

LEVITICUS



THE FIRST
testament

The First Testament

Why is this series called “The First Testament”? Words often communicate unintentional messages. While we have called the testaments “Old” and “New” for centuries, these labels have had an unfortunate consequence: for many, the word “old” conveys the ideas of irrelevance and being outdated. Nothing could be farther from the truth! Paul wrote, “Such things were written in the Scriptures long ago to teach us. And the Scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God’s promises to be fulfilled.” Romans 15:4 (NLT). When he wrote this, he was speaking of the Old Testament! Perhaps a better set of titles would be the “First” and “Second” testaments; together they give us the message of hope! The First Testament, two-thirds of the Bible, gives us the foundation from which Christ fulfills God’s will!

How to Use

The intent of this series is to be primarily a discussion-based study of the First Testament. Because ancient writings and cultures can be hard to identify with, the format is set up with passages of scriptures, some clarifying explanation and/or backstory, and directed questions. The goal is for students to process the information and come to conclusions through interaction, making it far more memorable.

While the study could be led with minimal preparation, it will be more effective if the leader has read through the passages of scripture and become familiar with the stories and the meanings behind them ahead of time. Modify it as needed to fit your group!

Author

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Born in San Diego

Leviticus

- Genre: Law
- Written: 1440-1400 B.C.
- Author: Moses

The book of Leviticus was written for the Israelites as a guidebook for worship and temple procedures. There are instructions for both the priests and the people. As such, it is particularly challenging for the modern reader because like any instruction manual, it is full of lists and details that lack excitement. The challenge is magnified by its age; written around 1400 B.C., it is rooted in ancient religious culture and practice, making it confusing and strange to students today.

Leviticus claims Moses as its author, through the inspiration of God. While it is believed to have been edited in the years since that writing to reflect adjustments to temple worship and practice, Jewish tradition recognizes Moses as the primary author.¹

Leviticus has three main themes; (1) holiness, (2) sin, sacrifice and atonement, and (3) worship. It is important as students read through Leviticus for them to remember that it is a step in God's plan to bring about salvation for His children. Some of the instructions contained in it were never meant to be definitive for all time, rather, they were one step in the process of bringing God's followers closer to His likeness.

Study Overview

- Week 1, Leviticus Says What?!?
- Week 2, Aaron's Redemption
- Week 3, So Much Sex!
- Week 4, Love Your Neighbor

Resource Ideas

Overview videos that could be used with any of the lessons:

- The Bible Project: The Book of Leviticus, <https://youtu.be/WmvyrLXoQio>
- The Bible Project: Overview of Leviticus, <https://youtu.be/IJ-FekWUZzE>
- The Fabulous Bentley Brothers (Rhett & Link) – Leviticus song, <https://youtu.be/IGL0bYzxLMY>

¹ *NIV Archaeological Study Bible: An Illustrated Walk through Biblical History and Culture: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Kindle location 10125.

LEVITICUS

WEEK ONE
LEVITICUS SAYS WHAT?!?



THE FIRST
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Week One | Leviticus Says What?!?

Key Passages: Leviticus 1:1-2a, 19:2

Goal

The goal for students is two-fold; first, to see the role Leviticus plays in revealing our sin. Secondly, to be challenged with God's holiness and our calling to be holy like Him.

Introduction

Introduce this week's topic with this scene from the 2012 movie, "Hyde Park on Hudson." Set in 1939, as war looms with Germany, the King of England visits America. In this scene, he is introduced to the hot dog; a food he has no idea how to eat, and yet is an American cultural staple.

Hyde Park on Hudson, "A Special Relationship," (2:18) <https://youtu.be/i5ogNBaY2BY>

Discuss

- Why is this scene comical? Explain.
- In the grand scheme of history, the United States has not been separated from England for all that long; how can we be so different?
- Have you ever experienced first-hand differences in culture? What was it like?

Background

Leviticus is an intimidating book for Christians. Written 3400 years ago, it is an ancient, and at times confusing, book. People joke about it being a "Bible Reading Plan Killer." Filled with seemingly bizarre rules, it can be confusing to modern readers. For example:

- Keep your hair combed and your clothes free of rips or it's the death penalty (Leviticus 10:6).
- Don't eat rats or lizards – was it really happening so much they needed a law about it (Leviticus 11:29)?
- No blended fabrics in your clothing (Leviticus 19:19)!
- Cursing your parents equals the death penalty (Leviticus 20:9).

There are a couple important things for modern day readers to remember when diving into Leviticus; the first is that this was written in a different time, to a culture far removed from our own, in another language, and in circumstances unique to that time and place. In other words, just as the king of England was mystified by a hot dog, we will be far more mystified by the ancient customs and values encountered in Leviticus.

The second thing is this; the laws of Leviticus are not set in concrete. In fact, we are released from them because of Jesus (Romans 7:6). They are, however, a stepping stone to guide the newly freed Israelites away from the pagan practices of Egypt to the

holiness of God, creating a foundation that would one day reveal salvation through Christ.

Which begs the question, if we are released from Leviticus, why should we study it?

Romans 15:4 (NLT)

Such things were written in the Scriptures long ago to teach us. And the Scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promises to be fulfilled.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NLT)

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. ¹⁷ God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

Observe

Fun fact: Leviticus was the first book that Israelite children were required to study and memorize!²

When Paul wrote Romans and the second letter to Timothy, the New Testament didn't exist – it was literally being written, and it wouldn't be for a couple more centuries before it was finalized. Which means that Paul was writing about the First Testament (Old Testament) when he said these things about scripture.

Discuss

- What do we learn from these two passages about why Leviticus was written?
- What is God's purpose in inspiring Leviticus?
- Why is it important that we realize what is wrong in our lives? Isn't that negative?
- God preserved Leviticus for a reason; what are some steps that we can take today to help us see what God wants to teach us from it?

What is Leviticus?

Leviticus 1:1-2a (NLT)

¹ The Lord called to Moses from the Tabernacle and said to him, ² "Give the following instructions to the people of Israel."

While Leviticus was written around the same time and events as Exodus, it is a very different book. Where Exodus was history, **Leviticus is essentially a guidebook**, both to the religious leaders on how to be priests, and to the people on how to worship God through the sacrificial system. Because they were emerging from centuries of living in

² Gordon J. Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2016). 81.

Egypt, a pagan nation, God needed to draw firm lines to separate them from the world around them and the pagan religious practices they had been exposed to.

As Rob Bell notes in his commentary on Leviticus, it is a guide to living life with intention, giving meaning and significance to every aspect of their lives. It is part of an ongoing process, bringing the people one step at a time to something good that is fulfilled in Christ.³

Discuss

Hebrews 10:1 (NLT)

The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves. The sacrifices under that system were repeated again and again, year after year, but they were never able to provide perfect cleansing for those who came to worship.

Matthew 5:17 (NLT)

[Jesus speaking:] “Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose.”

Romans 3:20 (NLT)

For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are.

- Why couldn’t the old system (Leviticus) provide perfect cleansing?
- What was the purpose of the law and prophets that Jesus came to accomplish? How did He do so?
- In what ways does the law show us how sinful we are?
- Did you ever have a time where you were informed of rules and realized you had been doing something wrong without realizing it? In what ways could we be unaware of our sinfulness without the law?
- Why do you think God had His people follow the law for centuries before getting to Jesus? Why not just send Jesus to begin with?
- In what way does Leviticus give us hope? [It communicates God’s desire to reach out to sinful mankind, to give hope of restoration.]

A Call to Holiness

Leviticus 19:2 (NLT)

Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.

The command to be holy because God is holy is one that is repeated over and over in Leviticus. The dictionary defines holiness as being “morally and spiritually excellent.”

³ Rob Bell, *Blood, Guts & Fire: The Gospel According to Leviticus*, <https://robbell.com/portfolio/leviticus/>

We follow a God who is morally and spiritually perfect; He is perfectly holy. The law reveals sin – it reveals the lack of holiness, and why we need a Savior. For the ancient Israelites, part of that pursuit of holiness meant being separate from the pagan world around them; laws about hair, clothing, and food, were not intended for all time – as we’ve seen. But in that moment in time, they did create ways for the Israelites to clearly identify themselves as being separate from the world and followers of God.

While we are released from Leviticus, the command to be holy is one that stands today because it is repeated frequently in the New Testament. For example;

1 Peter 1:16 (NLT)

For the Scriptures say, “You must be holy because I am holy.”

Discuss

- What are rules and/or cultural things that we have today that would be strange to the ancient Israelites? What are examples of laws that make sense today but would be bizarre 3400 years ago?
- How does the conversation on culture change your perceptions of the laws in Leviticus?
- How would you explain what holiness is? Is holiness possible?
- Why would God want the Israelites to be separate from the world around them? Why would God want their separate-ness to be so apparent, with laws impacting even their daily activities?
- We know now that being holy because God is holy is a call to be like Christ; what does that look like? Explain.
- In what ways are we to be separate from the world around us today?
- What are some practical ways that you should be separate from the world at school? On the sports team? In a club or theater group? With your family?
- Being like Christ also means being IN the world; what are some practical ways you can be like Christ at school? On a sports team? In a club or theater group? With your family?

Close in Prayer

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