



LEVITICUS

A 12-WEEK STUDY

Michael LeFebvre



J. I. Packer

THEOLOGICAL EDITOR

Dane C. Ortlund

SERIES EDITOR

“This series is a tremendous resource for those wanting to study and teach the Bible with an understanding of how the gospel is woven throughout Scripture. Here are gospel-minded pastors and scholars doing gospel business from all the Scriptures. This is a biblical and theological feast preparing God’s people to apply the entire Bible to all of life with heart and mind wholly committed to Christ’s priorities.”

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KNOWING THE BIBLE

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Genesis	Ecclesiastes	John	Colossians/
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Ruth, Esther	Hosea	2 Corinthians	Revelation
Ezra, Nehemiah	Matthew	Galatians	
Psalms	Mark	Ephesians	
Proverbs	Luke	Philippians	

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Michael LeFebvre

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S E R I E S P R E F A C E

KNOWING THE BIBLE, as the series title indicates, was created to help readers know and understand the meaning, the message, and the God of the Bible. Each volume in the series consists of 12 units that progressively take the reader through a clear, concise study of that book of the Bible. In this way, any given volume can fruitfully be used in a 12-week format either in group study, such as in a church-based context, or in individual study. Of course, these 12 studies could be completed in fewer or more than 12 weeks, as convenient, depending on the context in which they are used.

Each study unit gives an overview of the text at hand before digging into it with a series of questions for reflection or discussion. The unit then concludes by highlighting the gospel of grace in each passage (“Gospel Glimpses”), identifying whole-Bible themes that occur in the passage (“Whole-Bible Connections”), and pinpointing Christian doctrines that are affirmed in the passage (“Theological Soundings”).

The final component to each unit is a section for reflecting on personal and practical implications from the passage at hand. The layout provides space for recording responses to the questions proposed, and we think readers need to do this to get the full benefit of the exercise. The series also includes definitions of key words. These definitions are indicated by a note number in the text and are found at the end of each chapter.

Lastly, for help in understanding the Bible in this deeper way, we would urge the reader to use the ESV Bible and the *ESV Study Bible*, which are available online at www.esvbible.org. The *Knowing the Bible* series is also available online. Additional 12-week studies covering each book of the Bible will be added as they become available.

May the Lord greatly bless your study as you seek to know him through knowing his Word.

J. I. Packer
Lane T. Dennis

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW



Getting Acquainted

Leviticus—the center book of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible)—reveals the heart of Old Testament law.¹ Portions of the law teach the holiness God requires of his people. Other portions teach the forgiveness God offers to restore sinners to holiness. The major focus of Leviticus is atonement,² God’s provision for forgiveness. Readers often find Leviticus difficult to understand since it is written in the language of ancient ritual, with rules about festivals, sacrifices, ritual washings, and the like. Nevertheless, rich lessons on the atonement offered through Christ will reward those who undertake its study.

As we begin our study of Leviticus, it will help to bear in mind that ritual is “acted theology.” Rituals are prescribed actions whereby the Old Testament people of God expressed and passed on what they believed about sin³ and atonement. Their method of expressing faith (i.e., ritual) is unfamiliar to many modern readers; but as we explore the Levitical rites in this study, the truths confessed by Old Testament believers will become delightfully familiar to New Testament Christians.

Reading Leviticus is like rummaging through an old chest in the attic. Though confronted with many strange items from a bygone era, the photos you encounter present faces of ancestors with a striking resemblance to your own. Likewise, the rituals of Leviticus are unfamiliar relics of a bygone era, but in them we discern the early outlines of the same gospel⁴ we cherish as Christians. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 211–216; available online at www.esvbible.org.)

Placing It in the Larger Story

Leviticus is the third of the five Books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Exodus brought the people out of Egypt to Mount Sinai, where the tabernacle was constructed. Numbers will take the people from Mount Sinai to the border of the Promised Land. Nestled in between those two books, Leviticus takes place during the course of one month at the foot of Mount Sinai (Ex. 40:17; Num. 1:1). It was the first month of the tabernacle's operation, when the people learned lessons on communion with God, who dwelt in their midst. The book's rich descriptions of sacrifices, moral holiness, and ritual purity provided ancient Israel with a gripping vision for living at one ("at-one-ment") with God.

The New Testament teaches that Jesus came to fulfill the atonement taught in the Old Testament law (Matt. 5:17). That means the rituals of the law should no longer be practiced (Heb. 8:13; 10:1), but it also means that we can gain insight into Christ's work by studying those rituals (Luke 24:27). The Old Testament law (including Leviticus) is like the blueprints of a building: once the building is finished, its blueprints are no longer needed, but they are still useful for understanding the finished product. When we study these "blueprints" of atonement, we explore the riches of what Christ came to fulfill.

Key Verse

"The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life" (Lev. 17:11).

Date and Historical Background

It is not clear how soon Leviticus was written after the events it records. Scholars have advanced numerous theories concerning the production of the Pentateuch (including Leviticus), but there is no conclusive reason to question the testimony preserved within Scripture. Moses is identified in Leviticus itself as the one who received the laws from God contained in its pages, and Moses is elsewhere described as writing down various collections of the laws God gave at Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:4, 7; Deut. 31:9, 24). For these reasons, Moses has traditionally been recognized as the primary author of the entire Pentateuch, including Leviticus. That would mean Leviticus was originally written during Moses' lifetime, in the fifteenth or thirteenth century BC.

Outline

The outline used in this study is based on the presence of a pattern called *chiasm*. In a chiasm, the first half of the text presents a series of topics, which the second half repeats in reverse order. The center of the chiasm (where the two halves meet) is the focal point of the text. The following chiasm points to the Day of Atonement (IV) as the focus of Leviticus. Three topic categories are repeated in mirror image on both sides of that center: Sacrifices (I/VII), Priesthood (II/VI), and Cleanness/Holiness (III/V). The closing set of Blessings and Curses (VIII) is located outside the chiasm as a seal to close the book.

- I. Sacrifices (1:1–7:38)
- II. Priesthood: Its Appointment (8:1–10:20)
- III. Laws of Clean and Unclean (11:1–15:33)
- IV. Day of Atonement (16:1–34)
- V. Laws of Holy and Unholy (17:1–20:27)
- VI. Priesthood: Its Continuation (21:1–22:33)
- VII. Sacrifice Festivals (23:1–25:55)
- VIII. Blessings, Discipline, and Responses (26:1–27:34)

As You Get Started

Have you ever studied or heard a sermon series about Leviticus? What key lessons have you learned from Leviticus in the past, and what do you hope to gain from this study?

Have you ever studied the New Testament book of Hebrews, which offers significant interpretations for several important rituals from Leviticus? What have you learned about the Old Testament festivals and sacrifices from Hebrews or other New Testament books?

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW

A wedding ceremony is one setting in which rituals are still commonly practiced. As we think about how rituals express beliefs, discuss several symbolic aspects of a wedding and the truths about marriage expressed by those actions.

Jesus came to be the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). How do you expect this study of Leviticus to help you grow in grace and joy in Christ?

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Read Hebrews 9:23–28 and pray for God’s Spirit to enrich your faith in Christ through your study of Leviticus’s shadows of his work of atonement.

Definitions

¹ **Law** – When spelled with an initial capital letter, “Law” refers to the first five books of the Bible (see also Pentateuch). The law contains numerous commands of God to his people, including the Ten Commandments and instructions regarding worship, sacrifice, and life in Israel. The NT often uses “the law” (lower case) to refer to the entire body of precepts set forth in the books of the Law.

² **Atonement** – The reconciliation of a person with God, often associated with the offering of a sacrifice. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ made atonement for the sins of believers. His death satisfied God’s just wrath against sinful humanity, just as OT sacrifices symbolized substitutionary death as payment for sin.

³ **Sin** – Any violation of or failure to adhere to the commands of God, or the desire to do so.

⁴ **Gospel** – A common translation for a Greek word meaning “good news,” that is, the good news of Jesus Christ and the salvation he made possible by his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. “Gospel” with an initial capital letter refers to each of the biblical accounts of Jesus’ life on earth (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).

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THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS can be challenging for contemporary readers, but its pages are filled with spiritual riches. More than just archaic rules, the laws outlined in this book reveal God’s holy character and the forgiveness he offers to all who sincerely repent.

In this accessible study, pastor Michael LeFebvre helps readers understand how the rituals in the Old Testament law point to Christ’s work of atonement on the cross—highlighting the riches of the gospel foreshadowed in the Old Testament for Christians today.

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- Illuminate the doctrines taught in each passage
- Invite you to discover practical implications
- Help you better understand and apply God’s Word

“*Knowing the Bible* brings together a gifted team of Bible teachers to produce a high-quality series of study guides.”

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