

# LEVITICUS

**“For I am the Lord who brought you up from the land of Egypt.  
You shall be holy, because I am Holy.” Leviticus 11:45**

The message of Leviticus is

**I am your God  
I am holy  
You shall be holy**

These themes include:

1. Honoring God as God: I am the Lord.
2. How do sinful people live with a holy God?
3. A path to forgiveness and fellowship with God.
4. Setting the stage for Jesus.
5. God’s grace and protection.

You will get the most value from your reading if you look for themes and patterns. Ask yourself how each chapter and each section demonstrate these themes. Pray “*Lord, what do you want to teach me?*”

Leviticus has sections. Most people find one section very significant and another boring or very strange. For example, the verses about skin diseases may seem useless to you, but a doctor was so impressed with the healthiness of the laws that he became a Christian.

Here are the sections organized by chapter:

- 1-7 Instructions for sacrifices
- 8-10 Ordination of Aaron as high priest and fiery death of Abihu and Nadab
- 11-15 Clean and Unclean: Food, Birth, Skin
- 16 The Day of Atonement
- 17-20 Holiness code: Food, Sex, Economics, Death
- 21-27 Sabbath, Festivals, Jubilees, Vows, Offerings

Leviticus begins with instructions for sacrifices. “*The Lord summoned Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting saying ‘When any of you bring an offering of livestock to the Lord...’*” The writer assumes the hearer/reader knows the context. The previous book, Exodus, concludes with the construction of the tent of meeting which was the worship space for God’s people during the wandering years between Egypt and the Promised Land. Naturally, the next instructions should be about what you do there. In addition, Leviticus was written for farming people at a time when everybody had produce and animals but money was used less.

As Christians, we read about the sacrifices with the awareness that Jesus is the perfect, eternal sacrifice offered by the perfect, eternal priest. Instead of reading

Leviticus as a “how-to” manual for worship, we need to read Leviticus as a witness to the goodness of God who deserves our very best. In the New Testament book of Hebrews, previous rituals (especially those for atonement) are described as a shadow of the eternal, preparing us to receive what is better and lasting: Jesus. (See Hebrews 7:20-10:18.)

The introduction to Leviticus in The New Student Bible (Zondervan @1996) says: “*Its painstaking ritual is, however, strikingly similar to the procedures surrounding nuclear technology. The specialized clothing, the concern for purification, the precise handling of critical materials – both nuclear workers and Old Testament priests share these ... Its dangerous material, however, is more powerful than the atom. ... The creator of the universe has entered the life of a small and insignificant tribe. The Israelites could not merely fit this God into their lives. They needed to restructure their lives – food, sex, economics – to fit with His Life.*”

The question of which laws to follow and how to apply them arises for both Jews and Christians. With the decision of the council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, the church recognized that following the laws is not a requirement for salvation. *We [Jews] will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they [non-Jews] will.* Four “do-nots” were requested: 1) no food sacrificed to idols, 2) no blood, 3) no strangled food, and 4) no fornication. In Galatians 2:10, Paul names a further request: “Remember the poor.” Christian freedom allows us to use the laws to learn and do God’s will without requiring that we follow all or follow literally. Instead, always ask:

- Am I honoring God as God?**
- How should my life change because I live in the presence of the holy God?**
- Am I relating to other people in a holy way?**

Reading Leviticus reminds me of the saying “I can’t see the forest for the trees.” It contains a lot of details and instructions about what to do and how to do it. You may find some fascinating or boring and maybe even both. (I am personally intrigued that the Lord says grasshoppers are a “clean” food, which may be eaten, but wasps and beetles are “unclean.”) When you recognize the underlying themes, you will see the beauty of God’s love for God’s people.