

8. Old Testament sacrifices demonstrated that there was no totally independent access to God for the Old Testament believer under the Mosaic legislation: Hebrews 9:8-10

9. Old Testament sacrifices demonstrated that God’s desire with regard to the giving of His people did not go beyond their normal ability. The sacrificial objects (cattle, sheep, goats, doves; flour, oil, wine, and frankincense) were all immediately available to the individual Israelite. God did not require that His people bring something exotic or beyond their normal means. He did not require them to extend themselves to the point of either economical discomfort or disaster: 1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8–9

10. Old Testament sacrifices emphasized the ministry of the priesthood: Leviticus 1:9; 2:8; 4:20; 6:6; Hebrews 5–10; 1 Peter 2:5

11. Old Testament sacrifices involved the recognition of God’s covenant with His people: Leviticus 2:13; Psalm 50:5, 16

12. Old Testament sacrifices were commanded by God for the maintenance of the priesthood. The covenant community provides for those who minister: Leviticus 7:34-35; Nehemiah 13:5; Malachi 3:8-10

History of Redemption

Leviticus used to be the first book that Jewish children studied in the synagogue. In the modern Church it tends to be the last part of the Bible anyone looks at seriously. In practice then, though not in theory, Leviticus is treated as though it does not really belong to the canon of Scripture. How does Leviticus speak to us beyond the events at Mt. Sinai? Is there any value that can be extracted from this book about sacrifices? OT scholar Tremper Longman writes:

What is the enduring value of the book of Leviticus? This question has plagued Jewish and Christian readers for centuries. For the former, the loss of the temple raises the issue, but the continuation of dietary laws (kashrut) and the hope that someday temple worship will start again provide at least a partial answer (Levine). For Christians, the book of Hebrews provides guidance in that it presents Jesus Christ as the perfect High Priest who offers himself as the perfect sacrifice. As it says in Hebrews 9: 26: “But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.”

What is the enduring value of the book of Leviticus? This question has plagued Jewish and Christian readers for centuries. Jesus is the ultimate High Priest. By contrasting the regular Old Testament priesthood with the mysterious figure of Melchizedek, the author of Hebrews also solves the problem of Jesus’ non-Levitical background (7:14). In any case, the Aaronic priesthood and the Old Testament sacrificial system all anticipated a greater reality, namely, Jesus Christ as final priest and sufficient sacrifice (Heb. 4: 14-5:10; 7-10; see also Rom. 8:3; Eph. 5:2).9

Why is Leviticus such a hard book for Christians to understand and enjoy? There can be a variety of reasons, of course but OT professor Jay Sklar (Covenant Seminary) helps us by grouping them into three categories:

1. The cultural context of Leviticus so different from our own.

2. The *larger literary context* before and after Leviticus is often missed or not appreciated.
3. The *legal/cultic nature* of Leviticus is a roadblock in that 1) it isn’t as interesting to us as a story is and that 2) we in the West tend to view “law” in negative ways.

What must we understand about Leviticus in its original context before we can apply it today? We must try to appreciate how God was understood as wholly *transcendent* and *separate* for the average Israelite (and for good reason!). Sklar invites us to consider this further:

And all of this leads to a very burning question if you’re an Israelite: How in the world can the holy and pure king of the universe dwell among his sinful and impure people? How can he live here—in our very midst—without his holiness melting us in our sin and impurity?!

Answer: Leviticus, which begins by explaining the sacrifices that address sin and enable them to worship this king rightly (Leviticus 1-7).

Answer: Leviticus, which provides them with priests to intercede on their behalf and lead them in worship before the king (Leviticus 8-10).

Answer: Leviticus, which gives them laws to teach them how to deal properly with impurity (Leviticus 11-15).

Answer: Leviticus, which provides a yearly ceremony to remove every last ounce of sin and impurity from the kingdom (Leviticus 16).

Answer, Leviticus, which provides a whole series of laws in other areas to direct them in living like a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Leviticus 17-27).

In short, while we look at Leviticus as a burden, the Israelites looked at it as a life preserver! It was the very thing that taught them how to live in relationship with this king who had just entered into covenant with them and descended into their very midst (Exod. 40:34).