



The Bible's Big Story

Leviticus

Leviticus is one of the most theologically dense books in all of Scripture. There are essentially two ways to read it: as a complex code of ritual law, or as a rich revelation of God's holiness and mercy that points forward to redemption in Christ.

Introductory Information

Title: The Hebrew title comes from the first word of the book meaning "and he called." The Greek Septuagint named it *λευιτικον* (*Leuitikon*: "that which pertains to the Levites"), from which our English title derives.

Authorship: Although Moses is not named as the author within the text, the book consists almost entirely of God's words delivered through him. The phrase "the LORD said to Moses" occurs 37 times. The rest of the Old Testament (2 Chr 23:18; 30:16; 35:12) and the New Testament (Matt 8:2–4; Luke 2:22; Rom 10:5) both confirm that the Levitical law came through Moses.

Date: ca. 1445 BC. The date of Leviticus is directly tied to the Exodus, which dates to 1446 BC. Exodus 40:17 records the tabernacle's construction in the first month of the second year after the Exodus. Leviticus 1:1 records that God spoke to Moses from the tabernacle, and Leviticus 27:34 places Israel at Sinai. Numbers 1:1 then picks up on the first day of the second month, providing a clear timeline.

Purpose: The purpose of Leviticus is to instruct the people on how they are to live with God in their midst, the right way to worship him through sacrifice, what it means to be a holy people in an unholy world, and how to deal with the problem of sin.

Three Primary Themes:

- **Holiness** — God's holiness is not an abstraction. His holiness makes him both infinitely transcendent and, through proper means, wonderfully near.
- **Sacrifice** — Leviticus teaches that access to a holy God is possible only through sacrifice, and that this sacrifice must be offered through an ordained mediator. The sacrifices are not merely ritual requirements—they are picture-sermons of the gospel.
- **Sanctification** — The extensive purity regulations teach that life in a sin-marked world creates constant opportunities to hinder fellowship with God. These laws are presented, not as a path to earn favor, but as the expected shape of a redeemed life that mirrors God's own character.

Summary Theme: *Holiness must characterize God's people, as it is essential for fellowship with Him. The means of sanctification that God provides comes through sacrifice by the work of a chosen mediator.*

Redemption Revealed in Exodus

The Sacrificial System

The sacrifices under the Mosaic Covenant were never intended as a permanent or self-sufficient solution to sin—the blood of animals could never truly remove mankind's guilt before a holy God (Heb 10:4). Yet they were far from empty placeholders. They functioned as "picture-sermons" pointing forward to Christ, and as acts of faith by which the worshiper entrusted himself to God's promise of atonement.

The Priesthood

As humanity's representative before God, the priest served as mediator—performing on behalf of individuals what they could not do for themselves (Lev 10:17). While priests taught the law and examined physical ailments related to ceremonial cleanness, their primary calling was service in the tabernacle. They were set apart by strict physical and behavioral standards (chaps. 21–22) because they were living illustrations of a profound truth: access to God requires a perfectly righteous mediator to offer sacrifice on the people's behalf.

The Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement provides perhaps the clearest picture in Leviticus of the gospel. It demonstrates that sinners may not approach God however they choose—God alone determines the terms and the means of access. Michael Barrett identifies three great truths of the Day of Atonement::

1. *Sinners can approach God only through the mediation of a sinless priest.*
1. *Sinners can approach God only on the grounds of a vicarious sacrifice.*
2. *Sinners can be sure of salvation because of the resurrection of Christ.*

The Requirement of Holiness

The extensive purity regulations in Leviticus may seem strange to modern readers, but embedded in them is a clear and enduring lesson: fellowship with God requires holiness. The most common mistake is to treat these laws as a road map to righteousness—if only one follows them closely enough. The detailed holiness laws serve the same purpose as the rest of God's law: they function as a mirror to reveal our sinfulness and drive us in faith to God's promise of redemption in Christ.

