

The Book of Leviticus

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1.0 The Significance of the Book of Leviticus

- ? Why would we want to study a book that dedicates seven chapters to the sacrificial system of ancient Israel and five chapters to details concerning indelicate matters like the emission of a variety of bodily fluids?
- ? “It is perhaps the most neglected of the neglected biblical books.” — Samuel E. Balentine, *Leviticus*, Interpretation (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 2002), 1-2.
- Jewish children once commenced their biblical studies with the Book of Leviticus. — Bernard J. Bamberger, *Leviticus*, The Torah: A Modern Commentary, 5 vols. (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1979), 3:xix.
- “Genesis is the book of beginnings, Exodus the book of redemption, and Leviticus the book of atonement and a holy walk. In Genesis we see man ruined; in Exodus, man redeemed; in Leviticus, man cleansed, worshiping and serving.” — Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Handbook* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 85.
- “Leviticus is thus a work of towering spirituality, which through the various sacrificial rituals points the reader unerringly to the atoning death of Jesus, our great High Priest. An eminent nineteenth-century writer once described Leviticus quite correctly as the seed-bed of New Testament theology, for in this book is to be found the basis of Christian faith and doctrine. The Epistle to the Hebrews expounds Leviticus in this connection, and therefore merits careful study in its own right, since in the view of the present writer it is pre-eminent as a commentary on Leviticus.” — R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An*

Introduction and Commentary, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 9.

- ✓ See the New Testament use of Leviticus 18:5 in Luke 10:28; Romans 10:5; and, Galatians 3:12.
- ✓ See the New Testament use of Leviticus 19:18 in Matthew 19:19; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; and, James 2:8.

2.0 Outline of Leviticus

- I. Sacrificial System (chapters 1–7)
- II. Ministry of the Priesthood (chapters 8–10)
- III. Laws of Purification (chapters 11–15)
- IV. Day of Atonement (chapter 16)
- V. Covenant Ordinances (chapters 17–24)
- VI. Year of Jubilee (chapter 25)
- VII. Covenant Blessings and Curses (chapter 26)
- VIII. Appendix: Vows and Promises (chapter 27)



3.0 Name of the Book

- *Leviticus* was the name of the book in the Latin Vulgate, which had derived it from the Greek title *Levitikon* (Λευιτικόν) in the Septuagint. The title means “pertaining to the Levites.” It is a carefully arranged reference manual for the levitical priests.
 - Ezra 6:18 refers to the Book of Leviticus.
 - The only mention of the Levites in Leviticus is at 25:32-33.
- The Hebrew name is *Wayyiqra*’ (וַיִּקְרָא) the first word in its Hebrew text (= “And he called”).

4.0 Authorship and Date of Leviticus

- Direct statements in Leviticus support authorship by **Moses**:
 - 1:1; 4:1; 5:14; 6:1, 8, 19, 24; 7:22, 28, 38
 - 8:1
 - 11:1; 12:1; 13:1; 14:1, 33; 15:1
 - 16:1, 2
 - 17:1; 18:1; 19:1; 20:1; 21:1, 16; 22:1, 17, 26; 23:1, 9, 23, 26, 33; 24:1, 13, 23

- 25:1
- 26:46
- 27:1, 34



- Liberal scholars divide the authorship of Leviticus so that only chapters 1–16 are attributed to Moses. They claim that chapters 17–26 (the Holiness Code) were produced by a radical Judean priest around 560 B.C. Using this viewpoint, some defend homosexuality by insisting that the condemnation of homosexuality (18:22; 20:13) was not part of what God had revealed to Moses. (But, see Leviticus 18:5 and Romans 10:5.)

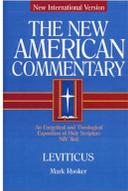
- “In contradistinction to the inquisitorial method is that which presumes a man to be innocent until he is proven guilty. As applied to documents it proceeds on the presumption that a document is to be presumed to be what it purports to be until it shall be proved that it is not.” — Robert Dick Wilson, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament*, rev. by Edward J. Young (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), 27.
- God revealed the contents of Leviticus to Moses on Mt. Sinai (cf. Leviticus 26:46; 27:34) — which may have occurred during the 50-day period after the Tabernacle was erected (Exodus 40:17), but before the Israelites departed from Mt. Sinai (Numbers 10:11). Moses may have penned Leviticus sometime **around 1444-1440 B.C.**
- “No other book in the Bible affirms divine inspiration so frequently as Leviticus. Under the heading of the verb *to speak* (*dibbēr*) alone, the concordance lists no less than thirty-eight occurrences of the statement that Jehovah spoke to Moses or to Aaron.” — Gleason Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 258.

5.0 Theme of Leviticus

- **Holiness** is the theme of Leviticus. Forms of the root *qādaš* (קָדַשׁ, *he was holy*) occur 152 times in Leviticus — more than in any other Old Testament book.
- **Key verse** — “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (**19:2b**).
 - See 11:44-45; 20:7, 26.
 - See **1 Peter 1:14-16**.

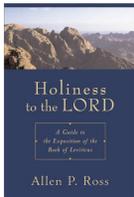
6.0 Recommended Commentaries on Leviticus (in Order of Priority)

- Mark Rooker. *Leviticus*. New American Commentary. Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000. The “Introduction” is superb in Rooker’s lucid critique of liberal criticism. He maintains a rock solid stand on Mosaic authorship. Rooker often presents major interpretive issues by specifying the various views and then eliminating them one by one until only one interpretation remains that best resolves the problem.

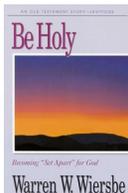


- R. K. Harrison. *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980. In this compact volume Harrison presents an evangelical commentary on Leviticus with a brief (but adequate) introduction. His focus is on the relevance of Leviticus for today’s Christian.
- Gordon J. Wenham. *The Book of Leviticus*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979. This commentary was perhaps the catalyst for the other works listed here. It is well-written with a bold approach to key subjects (e.g., the clean-unclean and holy-profane categories). Each chapter concludes with a discussion of its relationship to the New Testament and Christianity. It occasionally suffers from exegetical malnutrition.

- Allen P. Ross. *Holiness to the LORD: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2002. For each section of the text of Leviticus Ross provides a brief introduction, a discussion of theological ideas, an analysis of structure, a synthesis and outline, the development of the exposition, and concluding observations. Most chapters conclude with a select bibliography of books, essays, and journal articles focused on the major topic or theme of the passage under discussion.



- John E. Hartley. *Leviticus*. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, Publisher, 1992. Hartley’s commentary is a detailed exegetical commentary on the Hebrew text of Leviticus. He introduces each section of the text with a scholarly bibliography. Then he provides a translation with notes and a brief discussion of “Form/Structure/Setting” before giving comments on the text. Most sections are concluded by an “Explanation” summarizing the basic thought of the passage, its theological implications, and giving discussion of New Testament relationships.



Warren W. Wiersbe. *Be Holy: Becoming “Set Apart” for God*. Chariot Victor Books, 1994. The driving force behind this brief expository commentary is application to believers today.

- R. Laird Harris. “Leviticus.” In *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12 vols. Ed. by Frank E. Gaebelin, 2:499-654. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990). Fairly extensive in his discussion of introductory problems, Harris is less forthcoming when it comes to the details of the text itself. However, the commentary is exegetical and worthy of reference.