

Leviticus

The transition from the book of Exodus to the book of Leviticus is virtually seamless. Exodus focused on Yahweh's mighty acts of redeeming Israel out of Egyptian bondage, which established His right to rule over Israel. Leviticus focuses on the worship and walk of the nation of God. In Exodus, Israel was redeemed and established as God's chosen and holy (set apart) nation, and she was given the Covenant to explain her obligations to Yahweh. Leviticus expands upon the Covenant, showing how God's people are to fulfill their elect calling through the stipulations of the Law and how they are to maintain right standing before Him.

The Law gave guidance to the nation of Israel, for the Law provided a means for maintaining fellowship with God. Obedience to the Law was the natural evidence that Israel had really trusted the Lord and believed His promise. Leviticus represents the terms of the agreement; it forms the *basis for Israel's history*.

Things to think about in each chapter/scene (Law material):

1. Subject / Complement
 - Why here (how does it relate to the other scenes)?
2. Summarize logical divisions (not an outline)
 - What does this tell me about God or Israel's history?
3. Key verse / Focal point
 - Are there any binding stipulations, or trans-dispensational principles?
4. Observations
 - Why is it in the Bible?

Leviticus 1

- Burnt offerings – Procedure
- Divisions:
 - Burnt offerings
 - General – vv. 3–9
 - Sheep or goat – vv. 10–13
 - Turtledove – vv. 14–17
- Key verse – v. 4 :: Burnt offering must be performed to maintain right standing before Yahweh.
- Leviticus picks up right where Exodus left off. 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. They find access to God through the sacrifices.

Leviticus 2

- Grain offerings – Procedure
- Divisions:
 - Grain offerings
 - General – vv. 1–3
 - Preparation – vv. 4–7
 - Expansion – vv. 8–16
- Key verse – v. 3 :: Most holy part of gifts presented to Yahweh
- A portion is presented to Yahweh and burnt up. The remainder goes to the priests to eat (v. 10).

Leviticus 3

- Peace offerings – Procedure
- Divisions:
 - Peace/Fellowship offerings
 - General – vv. 1–5
 - Sheep – vv. 6–11
 - Goat – vv. 12–16

- Key verse – v. 5 :: Pleasing aroma to Yahweh
- This is different from the burnt offering. It can be a male or a female (burnt offering must be male), but it also must have no defects. The ritual is similar to burnt offering sacrifices, but it does have some differences.

Leviticus 4:5–13

- Sin offerings – Procedure
- Divisions:
 - Sin offerings
 - Sin of a priest – 4:3–12
 - Sin of the nation – 4:13–21
 - Sin of an elder – 4:22–26
 - Sin of an individual – 4:27–35
 - Causes/reasons to present – 5:1–5
 - Bring female sheep or goat – 5:6
 - If can't then 2 doves or pigeons – 5:7–10
 - If can't then 2 quarts of flour – 5:11–13
- Key verses –4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:6, 10, 13 :: for purification and right standing/forgiveness
- This is also similar to the burnt offering in ritual and reason, and is to be conducted for unintentional sin. It must be a bull for the priest or nation, a goat for the elder, and a female goat or sheep for an individual,. The ritual is similar to burnt offering sacrifices, but it does have some differences.

Leviticus 5:14–6:7

- Guilt offerings – Procedure
- Divisions:
 - Guilt offerings
 - If sacred property defiled – 5:11–16
 - If command violated – 5:17–19
 - If cheated or stole – 6:1–7
- Key verses – 5:16, 18, 6:6 :: Necessary to reacquire purification and right standing before Yahweh
- This is similar to the sin offering. It must be given if unintentionally sacred property is defiled, a commandment broken, or for cheating or stealing from another. A ram must be presented the same day as the offence/restitution.

Leviticus 6:8–7:21

- Offerings – Instructions (for priests)
- Divisions:
 - Burnt offerings – 6:8–13
 - Grain offerings – 6:14–18
 - Ordination offerings – 6:19–23
 - Sin offerings – 6:24–30
 - Guilt offerings – 7:1–10
 - Peace/fellowship offerings – 7:11–21
 - Thanksgiving offerings – 7:12–15
 - Freewill/voluntary offerings – 7:16–18
- This supplements the “handbook on sacrifice” (1:1-6:7) and contains administrative details about the sacrificial ritual for the priests. There is more detail on the procedure for the distribution and disposal of the flesh and other parts of the sacrifice which were not burned on the altar. The primary concern of the section is to identify which persons, places, and portions were acceptable to God as sacrificial meals.

Leviticus 7:22–38

- Offerings – Instructions (for people)
- Divisions:
 - Forbidden blood and fat – vv. 22–27
 - Priestly portions – vv. 28–36
 - Summation – vv. 37–38
- Key verse – v. 38 :: These instructions were given to Moses by Yahweh on Mt. Sinai.
- This entire section (ch. 1–7) was given so that the people would know how to approach God. It instructs so that the people could retain proper standing with Him and worship Him in right relation. The focus is upon holiness—both the Israelites remaining holy and Yahweh’s requirement to be holy for He is holy.

Leviticus 8

- Ordination – Ceremony
- Divisions:
 - Priests dressed – vv. 4–13
 - Sacrifices – vv. 14–24
 - Anointing – v. 30
- Key verse – v. 34 :: Yahweh’s instructions for ordination followed
- The priests have been prepared and installed; they are now able to lead the nation in worship.

Leviticus 9

- Sacrifices – Commence
- Divisions:
 - Sacrifices brought – vv. 1–6
 - Aaron prepares sacrifices – vv. 7–14
 - Aaron presents sacrifices – vv. 15–22
 - Yahweh appears – vv. 23–24
- Key verse – v. 15 :: Aaron begins the priestly duties
- The priestly work begins. The nation can experience the power and presence of Yahweh. They have a means of maintaining a right relationship with Him.

Leviticus 10

- Disobedience – Consequences
- Divisions:
 - Nadab & Abihu sin and die – vv. 1–3
 - Aaron mourns – vv. 4–7
 - Misconduct of sin offering – vv. 16–20
- Key verse – v. 3 :: Yahweh will display His holiness and glory
- We first see an offense by God’s appointed priests (two of Aaron’s sons), which results in their death. Later we see an offense by two more priests (more of Aaron’s sons). The difference seems to be attitude: Nadab and Abihu flagrantly disobeyed Yahweh, whereas Aaron’s attitude in the second event does not exhibit such flagrant wickedness. Yahweh’s response is therefore different; in the second offense Yahweh graciously spares them. God could, on this one occasion, overlook Aaron’s serious error. The concession made to Aaron shows that Yahweh is not unsympathetic to human sorrow caused by his judgment against wickedness.¹

Leviticus 11

- Clean/unclean – Animals
- Divisions:
 - Land animals – vv. 2–8

¹How many times has God been gracious with us when we too commit serious error!

Marine life – vv. 9–12
Birds – vv. 13–19
Insects – vv. 20–23
More land animals – vv. 24–28
Small land animals – vv. 29–42

- Key verses – vv. 46–47 :: Yahweh depicts clean and unclean creatures
- Key to the Levitical dietary system. These laws are important not just for the holiness of the people, but also for their health. However, though hygienic considerations were part of the restrictions, the primary reason seems to have been theological—to teach symbolically Israel’s status as the holy (separated) people of God. This can be seen in the section’s conclusion with an affirmation of Israel’s election to be a holy people of God. This serves as a reminder that there is no dividing line between the sacred and the profane.

Leviticus 12

- Purification – after Childbirth
- Divisions:
 - Period of purification – vv. 1–5
 - Method of purification – vv. 6–8
- Key verse – v. 7 :: After purification ceremony clean before Yahweh
- While childbearing was considered a very good thing (and childlessness was a bad thing) there was a need for purification after childbirth. The text is not condemning childbirth, for the text is clear that the discharge of blood is what renders unclean. Contact with the blood of childbirth “defiled.” Being unclean means that the mother is to be separated from the holy until this abnormal situation is corrected—until her body is whole again.²

Leviticus 13

- Clean/Unclean – Skin
- Divisions:
 - Various skin maladies – vv. 1–46
 - Contaminated clothing – vv. 47–59
- Key verses – vv. 45–46 :: Those with skin diseases are unclean
- One’s skin disease³ causes uncleanness which means that the affected person is to be separated from the holy community until their body is right again.⁴ The significance of this isolation was not only to prevent possible physical contagion, but also to symbolize the person’s separation from the holy camp of Israel where the Lord was dwelling. To some degree these requirements illustrate the notion that wholeness was tantamount to holiness.⁵

Leviticus 14

- Purification – Procedure
- Divisions:
 - Ceremonially unclean people – vv. 1–32
 - Contaminated houses – vv. 33–57
- Key verse – v. 57 :: Process to determine person/place ceremonially clean
- After the preceding chapter one naturally wonders how someone could once again become ceremonially clean. Chapter 14 provides the answer with careful prescriptions on how one could be restored. Both of the sub-sections of this chapter (skin disease and mildew) begin with formula “The Lord said to Moses.” Thus, reminding the reader¹ that Yahweh had a special relationship with Moses and² these specifications

²Another possible, though somewhat less likely, explanation is that the woman may be held symbolically responsible for bringing another sinner into this world and therefore “unclean.”

³The meaning of the term should not be narrowly construed as “leprosy,” for it is far more reaching than that.

⁴This was evidently to take place naturally since nothing is mentioned of the priest prescribing treatment.

⁵See Demarest, *Leviticus*, p. 138.

were directly from Yahweh. As a nation committed by covenant to Yahweh, the people must follow these rituals in order to remain in right standing with Him.

Leviticus 15

- Discharges – Dealings
- Divisions:
 - Man with gonorrhoea (chronic, abnormal discharge) – vv. 2–15
 - Man seminal (periodic, normal discharge) – vv. 16–18
 - Woman menstrual (periodic, normal discharge) – vv. 19–24
 - Woman with non-menstrual bleeding (chronic, abnormal discharge) – vv. 25–30
- Key verses – vv. 32–33 :: Regulations for dealing with men and women relating to genital discharges
- Personal cleanliness was important. Bodily discharges from sexual organs were not considered as serious as infectious skin diseases, but everyone was expected to practice good hygiene. Theologically, proper attention to normal and abnormal male and female functions was related to holiness. The seriousness of attending to these things is found in v. 31, which states that not guarding these dealings would result in death because it would defile Yahweh’s Tabernacle.

Leviticus 16

- Day of Atonement – Ritual
- Divisions:
 - Duties of high priest on entering – vv. 2–19
 - Prescriptions regarding scapegoat – vv. 20–28
 - Duties of people – vv. 29–34
- Key verses – vv. 30–34 :: Regulations for the Day of Atonement which will keep Israel in right standing
- The chapter includes a very theologically significant event. Yahweh established the rules regarding the day (once a year) when the sins of Israel would be atoned for. The Day of Atonement was a holy day whose main purpose was to cleanse the sanctuary from the pollution introduced into it by the unclean worshippers (cf. vv. 16, 19) so as to make possible God’s continued presence among His people (v. 34). As a result of keeping this ritual the *entire* camp would be purified of *all* sins, making them right with Yahweh.

The completion of the sin offering with the live goat ritual (scapegoat) involved a substitutionary carrying away of the people’s sins (v. 22, identified as “all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites”).⁶ This act was a foreshadowing of the transaction that takes place in Christ’s atonement for believers. There was no exclusion of sins that were atoned for.⁷

The central position that Leviticus 16 occupies in the book (and of the Law as a whole) is significant. It is the consummation of the previous fifteen chapters, and it provides the spiritual energy and motivation to carry out the imperatives of Leviticus 17–27.

Leviticus 17

- Animal – Prohibitions
- Divisions:

⁶The term scapegoat is one and the same with Azazel though the NLT obscures this by using both in the passage, leading one to think that the Hebrew text contains two different terms. Other translations, however, interpret the term either one way or the other (NIV, KJV, and NASB translate consistently as scapegoat, whereas ESV, NET, and NRSV translate term as Azazel consistently). The meaning of the term is uncertain, and there are 4 major interpretations of it: 1) The term describes the goat’s function—a scape-goat. 2) The term is an abstract noun meaning “entire removal.” 3) The term refers to the location/place where the goat went. 4) The term is a proper noun referring to Satan or a demon in the wilderness (this is what the NLT must prefer based on its translation). I believe the first option should be preferred. However, whichever of the four interpretation may be chosen, it is clear that the releasing of the goat indicated that the sins of the Israelites had been removed never to visit them again.

⁷Once again, a beautiful picture of what Christ has done in his atonement. He takes away all our sins, *nothing* is held against us by our Lord.

Sacrifices cannot be offered outside Tabernacle – vv. 1–9

Blood cannot be eaten – vv. 10–16

- Key verses – vv. 9b, 14b :: Disobedience means being cut off from covenant community
- Yahweh gives regulations relating not to the role of the priests but to potential mistakes of laymen regarding sacrificing and eating meat. The chapter makes it clear that it is a serious offense to break these stipulations, for it means being cut off from Israel and therefore cut off from Yahweh.

Leviticus 18

- Sexual – Prohibitions
- Divisions:
 - Introduction, reason to obey – vv. 1–5
 - Sexual restrictions – vv. 6–23
 - Acts of Canaanites – vv. 24–28
- Key verses – vv. 29–30 :: Disobedience means being cut off from covenant community
- In this chapter we see that the exhortation to avoid the customs of other nations (specifically Egypt and Canaan, v. 3) grows out of the person of God and Israel’s covenant relationship with Him. The motivation for keeping these laws is stated clearly—the man who obeys them will live, that is, enjoy life, by them.

Note: This section begins with a phrase which will become the motif of the entire 2nd half of the book, “I am the LORD your God.” This phrase has been used only once previously (cf. 11:44), but it will be used 45x in chaps 18–26. Each chapter will end using the phrase in the last paragraph as a kind of summary statement—the reason for the foregoing commands. In some cases the phrase is used at the beginning of a section as the reason why the Israelites are to obey, and at other times it can be viewed as a motivation for continuing to practice particular laws. It becomes abundantly clear that God views himself as Israel’s God, one who has the *right* to be obeyed and demands such.

Leviticus 19

- Holiness – Personal
- Divisions:
 - Introduction, reason to obey – vv. 1–2
 - Various restrictions – vv. 3–36
 - Necessity of obedience – v. 37
- Key verses – vv. 2b, 37 :: Yahweh demands adherence for He is Israel’s holy God
- The diversity of material in this chapter reflects the differentiation of life. All aspects of human affairs are subject to God’s laws. The holiness of God (v. 2) is the bedrock supporting the practical holiness promoted by these laws. Though the specific rationale behind some of the commands may not be clear to a modern interpreter (e.g., vv. 6, 9, 19b, 23, 27—some were purely for obedience and respect of Yahweh⁸), the ethical commands of this chapter are not arbitrary but are based on the just, humane, and sensitive treatment of the aged, the handicapped, the poor, the resident alien, the laborer, and others. These commands even reach beyond mere outward behavior to inward motivation (cf. vv. 17–18). It is also noteworthy that the basic principles of the Ten Commandments are incorporated into chapter 19, though not in the same order and not always with the same emphasis. The phrases “I am the Lord” and “I am the Lord your God” punctuate the chapter 16x, marking off most of its paragraphs. Clearly, Yahweh expected His commands to be obeyed for He had the right to demand it of them.

Leviticus 20

- Disobedience – Punished
- Divisions:

⁸Some of these prohibitions seem to relate to pagan religious customs which should be avoided, including pagan mourning rites (vv. 27–28), cultic prostitution (v. 29, in contrast with proper worship of the Lord, v. 30), and necromancy (v. 31).

Punishment for violating restrictions – vv. 1–21

Reason kept: set apart – vv. 22–26

- Key verses – vv. 22–24 :: Yahweh demands adherence for He is Israel’s sanctifying God
- Chapter 20 supplements and reinforces chapter 18, emphasizing the punishments for various offenses. The laws in chaps 18-19 are addressed to individual would-be offenders and prohibit specific actions, but the laws in chap 20 are addressed to the community and explain the punishment of offenders for specified crimes. All the crimes in this chapter receive the death penalty (except for those in vv. 19-21). Though seemingly harsh, this was essential to prevent sin from infecting the community life of God’s people. God must be taken seriously. He demands holiness and for His people to be set apart from the other nations, for He is the holy God of the covenant.

Leviticus 21–22:16

- Priests – Sanctified (set apart)
- Divisions:
 - Various stipulations on being set apart –21:1–22:16
- Key verse – 21:6 :: The priests are to be set apart from the community
- The priests had added restrictions to their lives. They were to live exemplary, sanctified lives because they had been anointed to serve in a special office. They represented Israel in a special way offering sacrifices on behalf of the nation. Therefore, Yahweh expected them to live in a special way as mediators between Yahweh and His covenant community.

Leviticus 22:17–33

- Offerings – Conditions
- Divisions:
 - Stipulations regarding burnt offerings – vv. 17–20
 - Stipulations regarding peace offerings – vv. 21–25
 - Stipulations regarding special offerings – vv. 26–30
- Key verses – vv. 31–33 :: Yahweh is to be obeyed
- Yahweh explains that offerings are to be brought as He prescribed. These commands must be followed faithfully and Yahweh will show His holiness in the community (v. 32). Yahweh emphasizes both His holiness and His grace (“who brought you out of Egypt”) as the motivations for personal holiness in His covenant community.

Leviticus 23

- Festivals – Planned
- Divisions:
 - Festival of unleavened bread – vv. 5–8
 - Celebration of first harvest – vv. 9–14
 - Festival of harvest/weeks – vv. 15–22
 - Festival of trumpets – vv. 23–25
 - Day of Atonement – vv. 26–32
 - Festival of shelters – vv. 33–43
- Key verses – vv. 43 :: The celebration is to remind Israel of God’s power (and rights over them)
- In this chapter Yahweh instructed His people to reserve certain dates in their appointment books for national public worship and sacrifice. This will remind each new generation of Israelites that Yahweh was mighty, in control, faithful to His Covenant, and had the right to rule over Israel, for He had rescued them from the land of Egypt. In other words, “I am the LORD your God.”

Leviticus 24:1–9

- Tabernacle elements – Arranged
- Divisions:
 - Lamps to always be lit in Tabernacle – vv. 1–4

Bread to be on table in Tabernacle – vv. 5–9

- We abruptly transition to the two subordinate articles of furniture in the Tabernacle, which were to be maintained daily and weekly ministry—daily maintenance of the lamps and weekly preparation and replacement of “the bread” on the table. The transition is difficult to explain but perhaps the purpose was to dispel the notion that God’s presence might be limited to special occasions of worship (since both articles of furniture were closely related to the continual presence of God in Israel’s midst). Between the great festival occasions, unbroken daily fellowship in the Tabernacle was to continue without interruption.

Leviticus 24:10–23

- Example – Punishment
- Divisions:
 - Man blasphemes – vv. 10–12
 - Man stoned – vv. 13–16
 - Commands reiterated – vv. 17–23
- Key verse – v. 16 :: Blasphemer must be punished
- Here is a reminder that the legislation of Leviticus carried with it penalties for disobedience. The laws were just and the penalties for crimes must also be just, reflecting the holiness and righteousness of Yahweh. We also see that God required a foreigner to be executed for this offense as well; therefore, Israel should realize that Yahweh would certainly not tolerate its violation among them. For they were his people and hence were identified with his name.

Note: Moses had no prescribed legal precedent to deal with the case. This illustrates that the Old Testament Law was not exhaustive nor was it comprehensive; it often only offered principles for direction.

Leviticus 25

- Years – Redemption
- Divisions:
 - Sabbath year (every 7th) – vv. 1–7
 - Jubilee year (every 50th) – vv. 8–22
 - Redemption of land – vv. 23–34
 - Redemption of slaves – vv. 35–55
- Key verse – v. 55b :: These instructions are to be obeyed because Yahweh is their God.
- After the brief case study, the author now returns to parlaying God’s laws for Israel. The land of Israel was God’s property and His people were its tenants (v. 23). Therefore, the people’s land “ownership” was not to be exploited for enriching some and impoverishing others. For any number of reasons an owner may need/want to sell his land; however, God stipulates that the land can be redeemed. It was very important for the OT Israelite to have a claim to the land and continue that claim through the generations, for the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant were tied to the land (*n.b.* This chapter is the only legislation on land ownership in the Pentateuch).

Leviticus 26

- Blessings/Punishment – Contingent
- Divisions:
 - Blessings promised for obedience – vv. 1–13
 - Punishment for disobedience – vv. 14–39
 - Return to Yahweh – vv. 40–43
 - Promise of Yahweh’s fidelity – vv. 44–46
- Key verse – v. 45 :: Yahweh will remain faithful—He is Israel’s God.
- This chapter sums up the master/vassal treaty between Yahweh and Israel. Yahweh will protect and bless Israel (hold up to His end of the covenant) if they will obey and follow Him (their end of the

covenant). The curses section of the summation is more than 2x as long as the blessing section. This is to stress to Israel the importance of obedience and covenant loyalty. It is also a kind of prophecy of Israel's future. However, in the end Yahweh promises to always be Israel's God; He will never forget them.

Leviticus 27

- Gifts – Vowed
- Divisions:
 - Vows of people – vv. 1–8
 - Vows of animals – vv. 9–13
 - Vows of houses – vv. 14–15
 - Vows of family property – vv. 16–21
 - Vows of purchased property – vv. 22–25
 - Items not able to be vowed – vv. 26–29
 - Tenth giving – vv. 30–33
- Key verse – v. 34 :: The end of Yahweh's covenant commands
- At first glance (and probably the second and third) this final chapter of Leviticus does not have anything to do with what precedes.⁹ There is a clear connection to chapter 25 regarding the subject of redemption. The question is, “why does it come here since chapter 26 seems like a solid summation of the Mosaic Covenant?” This can best be answered once we understand that the vows spoken of in the chapter refer to personal gifts to Yahweh, which are above and beyond the required sacrifices and offerings of the covenant. The issue of vows is related to the overall concerns of Leviticus, for the paying of vows is associated with, and parallel to, praising God (cf. Ps 61:9) or making a praise offering. Therefore, it is fitting that this section concludes the book because it represents the praise and worship of an Israelite to almighty Yahweh, his covenant God.

Conclusion

The book of Leviticus is Yahweh's guidebook for Israel; it shows them how to worship, serve, and obey a holy God. Access to Yahweh is obtained through the sacrifices and fellowship with Him is through obedience. Both of these requirements show the awesome holiness of the God of Israel.

Leviticus appears dull and boring; after all, it has no action or plot. It is completely laden with rules, regulations, and repetition. The content seems outdated and difficult to apply to the modern reader. But in reality Leviticus is rich in spiritual truth. It develops a number of doctrinal and practical themes centering on the questions of pardon for guilt and fellowship with God. God's holiness is central to the book—man cannot approach Him on his own merits; however, Leviticus also reveals how God in His grace accepts the death of a substitute as payment for the penalty of sin.

Yahweh requires holiness and faithfulness to His covenant, for He is holy and cannot be approached by ordinary means.

⁹Liberals would posit that it was a later addition to the book.