

# The Book of Leviticus

## Living in Light of God's Law

### Westminster Shorter Catechism: Question #3

**Q:** What do the scriptures principally teach?

**A:** The scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.

**Micah 6:8.** He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

**John 20:31.** But these are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you might have life in his name.

**John 3:16.** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

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## A Bird's-Eye View of Leviticus

**Overarching Purpose of Leviticus:** The book of Leviticus was written in order to teach Israel how they were to conduct themselves while in a covenant relationship with the *holy* God who had brought them “out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Exodus 20:2)

### Literary Features

- ◆ Key Questions to Answer: 1) How is Leviticus structured? 2) What does Leviticus mean in the context of the whole Torah?
- ◆ Title: English (Leviticus) comes from ultimately from the Septuagint as translated by the Latin Vulgate and mean “Pertaining to the Levites.” The Hebrew title is taken from the first word of the book— *wayyiqra* (וַיִּקְרָא)—and means, “And he [Yahweh] called.”
- ◆ Genre: “Instructional history” (Tremper Longman III), a blend of law set in the context of historical narrative, namely the time between Israel’s exodus and entrance into Canaan.

◆ Style: Straightforward, clear, highly structured. Focus is not on literary devices, figurative language, or rhetoric. The major take-away from the book are going to come in the theological implications of how Israel (and us) are expected to approach a holy God.

◆ Outline:

Two Major Parts	Further Breakdown of Parts
1. Part One: Worship of the Holy God	1. Laws on Sacrifices and the Priesthood (1:1-7:38) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Instruction for the laity (1:1-6:7)</li> <li>B. Instructions for the priests (6:8-7:38)</li> </ul> 2. Ordination and Ministry of the Priests (8:1-10:20) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. The formal beginning of the priesthood (8:1-9:24)</li> <li>B. Warning about immoral priests—Nadab and Abihu (10)</li> </ul>
2. Part Two: Living with the Holy God	3. Laws on Purity—To Protect Ritual Cleanness (11:1-16:34) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Dietary prescriptions (11)</li> <li>B. Birth laws (12)</li> <li>C. The discernment and cleansing of skin disease (13-14)</li> <li>D. Laws about bodily discharge (15)</li> <li>E. The Day of Atonement (16)</li> </ul> 4. God's Requirements for Holiness; [aka, <i>Holiness Code</i> ] (17-27) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. The laws (17:1-25:55)</li> <li>B. Blessings and Curses (26)</li> <li>C. Making and Keeping Vows (27)</li> </ul>

(*A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament*, by Van Pelt (& RTS faculty))

Compiled outline drawn from *CSB Study Bible* and Tremper Longman III & Dillard, *AITTOT*)

Discussion Question: What purpose does Leviticus serve in the context of the entire Pentateuch (Genesis-Deuteronomy)? Put another way: How does Leviticus fit in the flow of these other books?

## Historical Context

- ◆ Key Questions: 1) What is the author's intended meaning for the original audience? 2) What needs of the audience does Leviticus address?
- ◆ Overall Background: We are looking into some of the details of what happened in the one-year Israel was camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19) until they leave this spot in Numbers 10:11. It is within this immediate context we come to the laws set out in Leviticus. Notice that the law did not come *before* deliverance/salvation from slavery but *afterward*.
- ◆ Author: Not named in the book, but Jewish and church history maintain Moses to be the author (Ex 24:4; 34:28; Jn 5:46). However, various critical scholars push the date a thousand years after Moses, with some saying it was compiled by Ezra (Wenham and Harrison).
- ◆ Audience: Some contend this book was written primarily to priests as a Tabernacle manual for sacrifice, but because so much of this book applies to the laity (common Israelite) it is best to understand the audience to be all of Israel (Gordon J. Wenham)

Discussion Question: Considering the background, author, and audience, what do you think are the needs of the Israelites Moses intended to address in Leviticus?

## Major Motifs of Leviticus

### The Priesthood

“Much of the book is instruction to priests or to laypeople as they interact with priests. The brief narrative sections focus on the ordination of the priesthood and present a story of the dangers inherent in the responsibilities of the priesthood (Lev. 8-10)” ~ Tremper Longman III & Dillard, *AITTOT*

Responsibilities of the Priests	Christ's Fulfillment of the Priesthood
✓ Protected the holiness of the camp by reflecting the holiness of God by being holy themselves (Lev. 8)	✓ Protects the holiness of the church by perfectly reflecting the holiness of God because he himself was God in the flesh (Heb. 7:26)
✓ Protected the holiness of the camp by making sacrifices for themselves and the people (Lev. 1-7; 9)	✓ Protects the holiness of the church by offering himself as a sacrifice (Heb. 7:27)
✓ Protected the holiness of the camp teaching the Israelites the law of God (Lev. 10:11)	✓ Protects the holiness of the church by perfectly upholding and teaching the law to God's people (Matthew 5:17 & chapters 5-7)

## Holiness

*“You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy  
and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.”*

*Leviticus 20:26*

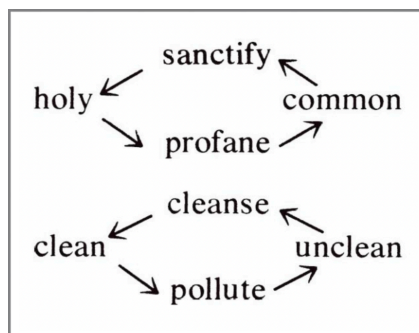
### 1. What is holiness?

- The Hebrew term for holy is **קדש** (Qadosh) and is used 143 in Leviticus (more than any other book of the Bible)
- “...at its heart [holiness] is the idea of something uncommonly special and distinct” (*A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament*, by Van Pelt (& RTS faculty))
- Yahweh is the apex of holiness—for he is utterly holy in his being, morality, and character. We can only understand Yahweh’s holiness in light of our lack of holiness, and we can only understand our unholiness in light of God’s supreme holiness (the two go hand-in-hand).
- Humans are unclean and unholy, sinners who fall far so below the standard of perfect holiness that we cannot be in a relationship with Yahweh unless he himself provides a means for us cleansing and makes us holy.



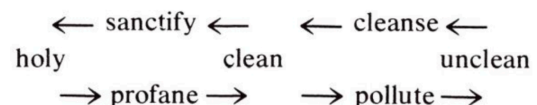
Clean & Unclean // Holy and Common: (Leviticus 10:10) “You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean...”

**Figure One**



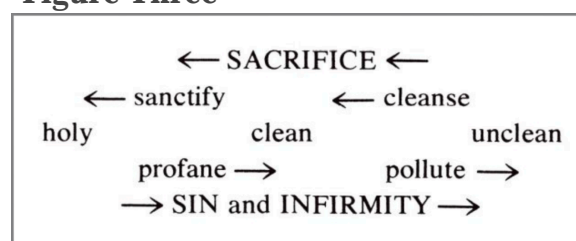
**Figure Two**

The diagrams can be combined as follows:



Cleanness is the ground state; holiness and uncleanness are variations from the norm of cleanness.  
~ Wenham, *Leviticus*

**Figure Three**



## Sacrifice

“According to Leviticus,...sacrificial blood is necessary to cleanse and sanctify. Sacrifice can undo the effects of sin and human infirmity. Sin and disease lead to profanation of the holy and pollution of the clean. Sacrifice can reverse the process.” ~ Wenham, *Leviticus*.

Five Major Sacrifices (“offerings”): 1) whole burnt offering, 2) grain offering, 3) peace/fellowship offering, 4) sin offering, 5) guilt offering. Offerings were made for the purposes of gifts to Yahweh, or a plea for atonement and/or fellowship.

### Purposes of the Sacrifices:

- Atonement: Such as the burnt offering, sin offering, and guilt offering, it was a substitute on behalf of the people for the penalty of sin: *death*
- Gifts to God: Such as the grain offering, it was “a gift made to the sovereign Lord of the Covenant” (Longman III).
- Pleas for Fellowship: Such as the peace offering, it was a sacrifice made to foster communion between God and the people

## ***Holiness and Sacrifice in Redemptive History***

*Jesus Christ, through his ultimate sacrifice on Calvary, has cleansed us and made us holy. We no longer pass from holy to clean to unclean because Christ’s work in us is certain. While we still suffer from bodily ailments (that would otherwise make us unclean) and remaining sin (that otherwise would make us unholy), Christ’s imputed righteousness keeps us in perfect standing before God. Yes, there is coming a day of complete glorification when the kingdom is consummated, and at that time we will never again suffer from sickness and sin as we do now.*

*Nevertheless, because of Christ’s imputed righteousness in us, we are NOW clean and holy in this life!*

*(Acts 10:15; 1 Corinthians 6:11)*

Discussion Question: Regarding the various laws detailed in the book of Leviticus, do those laws have any application for us today (either all or some)? If yes, how do we apply them? If no, why not?