

Introduction to Leviticus

I. Name of the Book

Heb. *Wayyiqra* “And he called...” 1:1 (God now speaks from the tabernacle, not the mountain)
Vulg. From LXX “Pertaining to the Levites” (Levites only in 25:33; priests nearly 200X)

II. Nature of the book—mostly laws guiding the priests

Spoken by God to Moses (1:1; 4:1; 6:1; 8:1; 11:1; 12:1; and so in 17 chapters; Matthew 8:4)

Only two portions concern historical info—

Chs. 8-10 Consecration of the priests and the judgment on Nabab and Abihu
24:10-16 The punishment of a blasphemer

III. Difficulties for modern readers:

- Difficulty in understanding (picturing) the ritual instructions
- Difficulty seeing the relevance of the ritual to us today
- Difficulty in sympathizing with the judgments of God about certain matters

IV. Primary message of the book:

“Be holy, for I am holy” (11:44-45; 19:2/ 1 Peter 1:15-16)

Continual stress on the holiness of God—“I am the Lord [your God]” stated 45 times

“holiness” and its derivatives used 131 times

“clean” and derivatives used 186 times

V. Setting:

- Geographical setting—Mount Sinai (7:38; 25:1; 26:46; 27:34)
- Time setting—9:1 only time reference (“the eighth day”, i.e., after the raising of the tabernacle)

VI. Abiding value of the book

(New Testament alludes to Leviticus over 40X, quotes 15X; Hebrews is commentary)

- Revelation of the character of God
- Inspired civil law code (Deut.4:5-8/ Rom.7:12)
- Inspired moral code (Rom.7:16; 8:4)
- The 2nd Great Commandment (cited 8X in NT—Lev.19:18/ Mat.22:39; Rom.13:9; Gal.5:14; Jas.2:8; Matt.7:12)
- Types and shadows of Christ

VII. Outline of the book:

I. Atonement and Cleanness (justification)

- A. Five Offerings (Chs.1-7)
- B. Priests begin (Chs. 8-10—counterpart to Exodus 28-29)
- C. Uncleanness that debars from the sanctuary (Chs.11-15)
- D. Day of Atonement (Ch.16)

II. The Holiness Code (Chs.17-27) (separation)

- A. Of blood (Ch.17)
- B. Of the people (Chs.18-20)
- C. Of the priests (Chs.21-22)
- D. Of the festivals (Chs.23)
- E. The blasphemer (Ch. 24)
- F. Of the Sabbath and jubilee years (Chs.25)
- G. Blessings and curses (Ch.26)

III. Appendix: Tithes, things dedicated, vows (Ch.27)

The Offerings (Chs.1-7)

1. Burnt offerings (1:1-17 / 6:8-13)

Offered freely at will. Also as continual burnt offerings, mornings and evenings, and for certain special occasions: e.g., Yom Kippur and annual festivals; consecration of the priests; a woman's purification after childbirth (12:6-8); the cleansing of a leper (14:10); the completion of a Nazirite vow (Num.6:10, 14)...

What is offered: Bull without blemish; or male sheep or goat without blemish; or turtledoves or pigeons (no specified gender).

Procedure (with larger animals):

1. The worshipper presents the animal, lays a hand on its head and kills it;
2. The priest
 - Sprinkles blood on the altar
 - Skins and dismembers, washes entrails and legs, burns all on altar all night
 - Changes clothes to remove ashes in the morning to a clean place (6:10-11)

Procedure (with birds):

The priest wrings off head, removes feathers, sprinkles blood on altar, tears carcass open, burns

2. Grain offerings (2:1-16 / 6:14-23)

Offered voluntarily, accompanying other sacrifices (7:12), and possibly alone, at will

What is offered: Fine flour, cakes, wafers, bread, pancakes—without leaven or honey; with salt, oil and frankincense.

Procedure: A handful of the flour (or a portion of the baked goods) is burned with all the frankincense on the altar as a memorial. The rest is food for priests.

3. Peace offerings (3:1-17 / 7:11-21)

Offered voluntarily as a token of gratitude to God (7:12) or in fulfillment of a vow (7:16)

What is offered: Bull or heifer; male or female lamb or goat kid

Procedure:

1. The worshipper presents the animal, lays a hand on its head and kills it;
2. The priest
 - Sprinkles blood on the altar
 - Burns the fat and the kidneys
3. Breast is waved, and right thigh is heaved to the Lord, then eaten by priests
4. The meat is returned to the worshipper, and shared with the poor.

Continued on reverse side

4. Sin offerings (4:1-5:13 / 6:24-30)

Offered, after the fact, on the occasion of learning that one has involuntarily sinned or incurred uncleanness...also on Yom Kippur and many of the special occasions when burnt offerings were offered.

What is offered:

For sins of a priest or the congregation, a bull; for a ruler, a male goat;
for a commoner, a female lamb or goat; for the poor, two birds; for the dirt poor, fine flour.

Procedure:

1. Penitent brings animal, lays a hand on its head, then kills it
2. The priest
 - Manipulates the blood variously (sprinkles 7X before the veil and puts it on horns of the incense altar, and pour out the rest at the foot of the bronze altar, in the case of the priest's and congregation's sins; in the case of a ruler or commoner's sins, the blood is simply put on the horns of the bronze altar and poured out at its foot)
 - Removes fatty portions and kidneys, and burns them
 - Remove the carcass (of a bull) to a clean place outside the camp and burn it. Of the goats and lambs, the flesh can be eaten by males of the priest's family, and the rest burned.

5. Trespass (or guilt) offerings (5:14-6:7 / 7:1-7)

Offered when one's involuntary sin also constitutes a trespass against holy things, or against a neighbor's property

What is offered: A ram, along with a monetary penalty amounting to the value of the damages, plus 20%

Procedure:

1. The penitent brings ram and money to the priest. The priest evaluates the damages and levies the fine;
2. The priest
 - Sprinkles blood on the altar
 - Removes and burns all fatty portions and the kidneys
 - Eats the ram's flesh, with the male members of his family

Additional details about offerings:

The fat and the blood cannot be eaten (7:22-27)

Leaven and honey must not be offered with sacrifices (2:11)

All sacrifices must be offered with salt (2:13)

Putting sacrifices in their proper perspective:

1 Sam.15:22/ Prov. 15:8; 21:27 / Isaiah 1:11ff / Jer.7:22-23 / Hos.6:6 / Amos 5:21-25 / Mic.6:6-8
Psalm 40:6-8 / 51:16-17

Matthew 5:23-24 ; 9:11-13; 12:5-7

Lessons from the Sacrifices

Jesus the Priest—Hebrews 7-10

Clean animals— Acts 10:9-15 / 2 Cor.6:14

Jesus the Lamb—John 1:29 / Rev.5:5-10

Without blemish—1 Peter 1:18-19 / Eph.5:27 / James 1:27

The hand laid on the head—transferral —Lev.1:4; 16:21 / 2 Cor.5:21

Blood shed—Lev.17:11 / Heb.9:22

The blood sprinkled—1 Peter 1:2 / Heb. 9:13-14; 10:22; 12:24

Kidneys (KJV “reins)—Ps.7:9; 26:2; Jer.11:20

Washed entrails—Psalm 51:6 / Luke 11:39 / Rom.7:22 / 2 Cor.4:16

Washed legs—1 John 2:6 / Eph.4:1

With salt—Mark 9:49

Without leaven—sin (1 Cor.5:6-8)

Without honey—carnal pleasure (as opposed to delighting in God alone-Ps.16:11; 37:4)

A sweet aroma—Eph.5:2 / Rom.12:1 / Philip.4:18 / Heb.13:15-16

The unclean carcass outside the gate—Heb.13:11-16