

# Introduction to Leviticus

*February 18, 2024*

## Lesson Summary

### **Main Passages**

Leviticus 1; John 14:21-26; Romans 12:1-2

### **Session Outline**

1. Why the Law? (Leviticus 1)
2. Sacrifice Today (Romans 12:1-2)
3. Ultimate Motivation (John 14:21-26)

---

### **Theological Theme**

Sin is a big deal to God and should be to His people. He has called us to be holy as He is holy. This happens as we are transformed by the renewing of our minds.

### **Call to Action**

Is there anything in your life that God has told you clearly to do, and you have refused?  
Have you surrendered your time, talents, treasures, and testimony to the lordship of Jesus?



## Leader Guide

# Introduction to Leviticus

### Introduction

There is power in finding the right motivation as a leader. Many coaches have been remembered for iconic speeches right before their teams stormed onto the field or court. Many military leaders have inspired and emboldened their troops before a major conflict. Parents work hard to find the right way to motivate their kids to obedience.

There is no perfect way to motivate all people all the time, but all people are motivated by something. Christians also need motivation to spur us on to godly living. Today we will look at some Old Testament and New Testament passages that can and should motivate the choices we make daily.

- ❓ What value have you found in motivation in your life? What types of tactics motivate you the most?
- ❓ In what area of do you most need spiritual motivation right now?


### Session Summary

Leviticus stresses the vast difference between a holy God and His sinful people. It addresses the problem of how people can be in right relationship with God despite our sins. Specific instructions were given about the different sacrifices that people could and should bring to the tabernacle. The priests administered the sacrifices on behalf of the people and set a precedent about dealing with sin in a timely manner.


As those living after the events of the New Testament, Jesus came as the once for all sacrifice for our sins. Yet, there remains a temptation to take that for granted and live however our flesh desires. We are called to be holy as God is holy. Leviticus demonstrates how sinful people can fellowship with our holy God and reminds us of the seriousness of sin. Jesus made it clear that we pursue holy lives because we love Him and want to obey His commands. Because it is impossible for us to do that on our own power, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to teach, guide, and empower all who choose to follow Him.

## 1. Why the Law? (Leviticus 1:1-17)

After the Israelites left Egypt, they spent a year at Mt. Sinai where God gave them the law, confirmed His covenant, established organization, and dwelled with them. Much of the book of Leviticus answers the basic question: *How do sinful people come into the presence of a Holy God?* Genesis records the fall man and introduction of sin into the world (Genesis 3). Exodus covered the deliverance of God's people from Egypt and the time that followed. Leviticus reveals the way God's people were instructed to worship.

 What do you think of when you hear the word *holy*? Does this stir up positive or negative images in your mind? Why?

The word *holy* means to be “set apart.” Holiness is about being pure, living according to God's standard, as one who is consecrated. The word *holy* is mentioned repeatedly in Leviticus. As we saw with the Passover, the Israelites obeyed. They believed that, through the sacrifice of an unblemished sacrifice, death would pass over them. Following their obedience and deliverance from Egypt, God established His covenant with His people and in Leviticus we see how He instructed them to continue toward personal holiness.

 Would you describe your life as holy? Why or why not?

The title of the book of Leviticus gives a glimpse into the book as whole. The Levites were the priests, and this book is full of instructions about how they would intercede for sinful people before a holy God. Just as the Passover hinged on the blood sacrifice of an innocent lamb, in Leviticus we see the continuation of the need for sacrificial death as the payment for sin. Sin breaks our fellowship with God, and we restore that fellowship through sacrifice.

Ultimately, Jesus became the once and for all innocent sacrifice for our sins. The sacrifices of the priests throughout the Old Testament pointed the people forward to the promised final sacrifice that would come. Leviticus covers very specific instruction about each of the types of sacrifices including what they were for and how to perform each of the rituals.

There was significance and symbolism in every sacrifice to make clear how seriously God takes sin and that we should do the same. All people face the temptation to make light of sin and disregard the importance of our daily decisions. There is nothing more serious than the reality that sin separates all people from God.

- Application: How seriously do you view your own sin? Where might you have turned a blind eye to sinful patterns in your life? What needs to change?

## 2. Sacrifice Today (Romans 12:1-2)

Though the book of Leviticus was written in the time before Christ there is still application today. We still need to prioritize the role of sacrifice in our lives. Paul's words in this passage in Romans offer insight into what sacrifice has to do with us today.

Paul stressed the importance of recognizing we have a choice every day of whether we will live for God or not. The motivation for the way we live should be based on all God has done for us. When we treasure the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross and the abundant life God gives us, it will affect the choices we make daily. Paul exhorted his readers to choose God's way over the ways of the world.

- How does reflecting on the sacrifice of Jesus affect your decision making each day?

When we consider the mercy God has shown us, a natural response is to present ourselves as living sacrifices to God. This reminds us of the priestly work described in Leviticus and of the importance sacrifice today. Spiritually speaking, we should bring our bodies to the altar and offer them to God. God is more interested in your being than your doing, and it is possible to do things for the Lord without giving yourself to Him. Presenting yourself as a living sacrifice means offering your entire life for His purpose and His glory.

### Sacrifice as Worship

Our true worship entails offering our bodies as a living sacrifice, which means dedication of the total person to living for God's honor. Christians are to be different from non-Christian society. We should experience a progressive transformation of life by the renewing of our mind. The mind is changed by prayer, by reading and reflection on God's Word, by worship, and by meditation on God's acts as the Holy Spirit works in us.



How is it possible to do good things for God but still not present yourself as a sacrifice for Him? When has this been true in your life?

Presenting yourself as a living sacrifice is a daily challenge. Each day we are faced again with the decision to die to ourselves and our will in favor of God's will and ways. Each day our flesh and the world rise again to tell us there is a better way.

The enemy seeks to use the influence of the world to pull us away from the Lord and keep us from fellowship with Him. Paul warned against giving in to the pressure to be conformed to the world, but instead seeking to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. The mind is the battleground where the war between these two choices occurs. When we continually renew our minds with the Word of God, we have more inclination to fight sin. Transformation into God's image brings the blessings and fruitful life He has promised.



Application: Where do you currently need to fight against conforming to the world and seek to be transformed by the Word?

### 3. Ultimate Motivation (John 14:21-26)


People are motivated into action in many ways. Paul wrote about God's mercies in Romans 12. In John 14, Jesus taught His followers the ultimate motivation for obedience to God. Simply put, Jesus said anyone who loves Him will keep His commandments.

It is not just about having a head knowledge of the commandments but about them being part of our lives. Ultimately, obedience is not motivated by legalism but by love. Jesus loved us and died for our sins, and that prompts us to love Him back and show our love through daily obedience and surrender. When we live as Christ calls us to, we show Jesus to the people around us and make Him more visible in the world.




What is the difference between knowing God's will and living according to His will?

You may feel overwhelmed by the idea of living a life of continual sacrifice before God. Jesus knew we would not be able to do this on our own and that's why He promised to send His Spirit following His death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus promised that the Helper who was to come would remind and guide His people in everything they needed. This promise extends to Jesus's followers now and forever.

 Where do you feel most lacking when it comes to a life of sacrifice and obedience before God?

The Holy Spirit empowers and equip us to live as God desires. The Spirit would be sent to help the disciples live for Jesus each day. The Holy Spirit would carry on the work of training the disciples and empowering them to fulfill the call of God on their lives.

We benefit greatly from the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. He helps, trains, teaches, guides, and reminds us of Jesus. The more that we put God's Word into our hearts and minds, the more the Spirit reminds us. Jesus loved His followers and never planned to leave them on their own. He loves us and doesn't want us to live on our own either. Jesus sent the Spirit to be with all believers in a real and powerful way.

 Application: How do you need to trust and lean on the Holy Spirit more? What changes do you need to make to open yourself to this?

## Conclusion

Sacrifice is important for believers. We need to understand the role sacrifice played in the Old Testament so that we can better understand why it matters today. Because sin entered the world and separated man from God, sacrifice was necessary to atone for sin and reestablish fellowship with God.

The book of Leviticus explains the necessity and specific practices of the different sacrifices. We may read Leviticus and feel grateful we live in the world after Jesus came as the final sacrifice on the cross. While it is true that Jesus has done everything needed for us to be accepted and forgiven by God, there is more to Leviticus to learn than just that. One of the biggest lessons is that God takes sin seriously and expects us to do the same. It should matter to us that our sin breaks our fellowship with God and needs to be addressed. Followers of Jesus are motivated by love for Christ to live a holy life and make choices that please the Lord instead of following the world.

- ❓ What is your primary takeaway regarding sacrifice and holiness today?
- ❓ How can we as a group support and encourage one another in obedience to Jesus?
- ❓ How could you have a gospel conversation with another person by sharing about the system of sacrifice in the Old Testament?

## Prayer of Response

*Thank the Lord for showing you the importance of holiness. Ask for wisdom for where you need to make changes and the power to follow through in those areas.*

## Memory Verse

*Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. - Romans 12:1*

## Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Leviticus* by Allan Moseley
- *Be Holy* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Leviticus* by Kenneth Matthews

## Disciples Multiplying Disciples





# Historical Context of Leviticus

## Purpose

The book of Exodus shows God at work with the goal of having such close fellowship with people that he is described as dwelling among them. He rescued the Israelites in order to make himself known, not only by the exercise of his power but also through an ongoing covenant relationship based on his capacity for patience, grace, and forgiveness. The record of what the Lord did for the Israelites provided grounds for them to recognize him as their God who deserved their complete loyalty and obedience. This record would make clear to the Israelites their identity as God's people and would continue the display of his glorious identity.

## Author

The book of Exodus does not state who its author was. It does refer to occasions when Moses made a written record of events that took place and what God had said (17:14; 24:4, 7; 34:27–28). The book also contains references to preserving and passing on information. Along with the other four books of the Pentateuch, it has long been considered to be primarily the work of Moses. Moses could have written Exodus at any time during a forty-year time span: after the Israelites finished constructing and dedicating the tabernacle at Mount Sinai, at the start of their second year after leaving Egypt (1445 BC), and before his death in the land of Moab (about 1406 BC).

## Setting

Exodus picks up where the Genesis narrative ended with the death of Joseph around 1805 BC. It quickly moves us forward almost three hundred years to a time in Egypt when the circumstances of Jacob's descendants had changed. The Israelites were serving as slaves during Egypt's Eighteenth Dynasty, probably under the pharaohs Thutmose and Amenhotep II. The Hebrew slaves experienced a miraculous deliverance by God's hand through his servant-leader Moses. The Israelite slavery ended in 1446 BC. The book of Exodus records the events surrounding the exodus from Egypt and the Israelites' first year in the wilderness, including the giving of the law.

The date of the exodus is disputed, but biblical evidence favors 1446 BC. First Kings 6:1 states that the exodus occurred 480 years before Solomon's fourth year as king, established by biblical data combined with Assyrian chronology to be 966 BC. In Judges 11:26, Jephthah said that Israel had been living in regions of Palestine for three hundred years. Jephthah lived around 1100 BC, thus dating the end of the wilderness journey to around 1400 BC.

## Special Features

The title "Exodus" is an anglicized version of a Greek word that means "departure" in recognition of one of the book's major events—the departure of God's people from Egypt. Exodus could be considered the central book in the Old Testament because it records God's act of saving the Israelites and establishing them as a covenant community, a nation chosen to serve and represent him. Exodus describes the enslavement and oppression of the Israelites; the preparation and call of Moses; the conflict between Yahweh the God of Israel and the gods of Egypt (represented by Pharaoh); the exodus of the Israelites; their establishment as a nation in covenant with the Lord; their rebellion; and the Lord's provision for their ongoing relationship, symbolized by his presence at the tabernacle they built for him.

# Extended Commentary

## Leviticus 1

The first major section of Leviticus (chaps. 1–7) deals with the nature, purpose, and ritual of sacrifice. The summary statement that concludes this section sets the entire sacrificial system in the context of God’s covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. God freed Israel from Egyptian slavery so that it would be free to worship. Leviticus 1–7 instructed Israel in how properly to worship God. God desires the fellowship of His people. The Israelites’ rebellion, however, made continued relations a problem for a holy God. Leviticus 1–7 introduces those sacrifices that made possible renewed fellowship between God and His people.

As an expression of tribute and devotion to the Lord, sacrifice had to be offered with a willing heart but also according to clearly articulated and well-understood prescriptions. Different kinds of offerings served a variety of purposes. Therefore an elaborate manual of procedure was necessary to show God’s people how to approach the Lord God in an appropriate manner.

### The Sacrificial System

A great deal can be learned about what a society values from what it expresses in rituals. The study of Old Testament ritual, far from being boring and unintelligible, can unlock the fundamentals of biblical theology.

### Meaning

To all who enter a relationship with God through faith, God gives commandments that the faithful follow in evidence of their faith (Deut. 5:29; Rom. 1:5; Heb. 3:18–19; John 14:15). When believers express their faith in obedience, they experience fullness of life (Lev. 18:5; Deut. 30:15–16; Ezek. 20:10–12).

For the Old Testament believer, God’s commands were given in the law of Moses. These included instructions on how God was to be approached in rituals of worship and repentance. Ritual that does not arise from hearts committed to God is worthless (Prov. 15:8; Isa. 1:11–17; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:21–24). Israel tended to neglect justice, mercy, and faithfulness, “the weightier matters of the law” (Matt. 23:23; see Mic. 6:6–8) and to be satisfied with ritual. Yet it is not true that authentic worship is found only in spontaneous acts and that formal, ritual acts necessarily represent sham or hypocrisy.

The sacrifices were a secondary though vital part of Israel’s religion. Through them Israel expressed their faith and learned the nature of a holy God, sinful humanity, and the necessity of atonement. They also received forgiveness (Lev. 1:4; 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 16) based upon Christ’s final sacrifice (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:9–10; 10:1–4).

### The Offerings

The most common offering in Israel was the burnt offering (Lev. 1). It was presented by the priests every morning and evening and more frequently on holy days. Its main distinction was that the animal was entirely consumed by the altar fire. In response to the faithful offering, God’s anger would be turned; and the worshiper would be accepted, freed from punishment by payment of the ransom.

The priest was to eat a portion of the other offerings (joined by the worshiper with the fellowship offering, Lev. 3). The sin or purification offering (Lev. 4:1–5:13) served to purify the sanctuary so that God could continue to dwell with a sinful people. The guilt or reparation offering (5:14–6:7) accompanied compensation that was required in the case of certain sins. The fellowship or peace offerings (Lev. 3) were unique in that these were optional, brought in response to an unexpected blessing (a “thank” offering), a general thankfulness (a “freewill” offering), or a prayed-for deliverance (a “vow” offering).

Finally, the grain offerings (Lev. 2) accompanied the daily burnt offerings or were presented independently in thanks at harvest.<sup>1</sup>

## References

1. Eugene H. Merrill, “The Pentateuch,” in *Holman Concise Bible Commentary*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 39-40.