

Introduction to Leviticus

After the description of Moses' life, Passover and leaving Egypt - the Book of Exodus was largely devoted to a description of the Ten Commandments and the Tabernacle. At the end of Exodus, the Tabernacle has been completed.

The next book in the Torah is Leviticus. It is largely devoted to the service of the priests and Levites in the Tabernacle.

The location of the "action" in Leviticus does not change. We're still at the foot on Mount Sinai. Leviticus ends with **Leviticus 27:34** - "These are the commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses for the children of Israel in Mount Sinai." After that, Israel's wilderness journeys continue in the Book of Numbers.

The English name of the book comes from the Septuagint title *Levitikon*, based on the word "Levite" - and refers to what the Levites and priests were supposed to do in carrying out God's instructions about sacrifice and other duties, including the sacrifices and offerings. In Hellenistic times, *Levitikon* was used to refer to priests. The Levites are actually mentioned in only two verses in Leviticus, while *kohen* (priest) is commonly used throughout.

That's why the Rabbis called Leviticus "*Torat Kohanim*" - instruction / law for the priests. More than half of the Talmud is concerned with commentary on Leviticus.

The name for Book of Leviticus in Hebrew is "*Vayikra*" - "he called," being the first words of the book: "And He called to Moses, and the Lord spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying..."

Sadly, Leviticus is rarely read or taught on in Christian churches. It's not a "page-turner" and there's not much narrative or storyline or characters. But it is the heart of the larger narrative of the Torah.

Actually, the main character is God Himself, who through a series of speeches lays out the ritual and ethical conditions under which He will dwell in the midst of Israel.

The middle verse of the Torah is **Leviticus 8:8** which speaks about God's communication with the High Priest - "And he put the breastplate upon him: also he put in the breastplate the Urim and the Thummim."

The middle word of the Torah is the word "sin" in **Leviticus 10:16** - "And Moses diligently sought the goat of the sin offering..."

One of the most-used verbs in Leviticus (89 times) is "to bring near" = *hiqrib*, which also means "to offer." This is important in revealing the redeeming work of Christ on the cross as the fulfillment of the sacrifices and offerings that are described.

Ephesians 2:13 - "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are brought

near by the blood of Christ."

Another key word is "separation" = *hibdil*. - Separation of the sacred from the profane, of the clean from the unclean, of Israel from the other nations of the world.

Leviticus devotes many chapters to the different kinds of sacrifices and offerings, and we will examine each one, to see how Christ is foreshadowed in the ritual.

The feasts are listed and described, along with the Jubilee Year and what is required in keeping the Sabbath.

Rituals to remedy different kinds of uncleanness - including leprosy and bodily "issues" - are described. Ethical demands to love your neighbor, care for the poor and the stranger and requirements for sex and marriage and other social interactions are listed along with prohibitions against idolatry. All these point to some aspect of Christ's redemption.

Leviticus is basically revealing God's holiness and what that means, but simultaneously showing how Christ fulfilled that holiness by his sacrifice.

References to Leviticus are all over the New Testament writings.

After his resurrection, Jesus told the disciples on the road to Emmaus:

Luke 24:27 - "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."

- and later to his gathered disciples:

Luke 24:44 - "...These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me."

The focus of Leviticus is this:

Hebrews 9:26 - "...now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

The ideas of redemption and holiness come together in Paul's statement in Colossians. What the sacrifices in Leviticus pointed to but were unable to achieve was complete reconciliation:

Colossians 1:19-23 - "For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and

unblameable and unproveable in his sight"

reconciliation is *apokatallassō*

apo = back again

katallassō = to return to harmony, reconciliation and favor ...with the idea of a mutual exchange. To change, exchange, as coins for others of equal value, to make equal something at variance.

Used in **1 Corinthians 7:11** of reconciliation between husband and wife. With the idea that husband and wife are "one flesh," the "exchange" between Christ and his bride is an exchange of identity.

Let's allow a study of Leviticus to "bring us near" to God as we see different facets of Christ's sacrifice.

See Introduction from "Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy" by Stephen K. Sherwood, David W. Cotter
<https://buff.ly/2t88r0F>