

# The Whole Truth Leviticus

## Introductory Questions

- When you think about the feelings conjured up when considering studying Leviticus, what word comes to mind?

(Drudgery? Delight?)

- How many Bible reading plans have gone awry or crashed and burned in Leviticus?

**TRUTH:** A book filled with detailed descriptions of how Israelites could worship and what they should eat and wear.

But, they still point us to Christ,

*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. John 5:39 NKJV*

## **I. Why is Leviticus such a difficult book for Christians to understand and enjoy?**

### Three Main Issues

#### A. Cultural context of the book is so different from our own.

1. Houses, apartments vs. tents
2. Sanctuary vs. open-air courtyard/tabernacle
3. Rice at weddings forbidden/animals slaughtered
4. Ritual purity, impurity, and holiness—totally different world

#### B. Lose our understanding of larger context or the narrative thread

1. Leviticus comes AFTER Exodus 25-40
2. Focus on instructions for building of the temple (tedious, easy to get lost in the wilderness)

#### C. It's all about the law (2 problems)

1. Law is not as enjoyable to read as stories

NOTE: Especially if it does not apply to us and much does not

2. Law is seen negatively. As people of grace—we see law as restrictive and ungracious

## II. What about the original context of Leviticus must we understand?

### A. Its cultural context—totally different than ours

Example: Leviticus 19:19 (bizarre)

#### 1. Original priestly garments (were mixed)

*And they shall make the ephod of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, artistically worked. Exodus 28:6 NKJV*

*You shall make the breastplate of judgment. Artistically woven according to the workmanship of the ephod you shall make it: of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen, you shall make it. Exodus 28:15 NKJV*

#### 2. Non-priests forbidden from doing priestly duties

*So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall attend to their priesthood; but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death. Numbers 3:10 NKJV*

*Moreover those who were to camp before the tabernacle on the east, before the tabernacle of meeting, were Moses, Aaron, and his sons, keeping charge of the sanctuary, to meet the needs of the children of Israel; but the outsider who came near was to be put to death. Numbers 3:38 NKJV*

#### 3. This prohibition was to maintain separation

#### 4. Show proper respect to authority structures

### Application

New Testament Church leaders not distinguished by special clothing but it does give leaders a unique role.

*And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 NKJV*

*Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. Hebrews 13:17 NKJV*

NOTE: Not all of Leviticus is as easy to decipher applicable rationale

B. Its Literacy Context—Leviticus is part of a bigger story, namely the story of Exodus

1. God delivers his people from slavery with mostly signs and wonders (Exodus 1-15)
2. Brings them to Sinai and says they will be a “Kingdom of Priests” (Exodus 16-19)
3. Establish covenant and gives them Kingdom laws to follow (Exodus 20-24)
4. He will be a King that will dwell with them, in their midst—so gives direction for His earthly palace or dwelling place (Exodus 25-31, 35-40)

Big Question: If you are an Israelite, how can the holy and pure King of the universe dwell among sinful and impure people? How can He live here in our midst without his holiness destroying us?

C. The answer to that question really forms the outline of Leviticus

1. Leviticus begins by exploring the sacrifices that address sin and enable them to worship their king properly.
  - a. Burnt Offering (1; 6:8-13; 8:18-21; 16:24)

READ: Leviticus 1

- Bullock, sheep and goats, fowl
- Free-will, surrender of life and will to God

NOTE:

*As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will bear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. 17 "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. 18 No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father." John 10:15-18 NKJV*

- Lamb without spot or blemish (v. 10)

*But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. 1 Peter 1:19 NKJV*

- An atonement offering—for unintended sins and showed Surrender to God

b. Grain (meal) Offering (2; 6:14-23)

READ: Leviticus 2

- Priest burns some/retains some
- Leaven can be offered, not burnt
- Free giving of thanks and gratitude to God

*This material is copyrighted. Its use in the local church or in any other setting as a teaching tool or ministry presentation requires written permission from the author.*

c. **Peace (fellowship) Offering (3)**

READ: Leviticus 3

- Any animal without defect
- Free act of worship
- Giver and priest are together to show fellowship between God and humankind

d. **Sin Offering (4:1-5:13; 6:24-38; 8:14-17; 16:3-22)**

- Different animal for different people (4:1-3; 22, 23, 27, 28; 5:7, 11)
- Forgiveness and cleansing from confessed sin (5:1-6)

e. **Guilt or Trespass Offering (5:14-6:7; 7:1-6)**

- Ram or lamb
- Necessary to restore relationships
- Required restitution
- See 5:15-19; 6:1-7

f. **Other rules concerning sacrifices**

- Fire on altar never goes out (6:8-13)
- Instructions for other sacrifices (7:9-21)

g. **Conclusion of offering sacrifice**

*The Lord commanded this to be given to them by the children of Israel, on the day that He anointed them, by a statute forever throughout their generations. 37 This is the law of the burnt offering, the grain offering, the sin offering, the trespass offering, the consecrations, and the sacrifice of the peace offering, 38 which the Lord commanded Moses on Mount Sinai, on the day when He commanded the children of Israel to offer their offerings to the Lord in the Wilderness of Sinai. Leviticus 7:36-38 NKJV*

2. **Leviticus also provides priests to intercession for the people AND lead them to worship (8-10)**

- a. **Patriarchal times the head of family offered sacrifices for the family. Now it will be priests.**
- b. **Moses' brother Aaron would be the first with two sons Nahab and Abihu**

NOTE: When they failed God judged

*Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. 2 So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. 3 And Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.'" So Aaron held his peace. Leviticus 10:1-3 NKJV*

- c. Priests represented people before God and taught God's principles to the people. They were custodians of the tabernacle with assistance from the Levites. Levites took the place of the firstborn male (See Numbers 3:5-13; 8:18)
- d. New Testament re-interpretation is key

(Hebrews 3:1; 5:1-10; 9:11)

NOTE: See priest's blessing

*Then Aaron lifted his hand toward the people, blessed them, and came down from offering the sin offering, the burnt offering, and peace offerings. 23 And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of meeting, and came out and blessed the people. Then the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people, 24 and fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces. Leviticus 9:22-24 NKJV*

- 3. Leviticus gives laws to teach how to deal properly with impurity (11-16)
  - a. Ceremonial impurity
  - b. Issues of human body
  - c. Day of Atonement (16) discuss later
- 4. Leviticus also provides a whole series of laws in other areas to direct them in looking like a "Kingdom of Priests" and a holy nation (17-27)
  - a. Unlawful marriages and lusts (18)
    - Incest
    - Homosexuality
    - Bestiality
  - b. Moral uncleanness (19, 20)—treating of neighbor

READ: 19:9-18

- c. Rules for priest (21:1-22:16)
- d. Rules for sacrifices (22:17-33)
- e. Feasts and feast days (23-25)

NOTE: Will see later

f. Treatment of poor, follow Jesus (25)

### III. Understanding the Law

#### A. Meaning of term “Law”—Torah

1. One of more than 600 regulations for Moses passed on in Exodus-Deuteronomy
2. First five books of the Old Testament
3. Early pattern of religious life and rituals in the Old Testament

#### B. Three kinds of Law

##### 1. Civil Law (regulation)

- a. Property rights, marriage and divorce standards, laws about theft, murder, crimes, and health regulations
- b. God’s way of shaping Hebrew society and is not binding today

##### 2. Ceremonial Law (ritual instructions that governed the sacrificial system and festivals)

- a. Rule of Levites
- b. Features of the Tabernacle

##### 3. Moral Law

- a. Sexual ethics
- b. Themes of 10 Commandments

#### C. How do we know what laws bind us?

1. Avoid shellfish
2. Passover? Tabernacle?
3. Incest?
4. Tithing?

#### D. New Covenant as our guide

1. Civil Law is not binding—it was God’s way of shaping society (expired with demise of Israelite nation)
2. Ceremonial Law—has been superseded by the work of Christ (expired when Christ fulfilled Priesthood)
3. Moral Law—ongoing validity because they are repeated in one form or another in the New Testament (no expiration—based on God’s character)

*This material is copyrighted. Its use in the local church or in any other setting as a teaching tool or ministry presentation requires written permission from the author.*

#### 4. Guided by a transcendent principle

*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2 NKJV*

*Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." Matthew 22:37-40 NKJV*

*For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Galatians 5:14 NKJV*

*Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. Romans 13:8-10 NKJV*

#### E. If most of the Law in the first five books of the Bible doesn't apply—in what sense is it the Word of God for us?

1. All of the Bible is the story of God moving among and within people to bring salvation to humanity.
2. Not every verse is about me.
3. Law is the Word of God for all people for all time, but given to specific people groups in the context of God's dynamic and progressively developing relationship with humanity.

*Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. Galatians 3:24 NKJV*

*"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. Matthew 5:17 NKJV*

#### F. Principles to interpret the law

##### 1. Law comes after redemption not before in the story (Exodus precedes Sinai)

- a. Obedience flows FROM grace it does not buy it
- b. Law was given to them when God's grace delivered them

##### 2. Law reflects the values of the lawgiver

- a. Neighbor
- b. Purity
- c. Honesty

d. Integrity

**IV. Feast and Holy Days (23-25)**

NOTE: These established to remind the Israelites that they were God's holy people.

A. **Sabbath (23:3)**—A day of rest set apart to God—no work for people or animals

*Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings. Leviticus 23:3 NKJV*

1. **Commemorated creation**

*But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. Exodus 20:10-11 NKJV*

2. **Commemorated the exodus**

*Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. 13 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 14 but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. 15 And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. Deuteronomy 5:12-15 NKJV*

3. **Object of controversy between Jesus and Pharisees**

B. **Sabbath Year (25:1-7)**—year of rest for the land

1. In Deuteronomy 15 it included forgiving debt and releasing slaves
2. It was a year of trust
3. If they disobeyed—a curse (READ: Leviticus 26:27-35)

*And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, 21 to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years. 2 Chronicles 36:20-21 NKJV*

C. **Year of Jubilee (25:8-55; 27:17-24)**

*This material is copyrighted. Its use in the local church or in any other setting as a teaching tool or ministry presentation requires written permission from the author.*

NOTE: To help the poor, debt canceled, slaves released, land returned to first owners

1. 50<sup>th</sup> year
2. Reversion of property to original owner
3. Year to live simply became 2 years in a row 49<sup>th</sup>/50<sup>th</sup> without planting
4. May never have fully trusted Yahweh

#### D. Passover (23:5)

1. Points to Jesus as the Passover lamb
2. Jesus reinterpreted it

#### E. Unleavened Bread (23:6-8)

1. Recalls how they left with haste
2. Ate bread without yeast
3. Points to sinless life of Jesus

#### F. Firstfruits (23:9-14)

1. Recognize God's faithfulness in the land
2. Burnt offering and wave offering
3. Jesus was resurrected on Firstfruits Day

*But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 1 Corinthians 15:20 NKJV*

#### G. Festival Weeks (Pentecost)

1. To give thanks for the grain harvest
2. Personal required and freewill offerings
3. 50 days of after beginning of Feast of Unleavened Bread
4. Church began at Pentecost

#### H. Feast of Trumpets—Rosh Hashanah (23:23-25)

1. Present Israel to God
2. Seek his favor
3. March and blow trumpets
4. Connected to the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:52)

#### I. Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)

READ: Leviticus 16-7:30; 23:26-32)

#### J. Feast of Tabernacles or Booths (23:33-43)

1. Recall going from Egypt to Canaan
2. Live in booths made with branches for a week
3. Tent waiting on resurrection

#### K. Sacred Assembly

*For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it. Leviticus 23:36 NKJV*

NOTE: Feasts, offering, Priesthood all reflect a theology of holiness

#### **Conclusion:** Chapter 26

1. Blessing for obedience
2. Curse for disobedience
3. Vows and tithes in 27
4. God in Christ provides a sacrifice for sin but He demands we move toward holiness
5. God wants His redeemed people to reflect on His character and move toward holiness
  - a. 1<sup>st</sup> books read by Israel
  - b. Last books read by Christians

*But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. 15 But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. 16 Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 3:14-18 NKJV*