

# Bible Studies on Leviticus

LEADER'S NOTES INCLUDED IN THIS VERSION

## Leviticus 1-7

### Sacrifice

Before you get started, share with one another what you know about Leviticus.

#### Introduction

What is one thing you wished you never had to do again??

This is just a starting question that links to the fact that the Israelites had to sacrifice every day but because of Jesus we do not have to. He was sacrificed once for all!!

Leviticus starts with a detailed look at the various sacrifices that the Israelites had to make. The first is the burnt offering that had to be made twice everyday (Num 28:1-6). By the end of this study we will be giving thanks for Jesus who is, according to Hebrews 7:27,

*Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.*

#### Analysis

In groups, fill in the following table by reading the passages and then share your results:

Sacrifice	What is sacrificed?	What happens?	When is this sacrifice done?	What is the purpose of this sacrifice? Why is it done?
<b>BURNT OFFERING</b> Lev 1				
<b>GRAIN OFFERING</b> Lev 2	Just a note here: the grain offering accompanies the burnt offering in Lev 9:17 and Num 28:1-6 and apart from that there is nothing said in the Scriptures about its actual purpose. In some circumstances it replaces the burnt offering sacrifice for people who are poor (Lev 5).			
<b>FELLOWSHIP OFFERING</b> Lev 3				

<b>SIN OFFERING</b> Lev 4-5:13	It should be noted that while the NIV gives this sacrifice a rather austere name, this is not necessarily the sacrifice for sin. The burnt offering takes that role. This offering is more about purifying the sinner or the community when sin has been committed inadvertently or by omission. Note the difference between this and the burnt offering – esp v.6-7 – in contrast to the burnt offering this sacrifice is used less regularly, uses less valuable animals and is designed to cope with a subsidiary problem created by sin – pollution and defilement. It is about cleaning what has become unclean. See 12:6-8, 14:19.			
<b>GUILT OFFERING</b> Lev 5:14-6:7				

### Chapters 6-7

We are not going to deal with chapters 6-7 in any detail in this study; suffice to say that while there is some overlap between Lev 1-5 and 6-7, careful study of the two reveal differences of emphasis and arrangement. Lev 1-5 is for the people (see Lev 1:2, 4:2), by contrast Lev 6-7 focuses almost entirely on the priest's role in the sacrifices (see Lev 6:8, 14, 24). Lev 1-5 focus on the animal or cereal to be sacrificed; Lev 6-7 focus more on the way they were to be sacrificed.

What are your overall impressions of these sacrifices?

#### *Experiencing sacrifice*

As you read through these first chapters, it does not take much imagination to realise that attendance at a sacrifice would have been a very confronting and moving experience. The person who came to the altar was intimately and actively involved in the proceedings – unlike many modern church services where 'participants' usually only participate by singing and listening. He would bring the animal he had chosen from his herds or flocks to the altar, kill it and dismember it with his own hands then watch it go up in smoke before his eyes. He was convinced that something very significant was being achieved through this act and knew that his relationship with God was being affected by this sacrifice.

What are some of the similarities/ differences/ interesting quirks?

What is happening in Lev 1:4?

Why the laying on of hands? What does atonement mean in Leviticus 1-5?

The **laying on of hands** occurs in a few different contexts in Leviticus. This one here should be seen as a contrast to that in Lev 16 where both hands are laid on a goat and the sin of the people is transferred onto the goat. Here, the laying on of hands marks *identification* with the sacrifice – that it is made for the one bringing the sacrifice and accepted on his behalf and he marks that this is the case before going in to the Tent of Meeting (Lev 3:2).

### **Atonement**

It is important when we are studying any literature (including the Bible) that we do not import the meaning for a word into the text. The word atonement is a good case in point. Throughout the Scriptures it can mean appease God's wrath, to remove sin and its effects and simply to cover. In the context of Leviticus, the second of these meanings is the more likely. We do not hear of God's attitude towards the person sacrificing but we do hear a lot about their sin and its effect (makes a person unclean). The atonement word is often used in conjunction with forgiveness and this is consistent with understanding atonement as removal of sin. When sin is removed we can be forgiven for putting it there. Note too that the person making atonement is not God but the priest – the priest offers the sacrifice for the removal of sin – he is unable to remove God's wrath – only God can do that.

What does it mean that an offering is “an aroma pleasing to the Lord”? (1:9, 13, 17 etc)

*What is this aroma pleasing to God?*

The phrase is a metaphor that is ‘anthropomorphic’ – it pictures God in human form to explain a divine reality. So the aroma does not really go into God's nose!! But we are meant to understand that in the same way smell stirs up emotions in us (pleasant or disgust), this sacrifice will stir up emotion in God – in this case favourably! The metaphor tells us that the sacrifice moves God to remember with mercy the one who made it. We are also reminded that God is not dependent on these offerings (like those made at Buddhist temples) but rather, each offering is made to be accepted by God for our benefit.

How is the fellowship offering different and why do you think it is?

Note the three reasons it is brought – to give thanks, to be a free-will offering or in accordance with a vow. Note that it is eaten. Note that the part that is burnt is given special attention – kidneys, internal fat, intestines. It is possible that offering the inner parts symbolises the dedication of the persons best and deepest emotions to God. There is a link here to a New Testament word meaning “compassion” or emotion (Phil 1:8, 2:1). It is said that the deepest emotions come from the bowels in Hebrew thought – and this is reflected in Jer 11:20, 17:10, Ps 7:9 – where the word for heart is actually indicative of lower bowel!

### **Explanation**

What do these sacrifices tell you about God's attitude towards sin and humans?

Consider specially the sin and guilt offerings.

Note here both that God takes sin seriously but that he also provides the solution (albeit it unsatisfactory) for sin. He is both judge and saviour at the same time. Without the sacrificial system they would have been left to wallow in sin.

What do the sacrifices tell you about what our attitude to sin should be?

Same as God's. More serious.

What do these sacrifices tell you about having a relationship with God?

Anything unclean, unholy cannot come into the presence of God without atonement/forgiveness.

*Read Hebrews 10:1-18*

How does Hebrews 10:5-8 relate to Lev 1-5?

The key here is to realise that while God wanted the sacrifices to be made and commanded it, he was not pleased with them because they were powerless to do the whole job. His ultimate plan was to do away with sin 'once for all'.

How is Jesus sacrifice different to those in Leviticus?

Once for all - Romans 6:10, Heb 7:27, 9:12, 26, 1 Peter 3:18

What effect does Jesus sacrifice have that the Levitical ones did not?

#### **Application**

Is your attitude towards sin the same as God's? If not, why not? If there is an imbalance, what can be done to change this?

How might Jesus sacrifice for sin change our attitude toward sin and our own lives (10:14, 17)?

How do you reflect the principle of the fellowship offering in your life?

LEADER'S NOTES INCLUDED IN THIS VERSION  
**Leviticus 8-10**  
**Priesthood**

These chapters continue the narrative from Exodus which has been interrupted by Leviticus 1-7. God had commanded Moses to build a Tabernacle (tent to be used for sacrifice and to symbolise God's presence with his people) in Exodus 25-31. After the golden calf incident (Ex 32-34), the tabernacle is built (Ex 35-40). But before it can be dedicated and operated, Moses instructs the people about the sacrifices that are to go on there (Lev 1-7). Chapter 8 now tells us about the ordination of the priest; chapter 9 tells us about Aaron's inaugural sacrifice; and chapter 10 of how personal tragedy strikes Aaron because his sons take their own initiative in the worship of God.

The Bible affirms that God directed the course of history in order to create a holy people who knew and did his will. At the heart of this plan was a pure system of worship in which God could be honoured and praised in a fitting manner, and sin could be atoned for. To this end, the tabernacle was erected, so that God's presence could become a permanent and living reality in the life of Israel. Furthermore, the sacrifices were instituted. Chapter 8-10 of Leviticus tells us how the priesthood, that would carry out these sacrifices, was instituted and describes the first sacrifices offered.

**Introduction**

Discuss the following quote:

*"If you obey all the rules, you miss all the fun." Katharine Hepburn*

**Analysis**

Our study starts this week in Exodus, where we find the background to Leviticus 8-10.

*Read Exodus 28:1-6, Exodus 29:1-9, 42-46*

God is giving instructions about the appointment of priests to work in the Tent of Meeting.

From what you have read so far, what is expected from Aaron and his sons?

Answers such as obedience to God, holiness, dignity and honour, that they would show God's glory, working as God's leaders.

*Read Exodus 32*

What sin did the people commit?

Breaking the first two commandments - See Exodus 20 - no other gods and no idols.

What part did Aaron play?

Do you think Aaron deserves to continue in his role described in Exodus 28-29?

Aaron and his sons are called forth for ordination in Leviticus 8:1-3. What does this teach you about God?

God's grace and forgiveness are such that even a sinner like Aaron may be appointed to the highest religious office in the nation. This point should not be pushed too far, because in the New Testament, we read that a leader should (1 Timothy 3:7) have a good reputation with outsiders. Not anyone can become a leader anytime no matter what they have done. We will think more about this later.

### *Read Leviticus 8*

As it is being read, write down anything interesting or important. Share what you wrote.

This exercise will give people the opportunity to share their own thoughts but also to learn a bit of basic Bible reading skill. Some things that may come up:

- "as the Lord commanded Moses" - note the repetition of this phrase - at least 9 times in the chapter. You can raise this and ask "what does this tell you about the role of the priesthood?"
- note in v.34-35 the threat of death if things are not done properly.  
*These first two points prepare you for what is coming in chapter 10.*
- the sacrifices are made for Aaron and sons to purify them - the gold plate in 8:9 (see Ex 28:38) atones for any inadvertent uncleanness on the part of the priests - so if they touch an unclean person they remain clean.
- the blood on the right side of the body is for purging and purifying sin - there may be parallels to Ezekiel 43:20-26
- the Urim and Thummim are not like dice in that any decision they cast is left to fate and chance, but are a tool, used by God to enable decisions to be made. No one knows what they looked like or how they operated. See Exodus 28:30.
- wave offering is just another sacrifice/ offering used primarily in the case of ordination but the interesting thing here is that Moses shares the offering with God - indicating his important role in proceedings.

In chapter 9, Aaron and his sons take action and enact the first sacrifices as an ordained priesthood. God had promised that he would appear to them (Lev 9:6) and he did (Lev 9:23-24). What does this tell you about this newly prepared priesthood and Tent of Meeting?

The importance of the appearance of God in the newly consecrated Tent of Meeting (tabernacle) cannot be exaggerated. It renders this tent the equivalent of Mt Sinai: God's presence was made known in both places. But whereas the people experienced God's voice at Sinai (Ex 20:18) only a small number saw God (Ex 24:10-11). In contrast, all the people were privileged to see the glory of God here. This Tent and this priesthood are appointed by God to do his will.

If this was a novel you were reading, what would you expect to have happen next?

### *Read Leviticus 10:1-2*

Were you prepared for these events? Is it unexpected?

What did Nadab and Abihu do wrong?

Do you think God took appropriate action? Why/ why not?

See 1 Corinthians 14:26-33a - God is a God of order.

### *Read Leviticus 10:3-11*

What are Aaron and his sons instructed to do?

What do verses 10-11 tell you about the role of the priesthood?

There is a teaching function in the priesthood. But note that they do not innovate but transmit the old. Moreover they are not the recipients of the divine teaching. The teaching is imparted through Moses.

*Read Leviticus 10:16-20*

What is the difference between this incident and the Nadab and Abihu one?

They did not innovate but Aaron was not eating out of respect for the most Holy things given that his sons had died. In a sense this was his way of mourning and showing ultimate respect for God - that the portion for him to share he did not eat. Perhaps it suggests that God is more gracious to those who make mistakes because they fear him rather than those who carelessly make their own decisions about what is best. This seems to accord with the notion of conscience in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10:23-33.

### **Explanation**

When considering this passage, one medieval writer said, "Those who serve God endanger themselves more. Just as those who are closest to the battlefield are more likely to die, so those closest in the service of the sanctuary are more prone danger."

*Read Luke 12:42-8, 1 Peter 4:17, James 3:1*

What do these passages tell you about leadership in the church?

Why do you think leaders will be judged with greater strictness?

They have the role of teaching the people of God and guiding them and if they guide people away from God they will be judged more harshly. Also, teachers are more than just a conveyor of ideas. They are leaders by word and life, are to watch such things closely (1 Tim 4:16) and is to live as an example of the life in response to Christ that he preaches.

*Read Acts 5:1-11*

How is this similar to the Nadab and Abihu incident?

What do we learn about God from these two incidents?

Do you think something like this might happen today?

### **Application**

How might God's response to Nadab and Abihu shape the way you think about living and worshipping as a Christian?

The account of Nadab and Abihu and the teaching of the New Testament underscores the principle that whoever wishes to be close to God must not let enthusiasm overcome discipline and discretion in worship. Those who serve God must be ever mindful that judgement begins with those who serve at his house. Each one will be held accountable to the standard he holds and for the skills he has been given.

How might you assist your leaders in their task to ensure they do not come under harsh judgement?

What do you think you need to work on in your life if you were to become a leader?

Spend some time praying for your leaders, that they may “watch their life and doctrine closely” (1 Timothy 4:16).

## LEADER'S NOTES INCLUDED IN THIS VERSION

# Leviticus 11-15 Clean and Unclean

What is the strangest thing you have ever eaten?

*In this study, we look at Leviticus 11-15. These chapters provide a set of instructions governing ritual purity. Your status (either clean or unclean) determined whether or not you could bring sacrifices, interact with the community or should be isolated for the benefit of the community.*

*Many of the prohibitions and rules will appear strange to us. Mildew is cleaned with bleach and little concern. Women who have their monthly period are treated no differently to any other person. The more adventurous among us will eat almost anything. So how are we to make any sense of what is in this chapter? Does anything here apply to us today?*

*Let's start by looking at the background to these 5 chapters.*

## Analysis

Ritual purity was a vital dimension of daily life in ancient Israel. Decrees regarding ritual purity are found throughout the Pentateuch but the core legislation is found in Lev 11-15. Cleanness and Uncleanness are regulated with regard to food (ch.11), births (ch.12), skin diseases and household growths (ch.13-14 and bodily emissions (ch.15). It is the duty of the priests to instruct the people in these rules of ritual purity.

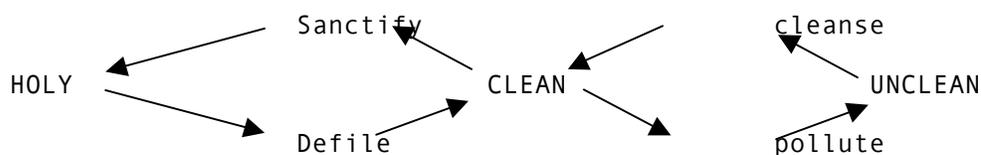
*Read Leviticus 10:10*

This verse foreshadows almost the rest of the book at ch.11-15 deal with clean and unclean and ch. 17-27 deal with holy and common.

From what you know so far, what do all these terms mean - holy, common, clean, unclean?

Anyone or anything given or set apart to God becomes holy (eg. Ex 19:23). Anything that is not holy is common. Common things divide into two groups - the clean and the unclean. (See Lev 11-15 where everything listed has not been given to God but it is just about division of common things) Clean things can become holy when they are sanctified. Unclean objects cannot be sanctified - they must first be cleaned. Clean things can become unclean. Holy things can be defiled and become common or unclean.

So



Cleanness is the state of normality (unless you are a priest or a thing used in the sacrificial system - then you are holy). Holiness is a state of grace to which people are called by God and is attained through obedience to the law and sacrifice. Uncleanness is a substandard position to which people descend.

(Note in Ex 19:4-6 that it is God's intention for the whole nation to be holy - and they will be if they did not ever become unclean and obeyed his commands. If they were holy when the sacrificial system was no longer required. Now that should make you think about where this study is going.)

Leviticus 11-15 deal with clean and unclean, providing for the people and the priests instructions on what is clean and unclean. Have a look at the following examples and fill in the table.

	What defines unclean?	Examples	What should be done?	
Lev 11:1-8				
Lev 12:1-8	Note that there is no real satisfactory reason for why girl babies require double time. Some suggestions are: (1) giving birth to girls is more dangerous; (2) women bleed longer after giving birth to girls; and (3) lower social status of girls.			
Lev 13:1-8				
Lev 15:1-8				

Why do you think these things (among others) were deemed unclean?

There have been several arguments put forward for this:

1. The system is entirely arbitrary, known only to God, and set as a test of obedience.
2. The system sets Israel apart from other nations who used the listed unclean animals in their pagan worship.
3. The system is really more about hygiene than anything else and those animals listed are more likely to carry disease so should be avoided.
4. The system is set up to stop human people becoming random killers of animals.
5. The system prohibits the consumption of things that are lower to the ground and therefore closer symbolically to the underworld and death.

In the end, perhaps the best answer is that they were deemed unclean by God to mark off his people as his people. There may be a combination of 1, 2 and 3 in that. This debate rages.

Why is uncleanness of such great concern? (Clue 11:4, 12:2, 13:3, 15:31)

Morally frail or impure humans could not enter the sanctuary presumptuously lest the consuming holiness of God destroy them.

## **Explanation**

Read the following passages.

*Matthew 8:1-4*

*Matthew 9:20-22*

*Matthew 15:10-20*

How does Jesus justify his actions to those around him?

Why does Jesus treat the Levitical laws with contempt? Is he entirely overturning Leviticus 11-15?

What does this teach you about Jesus' ministry?

Jesus actions in these passages are typical of his entire ministry. We find him touching people who would have been deemed 'unclean' on a regular basis. His actions demonstrate that with his coming, the new age has arrived when God in Christ would call all sinners to repentance. The Levitical laws tended to separate man from God and God's people from those who would defile them. Jesus showed that the Kingdom was open to all and anyone who repented would be saved. He points beyond the letter of the law in Lev 11-15 to the principles of purity and the people of God behind them.

## **Application**

Where might we see a Pharisee-type attitude toward people or things in the church?

Do you make distinctions between people? Do you keep your distance from certain people? Why/ why not?

How might Jesus teaching and attitudes in the Matthew passage be better reflected in your life?

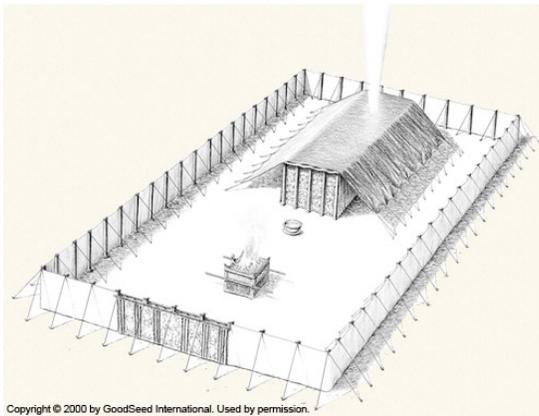
LEADER'S NOTES INCLUDED IN THIS VERSION  
**Leviticus 16-17**  
Atonement

Have you ever felt like a scapegoat - like you took the blame for someone else? How did/ would you react to such a situation??

**Analysis**

*In this study, we begin with a brief look at the Tabernacle (or Tent of Meeting) so we can understand a little more of what goes on with the sacrifices - and particularly the special form of sacrifice described in Leviticus 16.*

If your group is keen (and in preparation) you may want to read all of Exodus 25-27. This will give you a full (!) description of the Tabernacle, its courtyard, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. You can then use the following diagrams to help you decipher the text. Alternately, get your group to split into three and read each of these three chapters then label the parts. Or, you could just do the preparation and tell them what is what.



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The sacrifices described in chapter 1-7 all take place in the Outer Court or Courtyard of the Tabernacle. It is here that the Israelites who were clean would come with their animals to sacrifice. But in the middle of the Tabernacle was a tent into which only Aaron and his sons were allowed into. Ex 27:21 tells us that they had to keep the lamp burning in there all the time. In this Holy Place there was a table, the lamp and an incense altar.

Within the Holy of Holies, shielded from the eye of the common man, was one piece of furniture comprising two parts: the Ark of the Covenant and the atonement cover (or "mercy seat") on top of it. The ark was a chest made of acacia wood, overlaid with pure gold inside and out. It was 3 feet, 9 inches long and 2 feet, 3 inches wide and high. God commanded Moses to put in the ark three items: a golden pot of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the two stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written.

The atonement cover was the lid for the ark. On top of it stood two cherubim (angels) at the two ends, facing each other. The cherubim, symbols of God's divine presence and power, were facing downward toward the ark with outstretched wings that covered the atonement cover. The whole structure was beaten out of one piece of pure gold. The atonement cover was God's dwelling place in the tabernacle. It was His throne, flanked by angels. God said to Moses:

*“There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.” (Exodus 25:22)*

*“Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.” (Leviticus 16:2)*

*We are starting at the end here because the NIV title gives the game away really and it is best to start with the text informing us rather than just a heading that is not part of God’s word!!*

*Read Leviticus 16:29-34*

What do these verses indicate about the purpose of the sacrifice in this chapter?

How is this different from the sacrifices in Chapters 1-7?

Notice here atonement is made for the people and the Most Holy Place, the Tent of Meeting and the altar. Why for the altars and tent? There would have been people who sinned brazenly in the community and their sin would impact the altar in their midst. In addition, given the wide-ranging rules for cleanness in Lev.11-15 some will have unwittingly polluted the Tent of Meeting. The main purpose, then, of this day is to cleanse the tent of pollutions and to ensure that the sins of all the people are atoned for. (Note the explanation in Hebrews 9:1-10 esp. v.7) Note that this information applies for future questions in this study.

What action is the community required to take and why?

*Read Leviticus 16:1-29*

List out all the things that take place in this chapter and note those things that are different or new from previous chapters.

Note the linen is new, the goats, the entering into the MHP, not eating anything and laying both hands on the goat. This may seem a small thing, but note back in Study one that the laying on of one hand was more about identification than transference of sin from the people to the animal.

Why would Aaron die if he failed to follow the practice set out in v.13?

Why, if God is holy, does Aaron need to make atonement for the Most Holy Place in v.15-17? Similarly for the tent of Meeting and the altar (v.20).

*Read Leviticus 16:20-25*

What is the purpose of each of the parts of this atonement ritual?  
How do the two parts relate to each other?

Note in this case we have two hands on the goat and it is clear from v.21-22 that the sins are removed, taken away by the goat.

Why do you think the goat carrying the sins is not killed?

*Read Leviticus 16:34*

Why do Aaron and his descendants need to perform this ritual every year??

The events of this day are powerful both in reality (that they remove sin from the people and the Tent of Meeting) and in symbol (as it demonstrates the reality of sin and the need to eliminate it). The commands for the people to deny themselves and do now work underline the need for every person to examine themselves and be involved in what is going on here so that the presence of God may continue to dwell among his people who are holy and not wallowing in sin.

*Read Leviticus 17*

What does the warning in v.1-7 remind you of? What is the principle being upheld here?

The Nadab and Abihu incident. God is a God of order not innovation. When it comes to worship of God, it is "my way or the highway".

Why would God be so pedantic about such things?

What does it mean that someone might be "cut off"?

In preparation, see Genesis 17:14, Exodus 31:14, Lev 7:20-27. While the answer is not clearly stated, the idea is that a person cut off would no longer be considered a part of the people of God because they have transgressed God's commands. It would not be then that they are a foreigner but that they have no part to play in Israel anymore.

Why is there such a fuss over the blood? (v.10-12)

There is much debate on this point but it seems to be related to two things in these verses: respect for life and atonement for sin. Blood is not to be consumed for it has far higher purposes. Note Genesis 9:4.

What does this teach you about the cross?

Should Christians eat a black sausage<sup>1</sup>??

See Acts 15:29 – strangulation would mean the blood did not drain. Also Romans 14:2-3, 14-15. It is likely that the answer here is yes you can unless you might be causing someone to stumble. The Jerusalem council probably held to these conditions for Christians so that Jewish Christians would not be offended by Gentile Christians.

## Explanation

What does the whole set up of the Tent of Meeting teach us about God and our relationship with God?

What does Lev.16 teach us about how we should approach God?

How does Leviticus 16 inform and shape our thinking about the death of Jesus?

*Read Hebrews 9*

What does Jesus death achieve that the Leviticus 16 sacrifices could not?

How is it that a cleansed conscience enables us to serve God?

If the Old Testament sacrifices made the people outwardly clean (v.13) how is it that atonement and forgiveness could have been declared in Leviticus?

## Application

How do you know if Jesus sacrifice has been effective for you?

Do you think we have become all a little too familiar with God? Do we treat him more like Nadab and Abihu or Aaron? Share some evidence for your answer.

What can be done to impress upon our minds the need to take sin more seriously?

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<sup>1</sup> **blood sausage = blood pudding = black pudding = black sausage = boudin noir** These eggplant-coloured sausages are made of pig's blood mixed with fat, a filler like bread crumbs, and other flavourings that vary from region to region throughout Europe. They're usually sold precooked, but most people heat them before serving.

What is the purpose of confession of sin in church if Jesus has done away with sin 'once for all'?

LEADER'S NOTES INCLUDED IN THIS VERSION  
**Leviticus 18-22**  
Holiness

“Twenty-first century Christianity has lost shape. Christians have stopped believing that the next life is more important than this one; they have stopped believing that life here is essential preparation and training for the life hereafter.”

Discuss

*Read Leviticus 18-19, 20:22-27*

Why is God issuing all these instructions? Do any strike you as strange?

See Exodus 19:3-6 and then Leviticus 18:1-5, 24-30, 19:2, 20:22-24

Why do sexual issues and inter-personal relationships get so much emphasis?

The community and relationships within it under God are of primary importance.

What does it mean that God is holy?

Note Exodus 3 and also the fact that the people are called to be holy.

What do these chapters teach us about how God's people become holy?

See Lev 19:2 and 20:8, 22:9

What is the purpose of the constant refrain “I am the Lord” and all its variations??

The phrase is probably used repeatedly to remind the people of who they are dealing with. This is the God who brought them out of Egypt and out of the land of slavery. This is the God who when he introduced his commandments to them said “I am the Lord your God” (Exodus 20:2).

It is also a constant reminder of what this God has said to them in fuller form previously (Lev 11:44) and throughout these chapters. So, in this very short refrain the Israelites are reminded constantly of who they were and whom they served.

**Explanation**

Write out the principles that you think underlie these chapters. Are they principles that should or do apply to us?

See 1 Peter 2:11-12 – One of the key principles is to be distinctive: to live lives that honour God and are therefore distinctive from those around you. Notice that we too are different and though in the

world should not be characterised by its practices and behaviours. We are members of God's kingdom and even present with him now. (Eph 2:6-7)

It would be good to generate discussion at this point with on the difficulties of living distinctive lives. Talk about the impact of "peer group pressure" and the desire to always 'fit in'.

Do any of the specific laws in Chapter 18 and 19 still apply to Christians? Why/Why not?

See Matthew 22:35-40.

How do we go about distinguishing between what laws we can apply to us from Leviticus and what we cannot?

This is a very big question. Sometimes people will distinguish between moral and ceremonial laws - moral laws continue but ceremonial laws are done away with because of Christ. Other times people will distinguish between the situation we find ourselves in, in life. So Wenham writes: "Man's moral predicaments change very little with time. We still need guidelines to regulate man's treatment of his fellow man. But the believer's situation with regard to salvation has altered drastically. There is no need to continue with animal sacrifice now that the true lamb of God has appeared." One way to distinguish between the two focuses on the law, the other on the people. A third option is to uphold what the New Testament and Jesus upholds and do away with the rest.

I tend to think a combination of all three is required, where we listen to the teaching of the New Testament, assess the laws themselves and our status before Christ, always desiring to be holy for this injunction is a New Testament demand. See 1 Peter 1:14-16.

What would you say to someone who read Leviticus 18 & 19 and asked you why Christians are opposed to homosexual behaviour but have no problem with wearing poly-cotton shirts?

See Lev 18:22 and 19:19

*Read Titus 2:11-14*

In contrast to Leviticus 18 & 19, what surprises you about this passage?

Grace teaches us to say NO. We often think that law says NO and grace says it is OK when you fail.

Do you ever take God's gift of grace for granted? How?

In what areas of your life do you need to hear the call to live a distinctive life and to say 'NO'.

## Leviticus 23-26 Feasts & Festivals

This study will focus primarily on the Year of Jubilee in Leviticus 25.

In 2002, the average Australian household had a debt of \$60,000. How would you feel, if someone paid off all your debts?

### Analysis

*In this study we will focus on Leviticus 25, an intriguing chapter that has much to teach us about generosity, family and God's world.*

*Read Leviticus 25:1-22*

Fill in the following table

	What you can do	What you can't do
Leviticus 25:1-7 Sabbath Year		
Leviticus 25:8-13 Jubilee Year		

What do you think would be impressed upon the minds of the Israelites if they followed these regulations?

Trust in God, their temporary residency in the land, the need to see yourself as no more important than any other person in the land - v.6, they all had to get food the same way in the Sabbath and Jubilee years.

What do these verses (v.1-22) say -

...about God?

Notice especially v.2, he is the owner of the land. You will see this repeated in verse 23. He gives it and he owns it. Notice also he desires rest and justice and social equality for his people. He is passionate about family units.

...about the way people are to treat each other?

To put it simply, fairly and generously v.14-17

...about the way people should view their land?

Temporary residents. Owners of the crop not the land. V.16

*Read Leviticus 25:23-38*

Can you summarise the principles and regulations in these verses down to a few sentences?

What do these verses say -

...about the land?

v.23. Note that there are different provisions in the cities and this may have been because city dwellings were under constant rebuilding and value would be added to any house that would make it unfair to redeem if someone else had done the work. This is a little speculative but several commentators seem to think this.

...about the obligations of family and friends to one another?

Help redeem one another's property and possessions.

...about the treatment of foreigners in the land?

How does verse 38 contribute towards our understanding of what is being asked here?

Reminder that all they have has been given to them and they are residents at the purpose and pleasure of God and as he is holy in his treatment of them in giving them every good thing, so should they be holy in their dealings towards one another.

*Read Leviticus 25:39-55*

What can we learn about slavery in Israel from this passage?

Too often people are critical of God's endorsement of slavery. As the laws here make clear, slavery in the Bible is radically different to

the African exploitation of previous centuries. It is akin to being in a situation where you are not able to pay off a debt so you put yourself at someone's service to pay it off instead. (Like having no money in a restaurant and having to do the washing up to pay for your meal). The slaves were not cut off from society, and as you can see, could actually earn a wage and get themselves out of slavery.

What obligations do owners of slaves have?

What obligations do relatives of slaves have?

What obligations do owners of foreign slaves have?

### **Explanation**

Do any of the principles of this chapter apply to Christians? If so, which ones and why?

I think this chapter has a lot to teach us about the way God views human relationships and the way we should care for one another. These are timeless principles that are reiterated in the New Testament. See 1 Tim 5:8, 1 John 3:17, James 2:15-26, Lev 19:18 and Matthew 22:39.

How does Leviticus 25 shape the way you think about

your possessions?

your family?

the poor and foreigners in your midst?

What can you do to make a difference in your family or community?

*Read Luke 4:16-21*

How does your understanding of the Year of Jubilee increase your understanding of the ministry of Jesus both now and into the future?

Note he is quoting from Isaiah 61 but alluding to the concept of Jubilee.

*Further notes:*

These ideals have often inspired world leaders and social reformers. While the western ideal is that every family has a right to own

property, the view of land ownership in Lev 25 is revolutionary. It does not promote the ownership of private property in a way that allows the rich to amass large tracts of land, displacing the poor, nor does it permit the buying and selling of land for profit that feeds inflation and increases poverty. Neither does this passage encourage a socialist or communist view of land ownership. Instead, this chapter prescribes a classless society in which each family has an inalienable stewardship of a plot of land. It promotes responsible work and responsible brotherhood - all arising out of faith in God. Those who are more prosperous are to assist their poorer brothers, raising them up because they fear God. Family help family, neighbour helps neighbour and greed and covetousness are broken. This wondrous ideal feeds our understanding of God's vision of humanity both now and in the future when the Kingdom of Christ is fully established.

*John E Hartley, Leviticus. Word Commentary; p. 448.*

LEADER'S NOTES INCLUDED IN THIS VERSION

**Leviticus 27**  
**Vows and Redemption**

Have you ever offered or received a reward for getting something back?

Alternate: If you lost your pet [whatever it is] how much reward would you offer to get it back?

This chapter is about making vows and dedicating things into God's service. Many people have struggled to understand why it is here at the end of the book when ch.26 makes such a fitting conclusion. Perhaps the best way to explain it is that the blessings and curses of ch.26 are in a sense God's vows to his people, his promises as to what he will do in the future. It could then be that this prompts consideration of how people are to make and honour vows and promises to God.

We should note too that no where in the Scriptures are people encouraged to make vows to God. Perhaps the fact is that they do and people need to realise that making promises to God is no small thing. You may have heard someone say in the movies, "Dear God if you do this I will go to church for the rest of my life". We all smirk - yeh right you will. Ch.27 tells us that we should not play games with God.

Note that the average wage of a worker in biblical times was about one shekel a month; that is about 11 grams of silver. So the prices here for redemption and payment of vows were high.

There are bound to be extra questions from your group in this chapter and so there are fewer analysis questions.

**Analysis**

*The final chapter of Leviticus is all about making vows and dedicating things into God's service. It is a serious and costly business as we will see.*

*Read Leviticus 27:1-13*

What is a vow and why would you make one?

Can you think of why values for different things would be different?

Why is there the no-exchanges principle in v.9-11?

Read Deut 23:21-23. How does this add to your understanding of God's attitude to vows?

Even hardened atheists have been known to pray when they face imminent death. When people are in dire straits or just desirous of something they pray for deliverance, or make vows to God, promising

to do something if he rescues them. See biblical examples in Gen 28:20, Judges 11:29-40, 1 Samuel 1:9-12, Jonah 2:10. Vows can tend to be made rashly and the vow maker may forget the vow or leave it unfulfilled. There are several warnings in the Scriptures about such an attitude. Ecclesiastes 5:3-5, Deut 23:21-23, Prov 20:25. Here in Leviticus the Israelite who makes a vow of oneself or another to God is to fulfil that vow by contributing to the sanctuary a pre-determined payment. You could not become a priest except by lineage so instead you would pay a sanctuary price. The rules are there to ensure rash vows are not made and people realise that God takes our words, promises and vows seriously. The sorts of vows being made could be different but in general, people would ask God to do something for them - is seeking to motivate God to act in a certain way. A vow is not however a bribe designed to purchase God's intervention. They are voluntary commitments and it was clear to Israel that God was their God who acted in his time and his way.

*Read Leviticus 27:14-34*

What is the difference between dedicating something and devoting something?

Why would someone want to redeem something?

Why do you think a redeemer needs to pay 20% more?

Things that are dedicated are literally made holy. It has the same effect as vowing and as a result the property comes into the possession of the sanctuary and the priests may dispose of it as they wish unless it is redeemed. Something that is devoted is entirely given to God with no chance of redemption and the priests will do to it as God desires. Often in times of war, whole towns are devoted to God (or put under 'the ban') and that meant they would be destroyed in accordance with the will of God.

#### **Explanation**

*No where in the New Testament is there a call for Christians to make vows. But they do...*

*Read Acts 18:18 and 21:18-25*

*We ought to think carefully before we speak and especially to God. Of course, there is no reason for us to make vows, and some reason not to!*

Read the following verses and consider what they teach us about the way we should speak to and with and about God?

Matthew 5:33-37

2 Corinthians 1:17-20

James 5:12

Colossians 3:8-10

1 Timothy 6:3-6

Are you ever tempted to make deals with God in prayer? Would you still do that after working through this study? Why? Why not?

Where might we be guilty of saying one thing and doing another with God?

I wonder about our commitments to give, serve and pray and whether as we make promises to do things whether God looks on our feeble hands and minds and shows mercy because of our weak determinations.

How might the costliness of redemption in Lev.27 inform us about the work of Christ in redeeming us?

Luke 1:68, Gal 3:13-14

A note regarding the Judges 11 passage and Jephthah's vow:

God did give the victory, not because of Jephthah's vow but because of his compassion and grace in saving Israel. For Israel, the events of this fateful day bring salvation and peace from their enemies. But for Jephthah, he is no doubt entitled to be master and commander of the Gileadites, but it also means that he must fulfil the gruesome requirements of his self-imposed vow.

So God is not the one at fault here, but Jephthah - and as such he epitomises Israel's problem in the book of Judges. They are engaged in such syncretism that religion has gone mad. That Jephthah was willing to risk his own precious possession to achieve his own glory is a picture of Israel itself. Willing to give away relationship with God as they sought after their own autonomy. Jephthah exchanged dependence on God, let us say faith, in this story for superstition, to achieve for himself what was right in his own eyes. He bargained with God and got more than he bargained for. And can't we be just like that? How many times have we been tempted to pray the "if only you would just ..then.." prayer? How many times have we applied our own false religion or superstition in our lives, with no clear word from God? How many times have we displayed a measure of arrogance in our prayers, rather than an abundance of humility and trust?