

WHAT
THE **OLD**
TESTAMENT

AUTHORS REALLY
CARED ABOUT

A **SURVEY** of Jesus' Bible

JASON S. DEROUCHIE

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What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About: A Survey of Jesus' Bible

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LEVITICUS

Who?

Leviticus is a series of divine speeches with no explicitly cited author. Many scholars have theorized that multiple authors penned the book. However, Moses is by far the central mediating figure in Leviticus, and he is the most likely candidate to have written the material. God frequently speaks to Moses with words of guidance for the people (e.g., Lev. 1:1–2; 4:1–2; 5:14), and Moses is portrayed as God’s mouthpiece (8:5, 31; 9:1–2, 6–7, 23; 10:3–6, 12; 24:23). Later biblical figures allude to Leviticus as being from the law (of Moses) (Matt. 22:37–40), and they speak of laws in Leviticus as having come from the prophet’s command (Mark 1:44 with Lev. 14:2–32; John 8:5 with Lev. 20:10; cf. Deut. 22:22–24). Thus, there is good reason to assume that Moses wrote the book.

When?

The book’s final verse clarifies its contents: “the commandments that the LORD commanded Moses for the people of Israel on Mount Sinai” (Lev. 27:34). As such, Leviticus was likely composed during the forty-year span following this Sinai experience but before Moses’ death and Israel’s entry into Canaan in ca. 1406 B.C. (though some posit ca. 1210 B.C.).

Where?

The text clearly indicates that the teachings of Leviticus appeared first at Sinai (27:34), and the book as a whole makes up the largest and most central material within the larger Sinai narrative (Exod. 19–Num. 10). If the proposal

for authorship and date is correct, the book was likely composed at Mount Sinai or in the wilderness en route to Canaan.

Why?

Although it is often neglected, Leviticus provides a vital canonical witness to God’s holiness and to the “good news” announced to the exodus generation (see Heb. 4:2, 6). Anticipating in beautiful ways the work of Messiah Jesus, the book served as a guide to worship and ethics, clarifying how priests and laity were to behave properly before a holy God. It also testifies to God’s sustained gracious work announced in the previous books:

1. The opening announcement that “the LORD called to Moses ... from the tent of meeting” recalls the end of Exodus when God’s presence filled the Tent (Lev. 1:1; cf. Exod. 40:34–38) and reinforces that the holy God had taken initiative to relate with a sinful people (see Exod. 34:9).
2. Affirming Israel’s mission to be a “holy people” in the midst of a cursed world (Exod. 19:6), Yahweh called Israel to “be holy, for I am holy” (Lev. 20:26; cf. 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7; 21:8) and clarified how this would be done—“I am the LORD who sanctifies you” (20:8; cf. 21:8, 15, 23; 22:9, 16, 32).
3. “I ... will be your God” (26:12; cf. 11:45; 22:33; 25:38)—Yahweh’s covenant commitment made first to Abraham (Gen. 17:8) and then reaffirmed to Israel (Exod. 6:7) would continue.

D. Jeffrey Mooney and
Jason S. DeRouchie

Carefully Crafted Verses from Leviticus

“Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified” (Lev. 10:3).

“I am the LORD your God.... You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD” (Lev. 18:1–2, 5).

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD” (Lev. 19:18).

“Consecrate yourselves ... and be holy, for I am the LORD your God. Keep my statutes and do them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you.... You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine” (Lev. 20:7–8, 26).

THE AUTHOR OF LEVITICUS ...

- Proclaimed the reality and implications of *God’s holiness*.
- Clarified the place of *sacrifice and atonement* in covenant worship.
- Distinguished *the holy and common, the unclean and clean* in covenant worship.
- Called Israel to *display holiness* through the practice of covenant ethics.

The Author of Leviticus Proclaimed the Reality and Implications of God's Holiness

In contrast to Genesis and Exodus, which are dominated by a clear story line, Leviticus served principally as a manual for worship and ethics. No group of worshippers in history would have been more convinced of God's love for them than Israel's Sinai generation. Those called to worship in Leviticus had seen love displayed in raw acts of power and redemption, both in deliverance from Egypt's grip (Exod. 7–15) and in forgiveness from sin (Exod. 17; 32–34). Modern worship is often characterized by ethos, talent, polish, and celebration over an assumed love provided by God to his darling worshippers. In sharp contrast, worship in Leviticus is marked by danger, expulsion, personal and corporate ethics, burning flesh, dried blood, sin, impurity, death, and a marked distinction between Israel and their holy redeemer God.

Within Leviticus, vivid portrayals of God's holiness are interwoven with graphic depictions of salvation through judgment.

Figure 4.1. Leviticus at a Glance

Covenant Worship Chs. 1–16	Guidance for Sacrifices, Consecration of Priests, Clean and Unclean Laws, Day of Atonement
Covenant Ethics Chs. 17–27	Holiness Code, Festivals, Blessings and Curses

Within Leviticus, Moses clearly displayed God alone as supremely holy (“I am holy”—Lev. 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:26; 21:8). While this holiness included Yahweh's unique love for Israel above all other nations (Exod. 19:4–6), it also comprised God's absolute distinction (i.e., transcendence) from every created thing. He must not be taken lightly! On the heels of God's filling the tabernacle (40:34–35), the two sons of Aaron the high priest—Nadab and Abihu—approached God with “unauthorized fire” (Lev. 10:1). We can only theorize what the nature of this act was, but the text is clear that they were violating the heart of priestly responsibilities. The result was definitive: “And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died” (10:2; cf. Num. 3:4). Immediately after their death, Moses told Aaron that the younger priests' should have taken God's holiness more seriously (Lev. 10:3).

Unlike the “gods” of Israel’s neighbors, Yahweh could not be manipulated, bribed, or controlled by any human action. His purposes were not contingent on the people’s libations, prayers, sacrifices, songs, or offerings. He was alive and untamed apart from Israel, and his commitment to them was grounded in grace alone apart from any merit they had. Where he dwelt was holy and implicitly dangerous to any who would treat it as otherwise (10:2; 16:2). Thus, the life of worship had to assume the realistic distinction between the worshipper and the object of worship. Because Yahweh was holy, his people must in turn be holy, relating to God with true repentance (5:5, 17), humility (9:24; 10:3), and dependent surrender (e.g., ch. 19). Only in this way could they enjoy sustained life (i.e., covenant blessings) in relation to God (26:1–13). Carelessly engaging God at the tabernacle or demonstrating the same negligence by unethical living would result in catastrophe—namely, the covenant curses, involving the removal of all divine provision and protection and the loss of their distinct identity and purpose in life (26:14–33).



“In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of solemn rest, a memorial proclaimed with blast of trumpets, a holy convocation” (Lev. 23:24). *Jewish man blowing a shofar at the Western Wall, Jerusalem.*

Most people in the world today have “no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom. 3:18). The new covenant call is to “work out your own salvation *with fear and trembling*” (Phil. 2:12), accounting both for the greatness of God and our need for dependence on him (see Jer. 32:39–40).

The Author of Leviticus Clarified the Place of Sacrifice and Atonement in Covenant Worship

Unfortunately, the most popular theme in Leviticus is the reason most people fail to read the book. Moses provided a system of regulations concerning sacrifice and atonement that was to help Israel realistically assess, repent from, and gain atonement for their sin, so as to maintain the presence of God in their midst. There are five major offerings that appear in Leviticus. The first, fourth, and fifth dealt with unintentional and intentional sins, whereas the second and third were expressions of gratitude and communion, respectively: (1) the whole burnt offering, (2) the grain offering, (3) the peace offering, (4) the sin (purification) offering, and (5) the guilt (reparation) offering.

Figure 4.2. Major Old Testament Sacrifices and Offerings

1. Burnt	Pre-tabernacle this was the only offering to atone for sin; after the tabernacle it is an optional act of worship that atoned for sins in general, accompanied other offerings, and expressed devotion, commitment, and complete surrender to Yahweh (Lev. 1:1–17; 6:8–13; cf. 8:18–21; 16:24). God alone consumed the burnt offering.
2. Grain	As a recognition of God's goodness and provision, this optional act of worship expressed devotion to God and regularly accompanied other offerings (Lev. 2:1–16; 6:14–23). The priests consumed the grain offering.
3. Peace (Fellowship)	This optional act of worship celebrated the offerer's fellowship with Yahweh and was given in the context of thanksgiving, vows, general praise (i.e., "free will"), or ordination (Lev. 3:1–17; 7:11–36). The offerer consumed the peace offering (except the priestly portions).
4. Sin (Purification)	Mandatory atonement for contamination of God's holy places or objects; the focus was on purification or consecration of individuals or community after specific sins, whether prohibitive ("don't's) or performative ("do's), unintentional (negligence or ignorance) or intentional (Lev. 4:1–5:13; 6:24–30; cf. 8:14–17; 16:3–22, 29–34). The priests consumed the sin offering (unless the offering was their own, in which case the whole animal was burned outside the camp).
5. Guilt (Reparation)	Mandatory atonement for desecration of God's holy things or the property of others; the focus was on re-consecration of God's sacred things or people with compensation (restitution of what was violated + 1/5) for specific sins against others, whether prohibitive ("don't") or performative ("do"), unintentional (negligence or ignorance) or intentional (Lev. 5:14–6:7; 7:1–10; cf. Num. 5:6–8). The priests consumed the guilt offering.
Prepared by Jason S. DeRouchie with some material drawn from Richard E. Averbeck, "Offerings and Sacrifices," in <i>NIDOTTE</i> 4:1020–21.	

The text describes each offering twice. The first descriptions appear in Leviticus 1:1–6:7 and detail the procedures and purposes of the offerings, with special emphasis given to the responsibilities of the laity. The second appear in 6:8–7:10 and clarify the handling, eating, and disposal of the offerings, with special focus given to the work of the priest. The severity of the sacrificial act, namely the destruction of life, conveys the chasm between God's holiness and Israel's natural state. Yet, sacrifice resulted in God's pleasure in and forgiveness or purification of an individual, group, or object.

The Seriousness of Sin and the Need for Sacrifice

Moses presented sin as a concrete act of covenant hostility that had contaminating results. Sin was an Ebola virus-like substance that attached itself to people, animals, the various areas of the tabernacle (Lev. 15:31; 20:3), and the land as a whole (18:25, 27–28; Num. 35:33–34). Through sacrificial

worship, Israel effectively dealt with sin of all types, appeasing God’s wrath against it. Sacrifice in Leviticus included transfer of sin and impurity *via* the vital act of placing one’s hand onto the sacrificial animal (e.g., Lev 1:4; 4:4, 15, 24, 29, 33). By the imposition of hands a declaration was made that “this figure now represents me,” whether for a whole life consecrated to Yahweh or, as with the sacrifices related to sin, for a sinful life standing under God’s wrath. It further represented the public act of repentance (i.e., casting off sin), which was required of every true worshipper (4:13, 22, 27; 5:2, 3, 4, 5, 17; 6:4, 5; cf. 5:5; 16:21; 26:40; Num. 5:6; 1 John 1:9). Sinners who refused to repent (sinning with a “high hand” in Num. 15:30–31) found no respite in sacrifice (Pss. 24:3–5; 51:16–17; see Heb. 10:26–27). However, those who did publicly lay claim to their sin found forgiveness through the concrete transfer of their sin to the sacrificial animal. The animal’s blood in turn became diseased with the sin-contamination and in this sense, also functioned as the human’s penal substitute.



“If his gift for a burnt offering is from the flock, from the sheep or goats, he shall bring a male without blemish” (Lev. 1:10). *A shepherdess with a lamb in a Negeb riverbed.*

The Result of Sacrifice: Atonement

God is a holy and just judge who must take sin seriously. For him to remain just, he must punish sin. In Leviticus, atonement is the process by which God purifies and (re-)consecrates his contaminated and desecrated tabernacle and people by pouring out his wrath on the sinner or onto a substitute, thus restoring the relationship and right order. Moses characterized sacrificial blood like a sponge that could soak up (and thus remove) the sins of the true worshipper (Lev. 17:11; cf. Num. 35:33; Heb. 9:22). Through the transfer from sinner to substitute, the sacrificial animal and ultimately its blood would become “diseased” with the worshipper’s sins. The priest then deposited the sacrificial blood at various places in the tabernacle compound (depending on whether the sacrifice was for priest or laity) and then burned the sacrificial fat on the altar, thus securing atonement (e.g., Lev. 1:4–5; 4:17–18, 20,

Even today, “if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries” (Heb. 10:26–27). However, when repentance is linked with a true trust in Jesus as our atoning sacrifice, “If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

25–26, 30–31, 34–35; 5:9–10). The sin-diseased blood would then remain within the tabernacle compound until the Day of Atonement (ch. 16).

If our God is a just judge, how could he have freely forgiven Old Testament figures like Rahab the prostitute and David the adulterer and murderer? How was it right for him to accept an animal death to pay for a human offense—especially when “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:4)? Paul told us that, although “in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins,” God the Father sent his Son as the wrath-bearing, sacrificial substitute in order “to show his righteousness at the present time, *so that he might be just* and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:25–26). Because of Christ alone, God is “faithful and *just* to forgive us our sins” (1 John 1:9).

The Day of Atonement was the annual sacred day during which the entire community ritually declared God’s holiness and their sinfulness and collectively repented from all sins of the previous year (16:16, 21, 30, 34). To atone for the sins of the priests, the Day of Atonement required a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering (16:3); to atone for the sins of the congregation required two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering (16:5). Unlike the daily sacrifices where the priest took diseased animal blood into the holy precincts, on this day the high priest now took uncontaminated (no hand imposition) blood from the bull and one goat into the Holy of Holies and worked his way outward, sprinkling all major worship furniture on the way (16:14–15, 18–19). The



“For 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” (Lev. 17:11). *The (bronze) altar of burnt offering at the tabernacle model in Timnah Valley just west of the Arabah.*

uncontaminated blood absorbed the sin from every sprinkled place, and by this means the priest purged both sacred space and sacred people (16:27, 30, 33–34) of the sin that had resided there throughout the year. The priest would then transfer all sins of the community onto the remaining live goat (through hand imposition) and send the goat into the wilderness, thus symbolizing the absolute removal of all covenant rebellion and guilt from Israel (16:20–22). In this way, sacrifice produced atonement (16:30, 33–34, etc.) resulting in forgiveness (4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16, 18)—purification that reconciled all repentant ones to God and to the community (see e.g., 12:7–8; 14:1–32).

The sin offerings of the Day of Atonement foreshadowed the wrath-bearing, substitutionary, sufficient work of Messiah Jesus at the cross to remove sin and to secure right relationship between God and his people (Heb. 9:7–14; 13:12; 1 John 2:1–2). Through Jesus' blood, even common people who have no special pedigree or abilities become priests of God with unreserved access into his presence (Heb. 4:14–16; 10:19–22; 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Rev. 5:10).

The Author of Leviticus Distinguished *the Holy and Common, the Unclean and Clean* in Covenant Worship

The Holiness Continuum

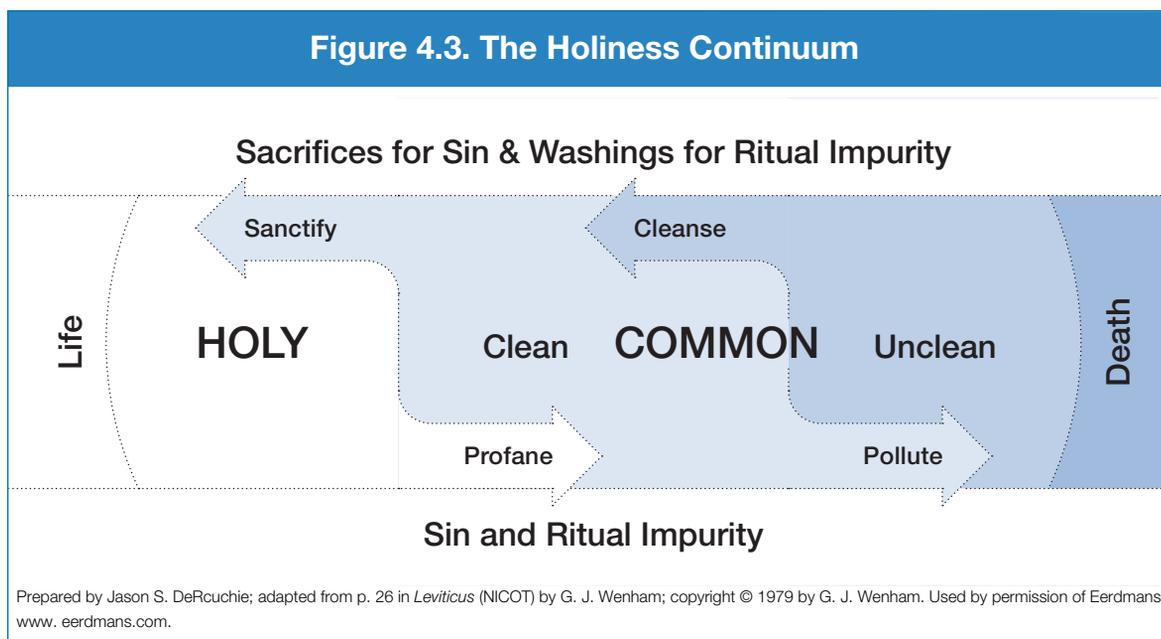
One of the challenging features of Leviticus for modern Western readers is its holiness continuum. God directed the priests “to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean” (Lev. 10:10). The holy presence of God in the midst of Israel created the need to differentiate this mixture of states and conditions with respect to people, space, and time.

While somewhat difficult to assess, it appears that everything that was not holy was common, and everything common was either clean or unclean. In Leviticus, holiness and uncleanness are completely incompatible, and so every effort is taken to distinguish the two. Holy persons or things could be profaned, thus requiring sanctification to enjoy holiness again. That which was clean could be polluted and rendered unclean. Those things that were unclean could be made clean and further made holy through being sanctified by the priests. While those who were clean could never experience exile from the community, they also were never allowed to approach the Holy Places in the camp.

Whereas cleanness is the normal state or condition of creatures, holiness portrays absolute order and is enjoyed only by grace. Holiness characterizes God himself (Lev. 11:4–45; 19:2; 20:26), and anything that belongs to God is holy:

- The tabernacle and its equipment (Exod. 40:9; 29:36–37; 30:29; cf. Lev. 16:33);
- The Sabbath and religious festivals (Lev. 23);
- The priests (Lev. 21:6–8; cf. Exod. 29:1; 39:30);
- In a general sense, the people of Israel (Exod. 19:5–6; Lev. 20:26; cf. 1 Peter 2:9–10).

Figure 4.3. The Holiness Continuum



In Leviticus, the call was for those who were declared holy in status to move away from death toward life, becoming holy in state or condition—“Be holy, as I am holy” (Lev. 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7, 26; 21:8; cf. 1 Thess. 4:3; 1 Peter 1:14–16).

Directly after listing numerous lifestyles that will keep one from inheriting the kingdom of God, Paul captured the shift from death to life, from unclean to holy (1 Cor. 6:11): “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

In contrast, uncleanness is a substandard state or condition acquired either by bodily process or sin. Uncleanness in some way represented death or that which was abnormal or out of order, and it could be

imparted to other objects or persons through contact (e.g., Lev. 11:39–40; 14:36; 15:4–11). Some uncleanness was tolerated (i.e., ritual impurity) but still resulted in “exile” from communal worship until the required cleansing was accomplished. For example, menstrual blood, bodily emissions, “leprous” or “dead-looking” skin, and contact with corpses were all “unclean” (chs. 11–15). Other types of uncleanness were prohibited (i.e., moral sin) and would result in exile from the community and possibly death—see, e.g., incest, adultery, spiritualism (chs. 18, 20).

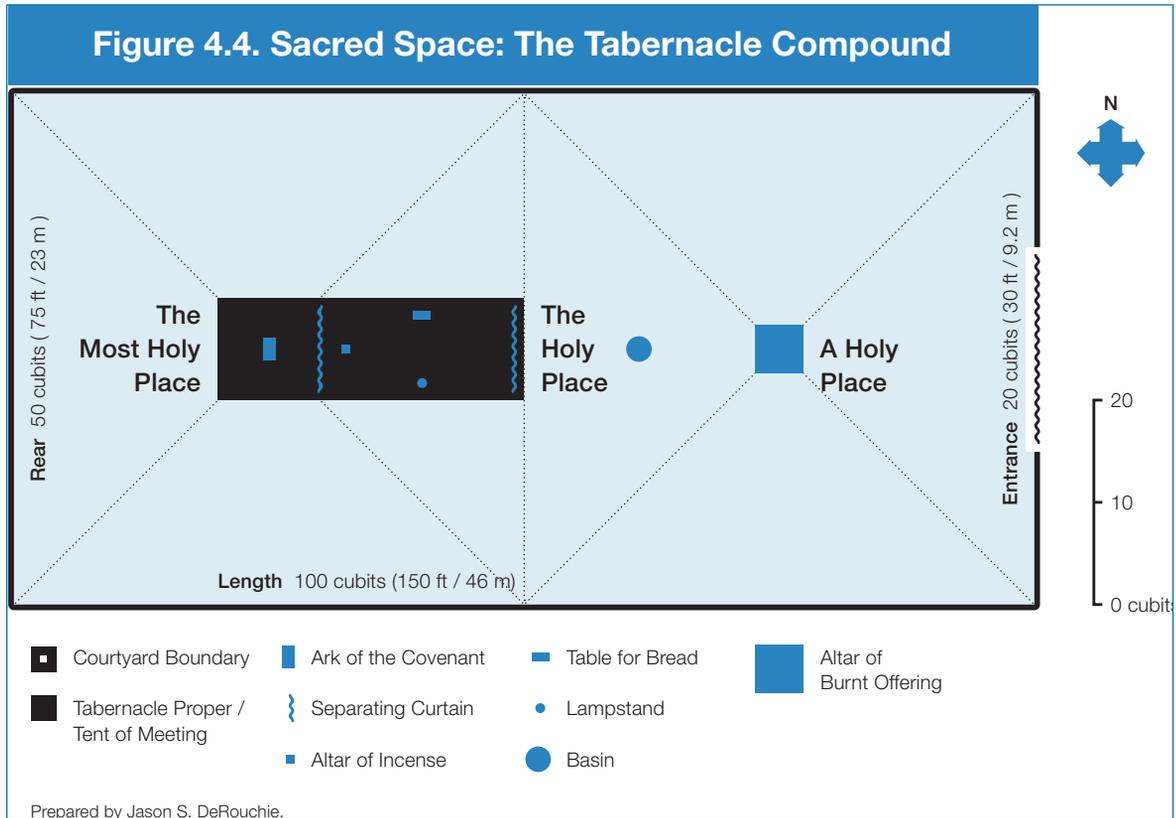
To persist in uncleanness was to embrace an exilic type of death (outside the symbolic Eden of the tabernacle) that separated one from God and destroyed all other relationships. In contrast, a true covenant worshipper desired God’s presence, understood his uncleanness and impurity, sought for reconciliation, and was moved away from death toward life-giving holiness.



“These are unclean to you among the swarming things that swarm on the ground: the mole rat, the mouse, the great lizard of any kind, the gecko, the monitor lizard, the lizard, the sand lizard, and the chameleon” (Lev. 11:29–30). *The small Sinai Agama lizard.*

Sacred Space

As noted in the previous chapter, God established his presence within Israel in a graded topography, demonstrated in the layout of the tabernacle. The entire tabernacle compound was considered holy (Exod. 29:31; Lev. 6:16, 26–27; 7:6; 10:13), but the intensity of holiness increased as one moved from the courtyard (Exod. 27:9–19; Num. 4:26, 32) westward into the tabernacle proper, the latter of which was also called the Tent of Meeting (Exod. 25:9; 26:1, 7, 15, 26). In the courtyard was the altar of burnt offering (where communal sins were atoned) and the basin (for priestly washing). The entrance to the tent was the boundary of *the* holy sphere, through which priests alone could go (Exod. 29:4, 32, 42; Lev. 1:3; 3:2; 12:6; 16:7). The front room of the tent was called the Holy Place (Exod. 26:33; 29:30; Lev. 6:30; Num. 3:28), and in it sat the table for bread, the lighted menorah, and the altar of incense, all giving the sense that God was “home.” At the center of all focus was the Most Holy Place, the Holy of Holies (Exod. 26:33; Num. 4:4, 19), where God’s presence rested on the ark of the covenant; into this sphere only the high priest could enter, and even then, only on the Day of Atonement.



The increasing level of holiness was represented in the building materials that adorned each sphere. For example, the coverings at the extremities of the compound were made of bland goat-hair cloth, whereas the coverings and curtains of the Holy Places included finely decorated, royal-colored linen. Similarly, the structures developed from plain acacia wood to acacia adorned with bronze and silver to acacia fully covered with gold. The most precious, luxurious materials were reserved for the Most Holy Place, thus drawing a strong contrast between Yahweh and his people. He was holy, and his presence deserved the highest respect. Nevertheless, the King over all also desired a relationship with a people prone to sin—a fact symbolized by the presence of the tabernacle itself. Significantly, to purge each area of the tabernacle compound from sin was to purge the people who worshipped in these areas (Lev. 16:16–19, 30, 33).

Sacred People

Compared with the nations, every Israelite was holy. However, with regard to sacred space and worship, the priests were set apart to God as stewards of holiness, singularly charged to elevate and demonstrate God's holiness to Israel. They were to serve as the authoritative teachers of God's Word (10:10–11; cf. Deut. 31:9–13; 33:10) and as the authoritative agents of righteousness—establishing, maintaining, and restoring the proper creational order of persons and things, land and sanctuary in relation to God. As imagers of God's holiness, the priests wore garments that were patterned off the materials of the tabernacle, with the most precious linens being closest to their bodies (Exod. 28). Their continual nearness to the Most Holy Place demanded great care, and they were given specific instructions about the movement from unclean to clean and from clean to holy (Lev. 10:10; 21:1–24). The non-Aaronic priests, known generally as Levites, bore the special responsibility of guarding the tabernacle and its sacred objects from mishandling and unwarranted encroachment (Num 3:5–10; 18:1–32; cf. Lev. 10:1–3).



“Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment ... to bring them to regular remembrance before the LORD” (Exod. 28:29). *The priestly breastpiece found at the tabernacle model in the Timnah Valley just west of the Arabah.*

The demand for a physically flawless priest to approach the holy areas (Lev. 21:17–23) is less a negative statement about the disabled and more an eschatological profile concerning the messianic priest who would be the fullness of God's image (Heb. 1:3; 2:17–18; 4:15; cf. 2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15) as well as the one who would approach once and for all to purge the sins of the Israel of God (Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 26–27; 10:10, 12, 14).

Sacred Time

The architecture of Israel's worship included a calendar of scheduled high moments of celebration and reflection each year (see esp. Lev. 23). God's greatness as provider and protector was apparent every day, and Israel's cycle of life was filled with reminders of this fact. Some of these feasts or sacred days were somber days of rest, calling for repentance or renewal of covenant commitment (e.g., Trumpets and Day of Atonement).

God's provision and protection reach their climax in the life and work of Messiah Jesus. Indeed, every feast and sacred day of the Old Testament ultimately pointed to Jesus, who is “the substance” of all matters related to “food and drink, or ... festival or a new moon or a Sabbath” (Col. 2:16–17; cf. Rom. 14:5; Gal. 4:10).

Figure 4.5. Israel's Sacred and Civil Calendars with Selected Events

Month: Sacred/Civil	Hebrew Name with Modern Equivalent	Feasts and Sacred Days	Agriculture	Climate	
1 7	Abib / Nisan	Mar/April	14: Passover 15–21: Unleavened Bread 21: First Fruits	Barley and flax harvest begins	Spring (Later) Rains
2 8	Ziv / Iyyar*	April/May		Barley and general harvest	
3 9	Sivan	May/June	1: Weeks (Pentecost, Harvest)	Wheat harvest; vine tending	
4 10	Tammuz*	June/July		Vine tending; first grape harvest	
5 11	Ab*	July/Aug	9: Destruction of First Temple	Grape, olive, and fig harvest	Dry Season
6 12	Elul	Aug/Sept		Processing/vintage of grapes, figs, and olives	
7 1	Ethanim / Tishri*	Sept/Oct	1: Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah) 10: Day of Atonement 15–21: Booths (Tabernacles, Ingathering)	Plowing	
8 2	Bul / Marchesvan*	Oct/Nov		Planting barley and wheat	Autumn (Early) Rains
9 3	Kislev	Nov/Dec	25: Dedication (Hanukkah, Festival of Lights)**		
10 4	Tebeth	Dec/Jan		Spring growth	
11 5	Shebat	Jan/Feb		Winter figs	Winter Rains
12 6	Adar	Feb/Mar	13–14: Purim	Pulling flax; almonds bloom; citrus fruit harvest	
	Adar Sheni* ("second Adar")	An additional month added about every three years to enable the lunar and solar calendars to correspond.			

*Names with a single asterisk are not in the Bible. **The feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) was established in the period between the Old and New Testaments to celebrate the rededication of the Jerusalem temple at the time of the Maccabean Revolt in the 164 B.C.; the only biblical reference to it is John 10:22. Prepared by Jason S. DeRouchie; some material adapted from p. 92 in the *NASB Study Bible* edited by Kenneth Barker; copyright © 1999 by Zondervan; other material is adapted from p. 19 in *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament* by John H. Walton; copyright © 1994 John H. Walton. Used by permission of Zondervan. www.zondervan.com

Other days were celebrative, filled, on the one hand, with joy, feasting, and gratitude for God’s past deliverance or bounty and, on the other hand, with confident longing for God’s future sustaining grace (e.g., Sabbath, Passover and Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Weeks, Booths, Purim). The Day of Atonement and the Year of Jubilee marked God’s gracious liberating power, both from sin and from debt or servitude, respectively. Every event pointed to the past defining acts of God and the foundation for a worshipping people’s future hope.

The Author of Leviticus Called Israel to *Display Holiness* through the Practice of Covenant Ethics



“His double-month is ingathering. His double-month is sowing. His double-month is late-planting. His month is chopping flax. His month is barley harvest. His month is harvest and measuring (?). His double-month is pruning. His month is summerfruit” (The *Gezer Calendar*). Likely dated to the time just after King Solomon rebuilt Gezer (1 Kings 9:16), the Gezer Calendar (ca. 925 B.C.) is in Hebrew verse with very early spelling and appears to have been a mnemonic instrument for children (translation from COS 2:222; cf. ANET, 320).

The Need for Holiness

The modern (and postmodern) divorce of worship from ethics does not appear in the book of Leviticus. Rather, the macrostructure of the book evidences that true Godward orientation will result in behavioral transformation. Leviticus 1–16 is a guide to Israel’s worship, and Leviticus 17–27 is a guide to their covenant ethics. The two must never be separated. Sadly, few in Israel’s history ever learned this fact, as is evident in the way Yahweh’s covenant enforcers, the prophets, continually had to use their words to blister all ethic-less “worshippers” (Jer. 6:20; 7:21–23; 14:12; Isa. 1:11–14; 40:16; 66:3; Hos. 6:6; 8:13; Amos 5:21–24; Mic. 6:6–8). Even when the curses of Leviticus 26 came, most of Israel failed to learn from God’s disciplining hand (see Lev. 26:18, 21, 23, 27).

Whether priest (21:1–24; 22:1–16) or laity, the holiness God demanded was to be life-encompassing, including all desires and behaviors and all things private and public, civil and ceremonial (11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7–8, 26; 21:6, 15, 23; 22:9). Such a calling portrayed Israel’s unique relationship to God and its distinction from its neighbors (18:3–5, 24–30; 20:22–26). God’s people were to guard themselves from eating blood and unclean foods

(17:10–16; 20:25), from misappropriating sex (18:6–23; 19:20–21, 29–30; 20:10–21), and from engaging in idolatrous or occult practices (19:31; 20:1–9, 27). They were to keep the Sabbaths (19:3; 26:2) and other sacred days (ch. 23) and be ordered in their sacrificial worship (19:5–8). They were to respect human life (24:17–23); to revere their parents and the elderly (19:3, 32); to be fair in all sales (19:35–36; 25:23–24); and to treat with equity and justice the poor, vulnerable, and sojourner (19:9–10, 13–16, 33–36; 25:25–28, 29–34, 35–55). Ultimately, the call was to “love your neighbor as yourself” (19:18), not abusing others for self-exalting gain but serving others in God-exalting love.

Frequently, Yahweh called Israel to covenant love by reminding them of their redemption from slavery. This call not to forget their past deliverance



“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor, and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God” (Lev. 23:22). *Women harvesting on the West Bank of the Nile in Luxor, Egypt.*

functioned in at least three ways. First, remembering the freedom that had been won for them stressed that they were not their own and must, therefore, follow God's ways (11:44–45; 18:3–4; 25:55; cf. 1 Cor. 6:19–20). Second, recalling the pain of persecution they once endured was designed to push them away from being oppressors themselves: “You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD” (Lev. 19:34; cf. 19:36; 25:38, 42; Deut. 10:17–19). Having received love, they were now obligated to give love (see Rom. 1:14; 13:8; 1 Peter 4:10). Third, God recalled his past redeeming grace in order to give his people confidence that he would grant more grace to all who believe: “I am the LORD who sanctifies you, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the LORD” (Lev. 22:32–33; cf. 26:13, 45). The call to love embodied a “holy sojourner ethic” that avoided the ethical leniency of Egypt from where they were liberated and of Canaan to which they were going. Remembering the pain of their own oppression as sojourners, they now needed to care for the less fortunate and to be mindful of the needs of others. This holy sojourner ethic disallowed the conjoining of adoration for God and cruelty of others. The two cannot coincide, and this remains true even today.

The Means for Holiness

Strikingly, Leviticus includes both the imperative, “You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy” (20:26; cf. 11:44–45; 19:2; 21:8), and the declaration, “I am the LORD who sanctifies you” (22:32; cf. 21:8, 15, 23; 22:9, 16). What was the bridge between Yahweh's statement and Israel's responsibility? The book suggests that God's means of sanctifying his people was through a combination of past and future grace—a feature highlighted in the book's structure, which places the ethical instruction (chs. 17–25) *after* the guidelines for substitutionary sacrifice (chs. 1–7, 16) but *before* the promises of blessing, curse, and restoration blessing (ch. 26).

With respect to past grace, Leviticus teaches that a person's growth in holy conduct (sanctification) is the *fruit* of one's acceptance with God (justification) (see Rom. 6:7–8, 22; 8:1–4), the latter of which is made possible only by grace alone through faith alone in the unblemished, substitutionary sacrifice

The only sin that a person can conquer is sin that has already been cancelled through atonement. To overcome innate rebellion, we need blood-bought power, provided only through the Holy Spirit of Christ in us (Rom. 7:4, 6; 8:13).

alone.¹ This truth is the main point of the only extended narrative within the book (Lev. 8–10). Here atonement is portrayed as the means for enjoying Yahweh’s sanctifying presence (9:3–4, 6). Yahweh’s fire (= his Spirit) will purify rather than consume only if his wrath toward sin is appeased through the destruction of a sacrificial substitute. By approaching God through the death of this “old man,” represented in the slain animal, God’s consuming fire sparks a change in the redeemed human heart, resulting in the display of God’s holiness in the lives of those restored into relationship with him: “Among those who are near me I will be sanctified” (10:3; cf. 9:5, 7; Eph. 2:13). Stated differently, Yahweh’s zeal against sin and for the display of his holiness is magnified through atonement, which in turn ignites a similar, blood-bought zeal against sin and for the display of God’s holiness in the life of the newly justified believer. God forgives every person who confesses his sins (Lev. 5:5; 16:21; Num. 5:6), and who trusts Yahweh’s willingness to pour his just wrath on a substitute sacrifice (Lev. 17:11; cf. Heb. 9:22). In the process, God manifests his presence to the believer in such a way that results in holy living (Lev. 9:24; 10:3; see Rom. 5:5–6; 7:4, 6; 8:13; Phil. 2:12–13). In contrast, death will come to all who fail to take Yahweh’s holiness seriously (Lev. 10:2).

With respect to future grace, the blessings and curses of Leviticus 26 were conditioned on faith-generated obedience, and the covenant promises themselves were designed to motivate this kind of holy living. What was hoped for in the future would affect how people lived in the present (see 2 Peter 1:4). Furthermore, for those able to learn from it, the experience of divine discipline through the curses would itself be a means of grace, softening a hard heart and nurturing persevering dependence (Lev. 26:14, 16, 18, 21, 23–24, 27–28; cf. Heb. 12:10–11).

1. The book of Proverbs declares, “He who justifies the wicked ... [is] an abomination to the LORD” (Prov. 17:15). Yet Paul declares that God justly “justifies the ungodly,” pardoning their sins and counting them righteous and accepted in his sight (Rom. 4:5). This is possible only because of our union with Christ by faith (symbolized in the Old Testament by a sinner’s identification with the unblemished, substitutionary sacrifice; Rom. 3:23–24; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:8–9; Titus 3:5–7). As sinners, we must look outside of ourselves for acceptance with God, for we deserve only judgment. Christ’s perfect righteousness and wrath-satisfying death are the only basis for our acceptance with God, and by faith alone (apart from works) our sins are counted to Christ and his righteousness is reckoned to us (Rom. 5:18–19; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9). “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13). Thanks be to God for his mercy!



At the Feast of Booths, “you shall take on the first day the fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days” (Lev. 23:40). *Jewish worshipper at the Western Wall in Jerusalem during the Feast of Booths.*

The Call to Holiness and the New Covenant

In Leviticus 18:5, Yahweh declared, “You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them.” Israel’s history recorded in the Old Testament testifies that the nation as a whole failed in their pursuit of holiness and therefore were unable to enjoy lasting life. As Leviticus 26:27–39 anticipated, Israel’s sin resulted in their exile from the Promised Land and the profaning of God’s name among the foreign peoples.

Nevertheless, in faithfulness to his covenant promises (Lev. 26:42; cf. Ezek. 16:60), the LORD pledged that, after addressing the problem of Israel’s sin (Lev. 26:40–41; cf. Ezek. 36:25), he would display himself as holy

through a restored remnant in the sight of the nations, resulting in effective witness and new worshippers. In the words of Ezekiel the prophet, “And the nations will know that I am the LORD ... when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes” (Ezek. 36:23). This is the new covenant hope! “I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (36:27).

Today, this side of the cross, God’s will remains our “sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:3). And our victory over sin is possible *because* the Spirit of the resurrected, sin-overcoming, death-defeating Christ dwells in us (Rom. 8:7–11). “By the Spirit,” we “put to death the deeds of the body,” resulting in life (8:13); “the fruit of the Spirit is love...” (Gal. 5:22).

“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:14–16).

Our growth in holiness comes only as an outgrowth of justification and ends in eternal life (Rom. 6:7, 22). Because both justification and eternal life are seen as gifts (3:24; 6:23), “the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” comes to us also as a gift, received through faith (Heb. 12:14). Every fruit of faith is, therefore, a “thanks be to God” kind of obedience (Rom. 6:17). We must work hard in our pursuit of godliness, but we must never do so in a way that replaces grace (1 Cor. 15:10; Phil. 2:12–13; Col. 1:28–29). And all the while we should rest confidently in God’s promises, each of which is “Yes” in Jesus (2 Cor. 1:20). “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely.... He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (1 Thess. 5:23–24).

Conclusion

Leviticus provided Israel with guidelines for worshipping and following Yahweh, who is forever holy (Lev. 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7, 26). Utterly distinct from his world and sovereign over it, Yahweh provided a way for a sinful people to enjoy lasting relationship with him, with sins forgiven, holiness enabled, and life sustained (16:34; 20:8; 22:32; 26:1–13). The detailed discussion of the various sacrifices (chs. 1–7, 16), the expansive overview of how to live for Yahweh (often called the Holiness Code, chs. 17–26), and the inclusion of the sacred calendar (ch. 23) all provided a hopeful prospect for Israel, who anticipated years of life in the Promised Land. Yahweh, nevertheless, warned his people that sustained covenant disloyalty and lack of repentance would ultimately result in their ruin (26:14–39). While they could learn from his disciplining hand (26:18, 21, 23, 27), the story of the rebellion of Israel’s religious leaders (10:1–3) and the inclusion of a longer

list of curses than blessings both suggest what the rest of Israel's history would show to be true—Israel would turn on Yahweh, spurning his grace and holiness and receiving a just penalty for their sin. Nevertheless, Yahweh promised that even after Israel's rebellion and punishment, he would remember his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, remember his land, remember his covenant with Israel at Sinai, and restore a repentant remnant (26:40–45).

KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS FOR REVIEW

Holiness	Topography of sacred space
Holy sojourner ethic	Priests
Sacrifices/offerings	Sabbath
Atonement	Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread
Blood	Feast of Booths
Day of Atonement	Blessings and curses
Holy/common	Means of sanctification
Clean/unclean	

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