

Leviticus

Title and Purpose

The purpose of the book of Leviticus is apparent from its title, *Leviticus*. The priests were Levites, descendants of the tribe of Levi (Exodus 28:1). The Hebrew title means, “*And He called...*” The Talmud – the writings of the Jewish rabbis during the Captivity – refers to this book as the “Law of the Priests,” and the “Law of the Offerings.” The purpose of the book was to present the people with the correct manner in which to approach and commune with God in public worship, and especially to instruct the priests concerning the worship practices prescribed for them by the LORD. Leviticus also points to a change in the place from which God spoke to His people. He would no longer address them from Mt. Sinai, but would now make His habitation in the Tabernacle.

Leviticus can be summed up as Israel’s worship handbook, showing the people how to worship, serve, and obey the holy God. The divine purpose behind all of these things can be found in 19:2: “*You shall be holy for I the LORD your God am holy.*” Through the Lamb of God and His perfect life and death, offering and sacrifice, God’s people are holy before the LORD.

Time of Writing

The book of Exodus ends with the construction of the Tabernacle, Israel’s place of worship. Fittingly, Leviticus takes up where Exodus leaves off, covering the second month of the second year of Israel’s freedom from Egypt. Israel’s reckoning of years begins in Exodus 12:2 with the institution of the Passover. According to Exodus 40:17, the Tabernacle was completed one year later: “*And it came to pass in the first month of the second year, on the first day of the month, that the tabernacle was raised up.*”

This book was likely written as Israel was encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai, awaiting the giving of the Cermonial Law to Moses at the Tabernacle (1:1). This would place the actual time of writing at about 1440 BC.

The Holy Writer

Moses. Again the early church is united in supporting Mosaic authorship. Christ Himself also supports Mosaic authorship of Leviticus (cf. Matthew 8:2ff and Leviticus 14:1-4; Matthew 12:4; Luke 2:22 - see also previous notes on the holy writer from our studies on Genesis and Exodus). There is no question that Moses recorded the words found in Leviticus, as he notes himself fifty-six times in this book (cf. 1:1; 4:1; 6:1, 24; 8:1).

Christ in Leviticus

Though there are no direct references to the Messiah in Leviticus, Christ can be found throughout the book in the worship format of God’s Old Testament people as well as the prescribed sacrifices, both bloody and non-bloody. The New Testament book of Hebrews points us to many of these forms of worship in Leviticus and shows us that they were shadows of Jesus.

► Our High Priest

Christ can be found in Leviticus in the work of the High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-7:28). The veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies shows that sinners are forbidden to come into the presence of a holy God. The only exception was on the Day of Atonement when the High Priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies in order to intercede for the people by sprinkling blood on the mercy seat.

Hebrews 10:19-22 also points out that the veil is a picture of the flesh of Christ, and is the way in which we are now able to enter before God through the sprinkling of Jesus’ blood on the cross. “*Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*”

► **Sacrifices**

When we think of the Old Testament animal sacrifices we think immediately of Jesus Christ, to whom John the Baptist points and declares, “**Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world**” (*John 1:29*).

There were four classes of bloody sacrifices.

- The *burnt offerings* which were performed daily upon the altar in the courtyard of the Tabernacle. The animals were slaughtered and burned and the blood was either sprinkled or poured out on the altar. The entire offering was burned, signifying Christ’s total offering as payment for sin.
- *Peace offerings* (3:1-17): The priests received the meat after it was burned. The peace offering involved the offering of a male or female lamb or goat without blemish. The picture is clear: Christ makes peace between man and God (Romans 5:10).
- *Sin offerings* were made by those who had sinned, whether they be individuals, or the entire people of Israel. The fat was burned upon the altar, the rest of the carcass was burned outside for all to see (4:1-5:13; 6:24-30), again, signifying the total sacrifice of the Savior, dying for our sins.
- *Guilt offerings* were required for lesser sins (5:14-6:7; 7:1-10). Rather than burning the carcass, as with the sin offering, the meat was given to the priests.

Included in the bloody sacrifices would be the *Passover* and the *Day of Atonement*. The death of the Passover lamb signified the substitutionary death of the Redeemer (John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:18f). On the Day of Atonement (16:1-34) a young ox was offered for the high priest and a goat was offered on behalf of the people. The priest laid hands on a second goat, symbolizing the laying of the sins of the people upon this scapegoat, which was driven into the wilderness.

There were also two kinds of bloodless sacrifices: *Meat offerings* and *drink offerings*, consisting of meal, cakes, grain, oil, incense, salt, or wine, according to the circumstances (2:1-16; 6:14-23). A portion of the offering was burned. What remained belonged to the priests.

The approach to God in the Old Testament was through sacrifices (Hebrews 9:1-9; 10:1). All of these sacrifices painted a picture of the promised coming of the Christ. Yet the repetitive nature of these sacrifices shows their inadequacy – until the one and final sacrifice of Jesus Christ Himself as the sacrifice for the whole world.

◆ **Festival Days**

Christ can also be found in the seven feasts: *Passover* (23:4f) - Christ died on the day of Passover; *Unleavened Bread* (23:6ff) points to the holy way in which the believer will conduct his life as a fruit of Christ’s Passover sacrifice; *Firstfruits* (23:9-14) - Christ rose from the dead on the day of the Firstfruits (1 Corinthians 15:20-23), and is the “firstfruit” of the resurrection of all believers; *Pentecost* or *Harvest* (23:15-22) - here we find the harvest of souls following the pouring out of the Holy Spirit; *Trumpets* (23:23ff), the *Day of Atonement* (23:26-32), and *Tabernacles* (23:33-44) all point to events associated with the second advent of Christ.

Outline

I. The Way to God – Sacrifice! (Chapters 1-17)

- A. The Laws concerning Offerings. (1-7)
- B. The Laws concerning Priests. (8-10)
- C. The Laws concerning Israel’s Purity. (11-15)
- D. The Laws concerning the Day of Atonement. (16-17)

II. The Walk with God – Sanctification! (Chapters 18-27)

- A. The Laws concerning People. (18-20)
- B. The Laws concerning Priests. (21-22)
- C. The Laws concerning Worship. (23-24)
- D. The Laws concerning the Land of Canaan. (25-26)
- E. The Laws concerning Vows. (27)