

- You may be waiting for this lesson so that I give you the keys to unlock the secrets of Leviticus or the things you need to know to read it with delight. Let me say up front that if those are your expectations, then I will likely disappoint you. Without being irreverent, in one sense this isn't possible.

LITERARY OVERVIEW

Title: The traditional Hebrew title is "Vayikra", or "and He called" from the opening line. Leviticus means "pertaining to the Levites", and is somewhat of a misnomer, seeing there are parts that don't refer only to the Levites and their work.

Author: Moses as primary writer and compiler.

Audience: Israel as they prepare to enter into the land of promise. Moses as he receives the Word from the Lord.

Purpose: To give detailed regulations as to the sacrificial worship and elements of daily life expected from Israel. This was the establishment of a civilization, society, or culture unlike what they had been accustomed to (ever).

Plotline: Mostly law codes, so not much of a cohesive plot (though certainly themes). There is an episodic narrative (incident) in chs.8-10.

Main Events: The giving of the regulations to Moses by God. The establishment of the priesthood and subsequent event of the judgment of Nadab and Abihu.

Main Characters: God, Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Israel.

Form/Genre: Mostly law codes or regulations with narrative in chs.8-10. However, there is a general narrative framework seen in that it is the Lord speaking to Moses within the context of preparation to enter the land after departure from Egypt.

Challenges: Don't expect to read the book like a story.

- 1.) Sorting through the question whether some of the laws were practically beneficial in the time
 - 2.) The moral heart of the various issues
 - 3.) The tension between the reality of the inspired system of worship, and the New Covenant's "negative" view of it all. It is viewed as inferior.
 - 4.) The sheer volume of laws.
- Try to picture the scene, use your imagination, and take part in it. What would it have been like to have gone through those actions?

OUTLINE¹

Chapters 1-16 emphasize the offerings and sacrifices ○ Chapters 17-27 emphasize particular every day regulations

I. THE SYSTEM OF SACRIFICES (1:1–7:38)

- A. The *Burnt* Offering (1:1–17)
- B. The *Grain* Offering (2:1–16)
- C. The *Peace* Offering (3:1–17)
- D. The *Sin* Offering (4:1–5:13)
- E. The *Restitution* Offering (5:14–6:7)
- F. Instructions About Offerings (6:8–7:38)

II. ORDINATION OF PRIESTS (8:1–10:20)

- A. Ordination Of Aaron As High Priest And His Sons As Priests (8:1–36)
- B. First Sacrifices Of The Newly Ordained Priests (9:1–24)
- C. The Sin Of Nadab And Abihu And Consequent Regulations For The Priests (10:1–20)

III. LAWS CONCERNING WHAT IS CLEAN OR UNCLEAN (11:1–15:33)

- A. Clean And Unclean *Animals* (11:1–47)
- B. *Purification* Following Childbirth (12:1–8)
- C. *Uncleanness* From Skin Diseases And In Garments (13:1–59)
- D. *Purification* Following Skin Diseases And Of Dwellings (14:1–57)
- E. *Uncleanness* From Bodily Discharges (15:1–33)

IV. THE DAY OF ATONEMENT: PURIFICATION FROM MORAL UNCLEANNESS (16:1–34)

V. THE HOLINESS CODE: LAWS FOR HOLY LIVING (17:1–26:46)

- A. Killing *Animals* For Food (17:1–16)
- B. Purity In *Sexual Relations* And Various *Life Situations* (18:1–19:37)
- C. *Penalties* For Violations (20:1–27)
- D. *Purity And Wholeness* In The Lives Of The Priests And In Sacrificial Animals (21:1–22:33)
- E. The Seven Holy *Convocations* (23:1–44)
 1. The *Sabbath* – a weekly rest day from ordinary labor
 2. The *Passover* – the celebration of the Exodus from Egypt
 3. The *Feast of Firstfruits* – the celebration of harvest
 4. The *Feast of Weeks* – (later known as Pentecost) was also related to harvest

¹ From Nelson Study Bible, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

- 5. The *Feast of Trumpets* – exact reason unclear, but possibly related to liberty
- 6. The *Day of Atonement* – recognition of sins and need for sacrifice by the High Priest
- 7. The Feast of *Tabernacles* – related to the harvest and remembrance of wilderness wandering
- F. The *Oil And Bread* (24:1–9)
- G. Punishment For *Blasphemy* (24:10–23)
- H. The *Sabbath Year, The Year Of Jubilee, And Redemption* (25:1–55)

VI. BLESSINGS FOR OBEDIENCE AND CURSES FOR DISOBEDIENCE (26:1–46)

VII. APPENDIX: THE REDEMPTION OF GIFTS AND TITHES (27:1–34)

MAJOR THEMES

1.) The need for sacrifice and priesthood.

- With both of these, we should be careful about judging things we see in other religions as “crazy” or “kooky.” There is much that would look very strange to us, and we cannot forget that this is what our Christianity is rooted in historically. This is a lot of “blood and guts” at the establishment of God’s worship in Israel. There are special garments and holy items and symbols.
- There is not a lot of difference between this stage of worship and pagan worship (in its sacrifice). We have the “luxury” of not being exposed to Judaism in its full OC manifestation.

2.) The concept of clean/unclean, holy/unholy.

- There is nothing strictly philosophical or abstract. Living in the presence of God was very concrete and affected every area of life. There is also a communal focus, that one’s state affects their relationship with others.

3.) The establishment of holy days.

- Some were a celebration of historic events in the life of the nation while others were celebrations of seasons of agriculture. They were all marked by thanksgiving and joyous feasting. These were community observances, a public recognition of the place of God. This was also a special time to invite the needy for to be blessed by the bounty.
- One of three perspectives: (1.) because holidays are not prescribed, there should be none or (2.) the recognition of distinctive cultural celebrations (3.) the NC church should continue to celebrate the OC feasts.

4.) The strictly regulated nature of worship and sacrifice.

- There was no doubt as to the details of what was expected. This is in stark contrast to the New Covenant worship. There is again one of a couple of directions this takes us. One is to assume that the NC worship is as regulated (and because of its silence its simplicity) or the other a flexibility within cultures to be fleshed out.
- Reading through Hebrews will help us to put this section into proper perspective as something that pointed forward to and fulfilled in Christ. While there are some principles (and this is the challenge), we have to say that much is not directly relevant. This is because this is a part of Old Covenant worship that has been abolished (Hebrews 8:13).