

### **#3. THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS**

1. Leviticus is the third book of the Bible, and the part of the Torah (the Law of Moses) dealing with *priestly matters*. The word Leviticus means *pertaining to the Levites*.
  
2. The author is Moses. This has been established in the lessons on Genesis and Deuteronomy. The date of composition is between 1445 and 1405BC.
  
3. Key Chapters
  - Chapters 1-17 deal with the offerings, the altar, the priesthood, and the people of God in relation to Jehovah.
  - Chapters 18-27 deal with Israel's seasons, holy days, feasts, and rules for the priests as they serve and for the people as they worship.
  
4. Key Verse
  - Leviticus 19:2 Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.
  
5. Key People
  - Moses – the great prophet and Lawgiver
  - Aaron – the brother of Moses who served as Key Priest.
  - Nadab and Abihu – the two eldest sons of Aaron. In Chapter 10, they offered a sacrifice with “strange fire” before The Lord. It appears they kindled the fire for the sacrifice themselves and not from the sacred altar. The prerogative of fire belonged to the Lord alone. Because of their presumption, God killed Nadab and Abihu. Though it may seem alien to our modern sensibilities, the death of Nadab and Abihu was deserved and just, though tragic, Nonetheless. It should be noted that had their sin been one of ignorance, they would have been told to bring a sin-offering. Presumptive sins (those that were deliberate and arrogant) elicited a stronger judgment.
  - Eleazar and Ithamar – the two youngest sons of Aaron. Eleazar followed his father and became the second High Priest in Israel. After the death of their older brothers (Nadab and Abihu), Eleazar and Ithamar were appointed as overseers of the sanctuary in the Tabernacle.

Eleazar's son, Phinehas, became the third High Priest of Israel.

Ithamar was in charge of the transportation of the tabernacle and was overseer of the Levites.

Note: The High Priesthood remained in the family of Eleazar until the time of Eli, who was a descendent of Ithamar. The honor remained in Ithamar's family. Abiathar, a descendant of Ithamar, was removed from office by Solomon and replaced by Zadok (a descendant of Eleazar).

## 6. Key Places

- Mount Sinai – (*The Mountain of Moses*; Jabal Mūsā) is a mountain in the Sinai Peninsula. It is the place where Moses received the Ten Commandments. There is a debate over the identity of the mountain, but its importance to Jews and Christian alike is beyond dispute.

## 7. Key Themes

- Offering (sacrifice)

There are two basic purposes behind each sacrifice of the Israelites:

1. To honor and worship God.
2. To atone for sin and uncleanness.

The life of an animal was often required as a reminder of the seriousness and high cost of sin and unrighteousness.

- Feasts (Holy Days)

Seven feasts or Holy Days were designated as days of celebration and consecration.

- Holy Lives

Daily life was sanctified by observing God's laws concerning diet, sex, and disease. The purpose was two-fold:

1. To protect Israel.
2. To model Holy living to the surrounding nations.

Holiness carried the idea of *separateness* or *devotion* to the Lord.

- The Priesthood

The priests and Levites were often vocational servants who supervised and led Israel in worship and Holy Living.

Note: All priests are Levites (being selected from the tribe of Levi), but not all Levites are priests. Priests belonged to the family of Kohath (Numbers 3:27-32). Other Levites tended to the furniture of the tabernacle and related duties.

Priests were consecrated and sanctified to serve the Lord; other Levites were considered a gift to assist the priesthood. (Exodus 32:25-29; Numbers 1:47-54; 3:21-32; 3:36-37; Exodus 28:1).

Initially, God intended the entire population of Israel to become a nation of priests (Exodus 19:5-6). However, when Israel rebelled against Moses during the Golden Calf incident, only the tribe of Levi stood faithfully at Moses' side (Exodus 32:25-26; Numbers 3:12-13; Deuteronomy 10:8).

God set Levis family apart for special service at that time.

## 8. The Contents of Leviticus

- The Way to God – Sacrifice 1-17

- (1) The offering before God (1-7)

- The Burnt Offering Chapter 1
    - The Grain (meal) Offering Chapter 2
    - The Fellowship (peace) Offering Chapter 3
    - The Sin Offering Chapter 4
    - The Guilt (trespass) Offering Chapter 5
    - The Priestly Offering of the sacrifices Chapter 6, 7

- (2) The Priests of God (8-10)

- The consecration of the priests Chapter 8
    - The ministry of the priests Chapter 9
    - The story of Nadab and Abihu Chapter 10

- (3) The People of God (11-16)

- Clean foods Chapter 11
    - Clean bodies Chapter 12
    - Clean clothes Chapter 13
    - Clean houses Chapter 14
    - Clean living Chapter 15
    - Cleansing through the Blood Chapter 16

- (4) The Altar of God Chapter 17

- The Walk before God – Sanctification (18-27)

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| (1) A Holy People   | Chapter 18-20   |
| God's high view of sex                                    | Chapter 18      |
| Living in honor toward others                             | Chapters 19, 20 |
| (2) A Holy Priesthood                                     | Chapters 21-22  |
| (3) A Holy Calendar                                       | Chapters 23     |
| ○ The Feast of Passover (23:5-14)                         |                 |
| ○ The Feast of Unleavened Bread (23:6-8)                  |                 |
| ○ The Feast of Firstfruits (23:9-14)                      |                 |
| ○ The Feast of Pentecost (23:15-22)                       |                 |
| ○ The Feast of Trumpets (23:23-25)                        |                 |
| ○ The Day of Atonement (23:26-32)                         |                 |
| ○ The Feast of Tabernacles (23:33-34)                     |                 |
| (4) A Holy Land   | Chapters 25-27  |
| ○ Sabbatical and Jubilee years (25:1-4)                   |                 |
| ○ Distribution and regulation of the land (25:23-38)      |                 |
| ○ Liberation of slaves and indentured servants (25:39-55) |                 |
- Summation – The command to obey the Law
    - Blessing and curses (26:1-46)
    - Redemption and gifts (27:1-34)

**Worth noting:**

- Leviticus is best understood if we see that it picks up where Exodus ends – with the Lord speaking to Moses from the *Tent of Meeting*.

The narrative is marked by the phrase “speak to the Israelites and say...” From that point on, the shift in subject matter is marked by the phrase “The Lord said to Moses” (See 4:1; 5:14; 6:1, etc.)

- Leviticus may seem strange to us, but it is helpful if we remember two ideas:

(1) Leviticus must be understood as God establishing concepts, principles and object lessons that help us understand our relationship to God who is Supremely Holy.

(2) The **rules** of the Levitical era were for Israel. The **principles** of Leviticus are eternal. In other words, Levitical rules were timely (for Israel); the Levitical principles are timeless (for us today) see 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11.

- Before Israel's year at Mount Sinai, several elements of God's plan for Israel had not been realized:

(1) The presence of God's Glory (thought manifested as a cloud and pillar of fire) had not come to rest at a place of worship.

(2) The Tabernacle had not existed. Israel had no central, formal place of worship.

(3) A system of sacrifices and liturgy of worship had not been given.

(4) No formal priesthood existed to streamline the worship of Israel.

By the end of Leviticus, all four objectives were reached.

- Rather than focusing on the details of Leviticus, Christians are well-served to:

(1) Observe the Holiness of God.

(2) Observe His willingness to make His people worthy of approaching Him by Grace, through faith (Ephesians 2:8-10).

- The Jewish sacred year

Month	Name	Approximation to our calendar	Feasts and Holy Days
1	Nisan	March – April	(1)Passover, (2) Feast of Unleavened Bread; (3) Days of Firstfruits
2	Iyar	Apr – May	
3	Sivan	May – Jun	(4) Feast of Pentecost
4	Tammuz	Jun – Jul	
5	Ab	Jul – Aug	
6	Elul	Aug – Sept	
7	Tishri	Sept – Oct	(5) (Rosh Hashanah) Feast of Trumpets, (6) Day of Atonement; Yom Kippur (7) Feast of Tabernacles
8	Heshvan	Oct – Nov	
9	Chislev	Nov – Dec	Hanukkah (John 10:22 began about 165 BC)
10	Tebeth	Dec – Jan	
11	Shebat	Jan – Feb	
12	Adar	Feb – Mar	Feast of Purim (begun after Exile ended)

- The offerings/sacrifices

(1) The Burnt offering (voluntary) – Leviticus 1                      A general sin offering.

(2) The Grain offering (voluntary) – Leviticus 2                      An act of worship and adoration of God.

(3) The Fellowship offering (voluntary) – Leviticus 3                      Thanksgiving

(4) The Sin offering (required) – Leviticus 4                      Dealt with unintentional sins.

(5) The Guilt offering (required) – Leviticus 5

Dealt with intentional sins.

- When reading Leviticus
  - Realize the awesome character and Holiness of God.
  - Realize the sinfulness of mankind.
  - Look for Christ in the typology of Leviticus.
  - Appreciate the Law as the foundation for our laws and governance.