

# LEVITICUS

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**Author.** As with the introduction to Exodus, see the discussion in Genesis regarding Mosaic authorship and the dating of the Pentateuch. Repeatedly throughout Leviticus it is written, "The LORD said to Moses," indicating that the contents were ultimately from the LORD and were given to Moses to write down (e.g., Lev. 1:1; 4:1; 5:16; 6:1, 8, 19, 24; 11:1; 12:1; 13:1; 14:1, 33; 15:1; 16:1; 19:1; 20:1; 21:1; 24:1 and 27:1).

**Date.** Leviticus begins immediately after God filled the Tabernacle with His presence in Exodus ch. 40, so the action is continuous with that of Exodus, and thus most of the book probably was written within the first year of the Exodus, about 1446-45 BC. The interrelatedness and the complexity of the laws described in this book would have necessitated having them written down early on in the life of the covenant community, and this is especially true given how the Golden Calf incident described in Exodus chs. 32-40 showed the people's inclination to fashion false worship absent any divine guidance. Moses probably incorporated the narrative aspects of Leviticus (chs. 8-10 and 24:10-23) at the end of the Wilderness period in 1406 BC as he assembled the Pentateuch as a whole.

**Covenantal Significance.** Leviticus is best understood as the third part of the giving of the Law (*Torah*) at Sinai. God gave the first part, the Moral Law, in Exodus 20:1-17, with the people reacting appropriately with fear and trembling. This was closely followed by the Civil Law, in Exodus 21:2-23:19, followed by the ratification of this covenant in ch. 24. Starting in Exodus 25:1 and going through Leviticus ch. 25, God gave the Ceremonial Law, with the ratification aspects (i.e., blessings and curses) in ch. 26. The Reformed tradition has long identified the three types of Law, but seeing Leviticus as continuous with Exodus as described above provides the exegetical underpinning for this division.

Since Israel had been saved in the Exodus, the totality of the Law addresses the question of how the people are to live in covenant with their God in light of the salvation He wrought for them. Man was made in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27), and those redeemed by God were to exhibit that restored image by being a kingdom of priests (Exod. 19:6). The Moral Law addresses the foundational ethical stipulations for individuals in reflecting God's image. As a kingdom people, the Civil Law provided the foundation for justice and equity within the covenant community. Under the Mosaic administration, this was actual civil law, but under the New Covenant administration it supplies general principles of equity. And, lastly, as a priestly community, the Ceremonial Law was a tutor to God's people (cf. Gal. 3), teaching them the radical demand for holiness that God expects of His people, the continual need for atonement with a holy God, and ultimately the need for One who would provide a definitive reconciliation with God which could never be attained through the sacrificial system (Heb. 9). The prohibitions on sexual immorality were implicitly continued under the New Covenant by the decision of the Council of Jerusalem directing Gentile believers to abstain from such sins (Acts 15). Understanding the holiness of God and the holiness which

God expects of His people is the primary utility of Leviticus to the Christian church in today's world.

**Outline.** Where Exod. 25:1-31:17 and 33:1-40:33 describe the material apparatus of the ceremonial system, Leviticus begins with the practices of that system. The first section (chs. 1-7) describes the offerings themselves, first from the perspective of the one bringing the offerings and then in terms of instructions to the priests handling the offerings. This is followed by a short narrative section (chs. 8-10) showing the institution of the priesthood, culminating with the death of Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu and thereby underscoring the seriousness with which God is to be worshipped only in the manner in which He has prescribed. The next two sections, dealing with uncleanness (chs. 11-16) and holiness (chs. 17-25) respectively. The book closes with blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (ch. 26). Chapter 27 forms what is essentially an appendix covering the rules on vows and tithes.

## **Abbreviated Outline**

- I. **Laws on Sacrificial Offerings** (chs. 1-7)
  - A. **Instructions for the Laity** (1:1-6:7)
  - B. **Instructions for the Priests** (6:8-7:38)
- II. **Institution of the Priesthood** (chs. 8-10)
  - A. **Consecration of Aaron and His Sons** (ch. 8)
  - B. **Aaron's First Sacrifices** (ch. 9)
  - C. **Judgment on Aaron's Sons** (ch. 10)
- III. **Uncleanness and Its Treatment** (chs. 11-16)
  - A. **Unclean Animals** (ch. 11)
  - B. **Childbirth** (ch. 12)
  - C. **Skin Disease** (chs. 13-14)
  - D. **Discharges** (ch. 15)
  - E. **The Day of Atonement** (ch. 16)
- IV. **The Practice of Holiness** (chs. 17-25)
  - A. **Sacrifice and Food** (ch. 17)
  - B. **Sexual Behavior** (ch. 18)
  - C. **Principles on Good Neighborliness** (ch. 19)
  - D. **Capital Crimes** (ch. 20)
  - E. **Disqualifications for Priests** (ch. 21)
  - F. **Rules on Sacrifice** (ch. 22)
  - G. **Feasts** (ch. 23)
  - H. **Tabernacle Lamps and Loaves** (24:1-9)
  - I. **Blasphemy** (24:10-23)
  - J. **Years of Release** (ch. 25)
- V. **Covenantal Blessings and Curses** (ch. 26)
- VI. **Appendix—Rules on Vows and Tithes** (ch. 27)

## **Detailed Outline**

- I. **Laws on Sacrificial Offerings** (chs. 1-7)
  - A. **Instructions for the Laity** (1:1-6:7)
    1. Burnt (Atonement) Offering (ch. 1)
    2. Grain (Tribute) Offering (ch. 2)
    3. Peace (Fellowship) Offering (ch. 3)
    4. Sin (Purification) Offering (4:1-5:13)
    5. Trespass (Reparation) Offering (5:14-6:7)
  - B. **Instructions for the Priests** (6:8-7:38)
    1. Burnt (Atonement) Offering (6:8-13)
    2. Grain (Tribute) Offering (6:14-23)
    3. Sin (Purification) Offering (6:24-30)
    4. Trespass (Reparation) Offering (7:1-10)
    5. Peace (Fellowship) Offering (7:11-36)
    6. Summary (7:37-38)
- II. **Institution of the Priesthood** (chs. 8-10)
  - A. **Consecration of Aaron and His Sons** (ch. 8)
  - B. **Aaron's First Sacrifices** (ch. 9)
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- III. **Uncleanness and Its Treatment** (chs. 11-16)
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- VI. **Appendix – Rules on Vows and Tithes** (ch. 27)

## SUMMARY OF SACRIFICIAL OFFERINGS (LEVITICUS CHS. 1-7)

Offering	Sacrifice Type	Purpose	Comments
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Burnt</b></p> <p>(Lev. 1:1-17 &amp; 6:8-13)</p>	<p><b>From the herd</b>, a male without defect (Lev. 1:3-9)</p>	<p>This offering makes <b>atonement</b> for the offerer, turning away the LORD's wrath, so he may <b>reconciled</b> to the LORD and be accepted as pure before Him (Lev. 1:3-4). This was an affirmation of faith and obedience.</p>	<p>This is probably the most common offering and was completely consumed (i.e. no part of it was set aside for eating). The altar of sacrifice was not to go out and was to be kept burning continually, symbolic of God's continual presence with His people.</p>
	<p><b>From the flock</b>, sheep or goats, male without defect (Lev. 1:10-13)</p>		
	<p><b>Of birds</b>, turtledoves or pigeons (Lev. 1:14-17)</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Grain</b></p> <p>(Lev. 2:1-16 &amp; 6:14-23)</p>	<p>Of <b>fine flour</b> or, if firstfruits, of <b>roasted grain heads</b> (Lev. 2:1, 14). It may be cooked or uncooked and all variants must include "salt of the covenant." It cannot include leaven or honey.</p>	<p>The term used for this offering often means <b>tribute</b> (i.e. what a vassal owes to his suzerain). It was thus a gift of fidelity. Salt was a symbol of the imperishability of God's covenant with His people (Lev. 2:13).</p>	<p>It was offered after, but in along with, the burnt offering. It could be offered alone as a first fruits offering. Priests could eat a portion. Special offerings priests made for themselves when anointed were not eaten but burned entirely.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Peace</b></p> <p>(Lev. 3:1-17, 7:12-34)</p>	<p><b>From the herd or flock</b>, a male or female without defect (Lev. 3:1, 7)</p>	<p>This was an optional offering of <b>blessing</b> made out of <b>thanksgiving</b> (7:12), fulfillment of a vow or from freewill (7:16) by one who has purified himself.</p>	<p>Sacrifice closes with a meal, in which both the offeror and the priest partake. It was to be accompanied by one of every type of grain offering. Eating any fat or blood was prohibited – fat was God's "portion," and blood is associated with atonement.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Purification (Sin)</b></p> <p>(Lev. 4:1-5:13, 6:24-30)</p>	<p>For the inadvertent sins of an <i>individual</i>, the <i>high priest</i> or the <i>whole congregation</i>: a <b>bull</b> without defect (Lev. 4:1-21)</p>	<p>Because the ritual was focused on the <b>sanctification</b> of the sanctuary (especially what to do with the blood of the offering), the offering is one of purification: God cannot abide uncleanness if He is to dwell among His people. Uncleanness is caused by ritual violations, dedicatory occasions, inadvertent sin (as opposed to deliberate ones), and sins of omission (failure to provide testimony, and rash vows, etc.). (Lev. 12:8, 14:19, 15:31, 16:19)</p>	<p>Anyone touching the offering becomes consecrated. The priest eats it in the court of the tent of meeting. No purification offering whose blood was used in making atonement can be eaten.</p>
	<p>For a (<i>tribal</i>) <i>leader's</i> inadvertent sins: a <b>male goat</b> without defect (Lev. 4:22-26)</p>		
	<p>For a <i>commoner's</i> inadvertent sins: a <b>female goat</b> or <b>lamb</b> without defect (Lev. 4:27-35)</p>		
	<p>For sins of omission: <b>female goat</b> or <b>lamb</b> without defect, or two <b>turtledoves/pigeons</b>, or 1/10 of an ephah of <b>flour</b> (Lev. 5:1-13)</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Reparation (Guilt)</b></p> <p>(Lev. 5:14-6:7, 7:1-10)</p>	<p>A <b>ram</b> without defect or the shekel equivalent (Lev. 5:15, 18). The offeror must make full restitution and add 1/5<sup>th</sup>.</p>	<p><b>Satisfaction</b> for inadvertently sinning against the LORD's holy things, including guilt prompted by conscience and perjury under oath. (Lev. 5:15, 6:1-5)</p>	<p>The priest who offers burnt offerings or cooked grain offerings may eat of the sacrifice, but uncooked grain offerings are shared among the priests.</p>



