

Reading Leviticus (you can do it!)

The Big Picture

1-7	Laws about sacrifices	18-25	Laws about Israel's moral purity
8-10	Laws for the priests	26	Covenant blessings and curses
11-15	Laws about ritual purity	27	Tithes and offerings
16-17	Atonement for sin		

Key Themes in Leviticus

1. God is holy and he wants his people to be holy

The core idea of holiness (*qodesh*) = to be different, set apart, sacred, consecrated. Yahweh is the source of holiness, and relationship with him requires holiness.

Key Words: when you see the words "holy, holiness, sacred, consecrate" look closely at who or what is holy, and if there are any reasons given why they are or should be holy.

- Holy God (11:44, 19:2, 20:26)
- Holy people: Israelites (see Exodus 19:6) > the priests (Exodus 40:12-15)
- Holy places: tabernacle, the ark of the covenant (see Exodus 40:1-11)
- Holy times: Sabbath, appointed feasts (Leviticus 23)

2. Israel was called to *Ritual Purity* by keeping symbolic distinctions between what is pure and impure, holy and profane, life and death.

Lev 10:10 "You must distinguish between the holy and the profane, between the impure and the pure."

- Sources of Ritual Impurity
 - Certain animals (Lev 11)
 - Dead bodies (Lev 11)
 - Childbirth (Lev 12)
 - Mold and Skin Diseases (Lev 13-14)
 - Genital Discharges (Lev 15)
- Why do these cause impurity? In Israelite culture each of these was associated with death (losing bodily fluids, skin disease, pigs were sacrificed to Canaanite gods, etc.) which violates God's essence.
- Leviticus provides rituals for becoming pure again (washing, sacrifices, waiting)

3. Israel was called to *Moral Purity*: Holiness extends to ALL areas of human life

- Israel is called to be holy and different from the broken and sinful cultural practices of the Canaanite (see 18:1-5, 18:24-30; 20:22-24)
 - **Remember the Sinai Covenant in Exodus 19:5-6:** Holiness serves to mark Israel as distinct from the nations for their role in God's mission. > This is the same role of holiness in the New Testament: See 1Peter 1:13-16, 2:9
- Moral holiness was permeate all areas of human life and culture; all of life is lived before God
 - Food [Lev 11]
 - Sex [Lev 18]
 - Agriculture [Lev 19:9-10]
 - Social Justice [Lev 19:15, 35-37]
 - Health [Lev 13-15]
 - Business [Lev 19:19]
 - Community relationships [Lev 19:11-13]
 - Time Rhythms [Lev 23, 25]

4. Relationship with a holy God requires sacrifices to atone for human sin and moral failure

- Sacrifices are a way of offering thanks and praise (Lev 2-3; 6:14-23; 7:11-21)
- Sacrifices are God's chosen method of *forgiving* the people and *repairing* the relationship :
"Atonement" = "at-one-ment" = reconciliation of what is separate: כִּפֹּר - *kipper* = "to cover over" = to erase the wrong between two parties
- **Key Words:** When readings chapters 1-7 look for the words "atone, atonement" and "forgive": pay attention to how atonement is linked with the forgiveness of sins.
- Lev 17:10-11: Atoning sacrifice is the substitution of the animal's life for the sinner's life.