



## Week Three Leviticus

n.b. most factual information below is taken from website  
***Grace Communion International***

The opening word of Leviticus is *wayyiqra*, which means "and he called." The Jews used this word as a title for Leviticus. It seems to have been intended as a work principally for the priesthood. The Latin Vulgate version

starts *Liber Leviticus*, "the book of Leviticus," which is book's title in the English Bible.

Leviticus begins where Exodus ends – at the foot of Mt. Sinai. The tabernacle has just been completed, and God now begins to teach the Israelites how to worship him. Through the book of Leviticus, God shows Israel how to live as a holy nation. The book can be divided into six sections: sacrifices and offerings (1:1 - 7:38), the priesthood and the tabernacle (8:1 - 10:20), regulations about life (11:1 - 15:33), the Day of Atonement (16:1-34), living holy lives (17:1 - 22:33) and festivals and various regulations (23:1 - 27:34).

To us, living in a modern society, the rituals and sacrifices explained in Leviticus may seem strange. Yet portions of the New Testament can be understood only by reference to Leviticus. Jesus fulfilled many parts of Leviticus in the New Testament, but it is still important to examine the text to see what it meant for Old Testament Israel. Then we will understand Jesus' context better and also how He fulfilled and transcended the Law.

For example, what does it mean for Christians to be a royal priesthood? A holy nation? For Christ to be our great High Priest? Our Passover Lamb? Much of the original context of these New Testament concepts is found in Leviticus.

But the book is not only a record of laws and traditions that were superseded by the ministry of Jesus Christ. There are many laws, customs, traditions and principles that address such subjects as hygiene, managing the environment and moral conduct. These tell us that God is interested in every detail of our lives, even if we find much of the stipulation odd and irrelevant today. Some of these may still be sound guidelines for us, e.g. the rules about sexual purity in ch 15:1-33.

Above all else, Leviticus teaches us that God is holy. This provides the basis of all his laws. In Leviticus, God is present with his people. In Israel's worship, all sacrifices and ceremonies took place "before the Lord." This teaches us that God is always there and that everything we do must be done in light of his presence.

We also learn that God judges sin. Because God is holy, nothing sinful or unclean can come into his presence. For human beings to develop a relationship with God, they must first be forgiven and cleansed of sin.

The book of Leviticus tells us to worship, serve and obey God only (17:2-9; 20:1-7), to recognize His blessings (e.g. the festivals 23:1-44), to be as concerned about every aspect of our lives as God is (e.g. the rules 18:1 - 22:16) and to deal justly with each other, (19:9-37).

### Other topics

**ANNUAL FESTIVALS:** These festivals and holy days memorialize God's great acts of salvation in history, symbolize the power of God and typify the anticipated future fulfillment of God's plan of salvation for all humanity (Leviticus 23).

**TITHING:** Tithing is the scriptural practice of giving a tenth of one's increase to God. The Israelites paid tithes to the Levites (Leviticus 27). Giving God back a tenth of what belongs entirely to him anyway, recognizes his ultimate ownership of everything.

**COVENANT:** Because God had made his covenant (agreement) with the Israelites, it was imperative that they lived according to his laws. See Leviticus 26 and note the eight references to "covenant" (verses 9, 15, 25, 42, 44-45).

**LEVITES:** The Levites and priests were the ministers of their day. They also regulated the moral, civil and ceremonial laws and supervised the health, justice and welfare programs of the nation.

**COMMUNITY HEALTH:** Leviticus contains rules and guidelines regarding food, disease and sexual purity. Although some of the laws seem arbitrary, others would have promoted hygiene and community health.

### More about Jesus

**SACRIFICE/OFFERING:** Israel's sacrifices were to serve as a reminder of sin (Hebrews 10:3). An animal's life was taken to picture that without the shedding of blood there could be no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22). But the Levitical sacrificial system lasted only until Jesus' death paid the penalty of

sin for all people everywhere. While Jesus is of course not mentioned in Leviticus, the sacrificial system and the office of high priest foreshadow the greater work of Christ for human salvation (Hebrews 3:1; 4:14-16). Hebrews 7 describes Jesus as our High Priest and uses the text of Leviticus as a basis for illustrating his work. Jesus is the eternal High Priest whose work far surpasses that of Aaron and his successors.

As the author of Hebrews states: *"But now [Jesus Christ] has obtained a more excellent ministry.... He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises"* (Hebrews 8:6, NKJV).

Hebrews 9:26-28: *"But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."*

Through the crucifixion, Jesus fulfilled the Levitical concept of the sin offering (Romans 8:1-4; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Hebrews 9:1-1-28; 10:11-12; 13:10-15). In other passages, Paul described Christ as a peace offering (Romans 5:1-11; Ephesians 2:13-18; Colossians 1:18-20).

Christ's death and resurrection meant that the Levitical prescriptions for sacrifice and holiness have been superseded for the Christian by faith in Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:9-19; 15:1-21; Galatians 2:15 - 3:5).

The concepts of separation and holiness were attractive themes to New Testament writers. The apostle Peter reflected the theme of Leviticus when he encouraged Christians to *"be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'"* 1 Peter 1:15 (see Leviticus 11:44; 19:2; 20:7). Peter also called Christians a *"royal priesthood"* and *"a holy nation"* (1 Peter 2:9).

### **What this book means for us**

Leviticus reminds us of the holiness of God and the necessity of living a holy life. Sin is always serious, because God is holy and cannot live with sin. Sin separates human beings from God. If a relationship with God is to be restored, sin must be removed through faith in Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice.

Obedience to God must be important in our lives. Leviticus 1 - 16 may be summed up in the words of Jesus, *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength"* (Mark 12:30).

Being right with God leads us to be right with others. Leviticus 17 - 27 describes godly behavior toward our neighbors. These chapters can be summarized by Leviticus 19:18, *"Love your neighbour as yourself."*

- Family life should be strengthened and protected (18:6 19:3; 20:10-21).
- The poor should be provided for (19:9-10).
- All business transactions must be fair (19:11-13, 35-36).
- Nobody should acquire wealth to the hurt of other citizens (25:8-55)

Leviticus shows that God cares for his people. He has thought through our problems and given us guidance and direction, not just in spiritual, but also in physical matters. He always seeks to forgive us and restore us to his fellowship. God can fully restore Christians today because Christ completely fulfilled the sacrificial system. Only in him do we experience the awesome opportunity to come humbly, yet boldly, before the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16).

### **EXPLORE by yourself (10 mins) and then in groups of 2 or 3:**

EITHER 1. Which of the rules still pertain today – if any – and which should certainly be ditched? What other "rules" are important for our discipleship today? Why? After 10 minutes or so, get into groups and try to agree these; come up with a list of "rules" for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Christian. Write them out for discussion and display.

OR 2. How our understanding of Jesus' redeeming work is helped by understanding the context of Leviticus. Pick one or two aspects (e.g. Jesus as a high priest or Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb or Jesus as our peace) and look up the references from the notes above. Be prepared to feedback what you discover.

THEN 3. Prayerfully write your own "Rule of Life": What "rules" do you personally commit to follow in order to enhance your own discipleship – be specific e.g. in areas such as work, giving, church activities/leadership, rest, study, family and holiday time, retreat times etc etc.

## Outline of the Benedictine life



The **Rule of Saint Benedict** (*Regula Benedicti*) is a book of [precepts](#) written by [St. Benedict of Nursia](#) for [monks](#) living communally under the authority of an [abbot](#). Since about the 7th century it has also been adopted by communities of women. During the 1500 years of its existence, it has become the leading guide in Western Christianity for monastic living in community.

The spirit of St Benedict's Rule is summed up in the motto of the [Benedictine Confederation](#): *pax* ("peace") and the traditional [ora et labora](#) ("pray and work").

*Ora et Labora* (Pray and Work). This 1862 painting by [John Rogers Herbert](#) depicts monks at work in the fields with an abbey (the [Trappist Mount St. Bernard Abbey](#)) in the background

St Benedict's model for the monastic life was the [family](#), with the [abbot](#) as father and all the monks as brothers. Priesthood was not initially an important part of Benedictine monasticism – monks used the services of their local priest. Because of this, almost all the Rule is applicable to communities of women under the authority of an [abbess](#).

St Benedict's Rule organises the monastic day into regular periods of communal and private [prayer](#), sleep, spiritual reading, and manual labour – *ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus*, "that in all [things] God may be glorified" (cf. Rule ch. 57.9). In later centuries, intellectual work and teaching took the place of farming, crafts, or other forms of manual labour for many – if not most – Benedictines.

## **ADDENDUM to LEVITICUS NOTES**

Various points were voiced in the feedback after the group-work on rules for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Christian, and below is a gathering of the written ideas.

### A) General Points

1. "I will write my laws on your hearts" - so basically it is from within our hearts that we keep the commandments. Understand God's heart; trust God and allow Him to work things out. We are under grace, not law.
2. Care for others/respect others/be faithful in relationships.
3. Do not "cherry-pick" the commandments. We should not "ditch" any of God's word.

### B) Giving

1. Acknowledge God's ownership.
2. Be honest in all you do.
3. Live sacrificially.
4. No stealing or deception.
5. Pay bills promptly.
6. Don't keep the benefits of what you have to yourself.
7. Jubilee times –wipe debts clean and do not take interest if one of your countrymen becomes poor. (When might this apply and how might this affect our response to Greece?)
8. Tithe time and skills as well as money.

### C) Family Matters

1. Respect parents.
2. Be sexually pure and avoid incest.
3. Bless mothers after the birth of babies.

### D) Other Laws

1. Keep the Sabbath.
2. Protect the eco-system.
3. Embrace diversity.
4. Treat immigrants as one of your own.
5. Judge fairly and do not spread slander.