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Introduction

This study guide will be most helpful if you work through it slowly with an open Bible, looking up all the references. Grab some friends and do it together!



1

Exodus concluded with Moses completing the tabernacle to host God's presence, but unable to enter it

EXODUS 40:34-35

A

This is a problem! The whole purpose was for Israel's priests to meet with God.

SEE THIS THEME IN
EXODUS 25:8-9; 29:45-46

But Israel's sinful worship of the golden calf has damaged the relationship.

EXODUS 32

B

Moses not entering the tent on Israel's behalf shows the relationship still needs to be repaired in some way: How can rebellious Israel restore its relationship with God and live in his holy presence?

C

The book of Leviticus opens by highlighting this problem.

"The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting."

LEVITICUS 1:1

D

The next book of the Bible, Numbers, begins by showing this problem has been resolved.

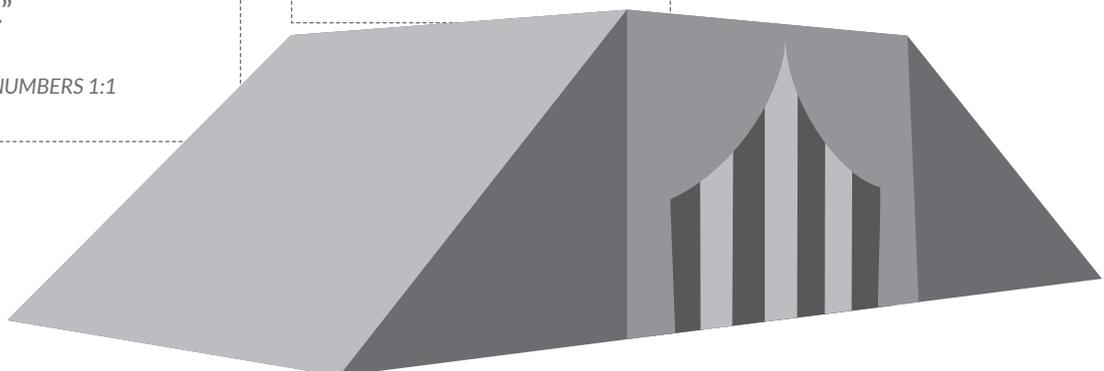
"The Lord spoke to Moses in the tent of meeting in the Desert of Sinai."

NUMBERS 1:1

E

What happened?! Leviticus happened: God takes the initiative to provide a way to reconcile his relationship to rebellious Israel.

Leviticus is all about God's grace!



2

The book of Leviticus has an amazing literary structure, with a symmetrical design.



1-7

RITUAL
SACRIFICES



8-10

ORDINATION
OF PRIESTS



11-15

LAWS ABOUT
RITUAL PURITY



16-17

DAY OF
ATONEMENT
AND SACRIFICE



18-20

LAWS ABOUT
MORAL PURITY



21-22

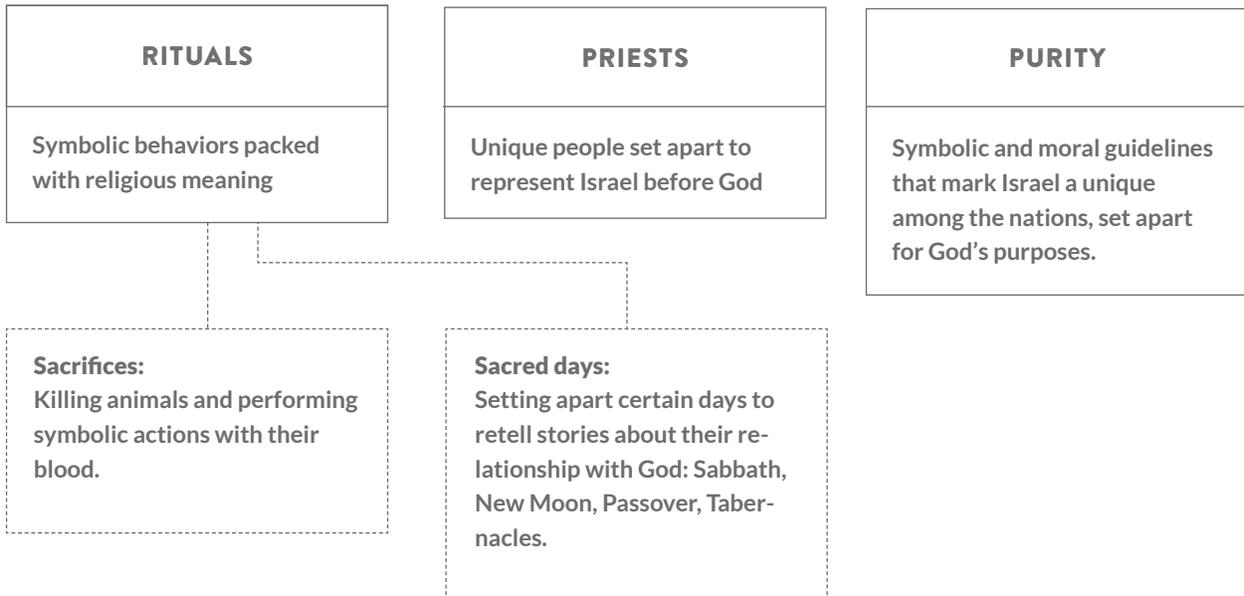
QUALIFICATION
OF THE PRIESTS



23-27

RITUAL
CALENDAR

This structure highlights three main solutions to the relational rupture between God and Israel:



1-7



RITUAL SACRIFICES

3

There are 5 types of sacrifices described in Leviticus, each with a different meaning:

1

GRAIN OFFERING

LEVITICUS 2

2

FELLOWSHIP OFFERING

LEVITICUS 3

3

BURNT OFFERING

LEVITICUS 1

4

PURIFICATION OFFERING

LEVITICUS 4-5

5

RESTITUTION OFFERING

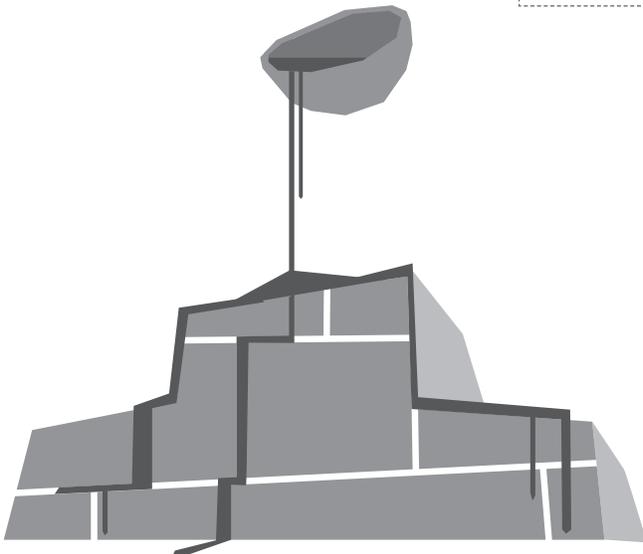
LEVITICUS 5-6

Two are ways of saying "Thank you" to God by giving back a part of what he's given to you in produce and flocks.

Three are different ways of saying "I'm sorry" to God for wrongs done to others or to God, resulting in forgiveness of sins.

The three "I'm sorry" offerings are all said to "provide atonement" for the sin of the one who offers it, so that they are "forgiven"

LEVITICUS 4:20, 26, 31, 35;
5:10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7



What is atonement and how do these sacrifices bring forgiveness?

GO DOWN TO THE SECTION BELOW ON THE DAY OF ATONEMENT.



4

Israel was to keep a full calendar of sacred days, all of which were designed to help Israel remember who they are and who their God is.

Annual Sacred Days:

Passover*(pesakh)*

retells the story of the 10th plague and God's redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt

LEVITICUS 23:4-8

Unleavened Bread*(khag khamotzi)*

retelling the story of the last night in Egypt and the haste with which they left Egypt

LEVITICUS 23:4-8

Pentecost*(shavu'ot)*

50 days after Passover, another offering of the late spring harvest

LEVITICUS 23:15-22

Tabernacles*(sukkot):*

retelling the story of Israel's sojourn through the wilderness and God's provision for them

LEVITICUS 23:33-43

Firstfruits*(yom habikkurim)*

retelling the story of God's gift of the promised land and its abundance by offering the first bits of the spring harvest

LEVITICUS 23:9-14

Day of Atonement*(yom kippur)*

An annual fast of repentance as the priests accomplished atonement for Israel's sin.

LEVITICUS 23:26-32

Trumpets*(yom teru'ah; also called rosh hashanah = New Year)*

marked the 1st day of the 7th month, beginning the final three feasts of the year. It began a 10 day preparation for the next two feasts.

LEVITICUS 23:23-25

And then also:

SABBATH YEAR

...every seven years where there is no farming in the fields.

LEVITICUS 25:1-7

THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

...every 49 years where all debts are cancelled and any family land lost because of bankruptcy or debt is to be returned to the original owners.

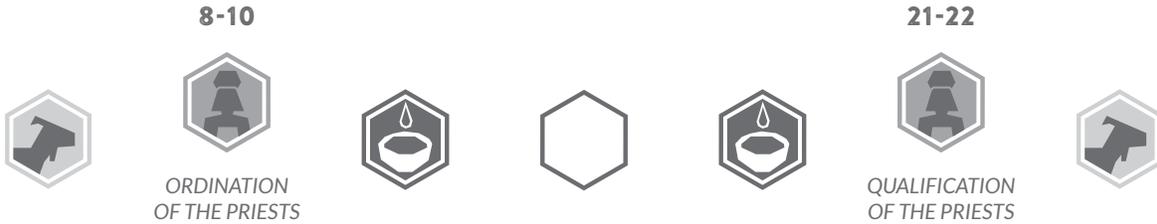
LEVITICUS 25:8-55

WEEKLY SABBATH

LEVITICUS 23:1-3

MONTHLY NEW MOON

NUMBERS 10:10 AND 28:11-14



5

The people of Israel as a whole had demonstrated their own failure to keep covenant with Yahweh, and so needed a mediator, someone to represent them before God.

God called the family of Aaron, Moses' brother, to carry on this role after Moses: a special group of people who would enter God's presence on behalf of Israel.

8-10

Aaron and his sons are ordained as Israel's mediators who will enter God's presence on their behalf in an elaborate ceremony that marked them as holy. There's also a story of two priests who violate God's holiness and are destroyed by it (ch.10): a haunting tale reminding us of the seriousness of the problem caused by Israel's sin in the presence of God's holiness

21-22

The qualifications for being a priest involve a higher degree of moral integrity and holiness: kind of like the way the assistants to an important governing official are called to unique kind of lifestyle appropriate to that role of service.





11-15



LAWS ABOUT
RITUAL PURITY



18-20



LAWS ABOUT
MORAL PURITY



6

Laws about Purity

Because Israel lived near God’s holiness, they were to reflect God’s own holiness and purity to the nations:

“You shall be holy as I am holy”

LEVITICUS 11:45

RITUAL PURITY

These are symbolic practices that reminded Israel that every part of their life was lived in God’s holy presence.

God is the author of life. Any contact with things connected to death, like dead bodies, skin disease, blood, bodily fluids, rendered a person *impure*, and thus unable to enter into God’s holy presence.

Being impure is not a sin, you simply have to wait a few days, and take a bath before being pronounced “pure.”

What is wrong is barging into God’s holy presence when you’re in an impure state. It’s a symbolic violation of God’s holiness.

MORAL PURITY

Israel was called to a level of moral holiness that corresponded to God’s own goodness and set them apart from the other nations.

These areas of moral integrity focus on sexual integrity, social justice, and right relationships within the family and community. Their moral lives were to correspond to God’s moral goodness.

16-17



DAY OF ATONEMENT
AND SACRIFICE

7

Once a year all the sins of Israel were atoned for by a critically important ritual

A

At the center of the book is a ritual day that addresses the relational rupture between God and Israel. The priest takes two goats, puts his hands on them, and confesses all the sins of Israel, symbolically 'placing' the sin on these animals.

LEVITICUS 16:1-19

B

One animal is killed, and its blood brought into the very hot spot of God's presence. This symbol is explained in 17:11-12: when Israel wrongs God while living in his presence, it's so offensive that it deserves some kind of consequence. God says he provides these sacrificial animals to take that consequence it, by dying in their place.

LEVITICUS 17:11-12

C

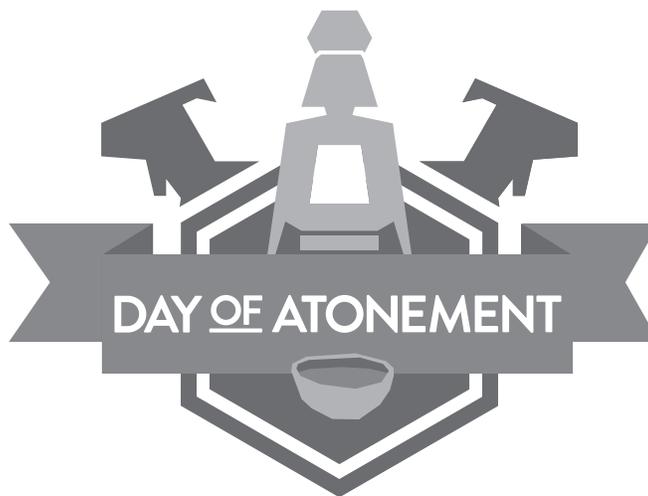
And the second animal is another powerful symbol: it's cast out into the wilderness and symbolically 'removes' the sin of Israel away forever. They are free from their sin.

LEVITICUS 16:20-22

D

These symbols are explained in chapter 17: These sacrifices are not Israel's efforts to appease an angry God. Rather, they are given by a gracious God who loves his people: he wants to show Israel just how serious and destructive their moral corruption really is as well as just how much he wants to save them and restore the relationship. And that's what 'atonement' means: covering over someone's wrongdoing, to restore the relationship.

LEVITICUS 17



**DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

1

Read Exodus 40:33-35, Leviticus 1:1, and Numbers 1:1: How does Moses' inability to enter the tent demonstrate the problem between God and Israel? How do the first sentences of Leviticus and Numbers give us clues about the purpose of the book of Leviticus?

*EXODUS 40:33-35
LEVITICUS 1:1
NUMBERS 1:1*

2

Skim Leviticus 1-7: Notice the different purposes of all five offerings: How do the Grain and Fellowship offerings express gratefulness to God?

LEVITICUS 1-7

3

Skim Leviticus 11-15: Notice that all the ways a person becomes "unclean," are signs of mortality or death. How did these symbolic behaviors communicate something powerful about God's holiness dwelling in the midst of Israel?

LEVITICUS 11-15

4

Skim Leviticus 18-20: In these laws about moral purity, notice the emphasis put on sexual purity and social justice. Notice how living by these laws would set Israel apart from all other nations (see especially Leviticus 18:1-5). Why does God call his people to holiness in these areas specifically?

LEVITICUS 18-20

5

Skim Leviticus 23-25: Notice the emphasis put on calendar rhythms and how important they are to help God's people remember who they are and who God is. Do you have any rhythms of this kind in your life? Why or why not?

LEVITICUS 23-25

6

Read Leviticus 16-17: After watching the priests perform this ritual, what insights would it give to your own sin and selfish decisions? What would you learn about God's character? Read the description of "atonement" and sacrifice in 17:11-12: how does it highlight both God's justice and mercy at the same time?

LEVITICUS 16-17

