



7 Bible Studies for Growth Groups



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Introduction

Welcome to this series of seven Bible Studies on the book of Leviticus. Many people have deemed this Old Testament book impenetrable, irrelevant and esoteric. Rituals for sacrifice and regulations concerning uncleanness appear to have nothing to say to people living in the twenty-first century (not to mention that Jesus does away with any concept of outward uncleanness in Mark 7:15). “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Lev 19:18) is often said to be the only memorable principle in the whole book. Yet, I believe it contains a wonderfully rich and profound exposition of the character of God, holiness and the need for the cross of Christ.

Reading the Old Testament correctly

This belief is not based on a vibe or hope – it is based on the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. He made it quite clear that the Old Testament was a collection of books about him. In John 5 Jesus criticises the Pharisees for being readers of the Scriptures but failing to see that the Scriptures testify to him (John 5:39). In Luke 24, on two occasions Jesus explains what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. So even the slightly obtuse book of Leviticus must be read as a book that has something to say about Jesus.

Of course, it is too simplistic to say that it only tells us about Jesus. As I have already said, Leviticus will teach us about God, sin, holiness and a host of other things. As we read the Old Testament we are reminded by Paul that “everything that was written in the past was written to teach us” (Romans 15:4).

So, as with every other book of the Bible, read Leviticus at two levels. Firstly, read first to understand what the book was originally about. Then read in light of knowing that this book will contain testimony to Jesus. The former is the easier task often, and the latter must not be pursued as though there is a ‘hidden message’

about Jesus. Rather, ask yourself, what here, in this book or passage, sheds light on or tells me about who Jesus is, what he came to do and why he came to do it.

Literary Background

Leviticus is the third book of the Pentateuch (a name for the first 5 books of the Bible meaning ‘five-volume book’). It is part of a large section of instructions and regulations that runs from Exodus 25:1 to Numbers 10:10. Yet those who put the Pentateuch together gave it a distinct heading (1:1-2) and a conclusion (26:45) and an appendix (27). Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers is really one long story about the origins of Israel as the people of God and the way that God instructed them to live.

One striking feature of Leviticus is the centrality of God. At the beginning of almost every chapter and several times within each chapter, it says “the Lord spoke”. In other words, all the laws we read are set within a narrative framework. They are fundamental to God’s relationship with Israel.

Theme

Since their escape from Pharaoh through the Red Sea (Exodus 12-17) the Israelites had been camped in the shadow of Mt Sinai. They had experienced the great redemptive act of their God – their deliverance from slavery in Egypt – and that event was to remain central to their faith for all future generations of believers. They had seen and heard the thunder and lightning on the holy mountain (Ex 19:16-19), and God had given his Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). He had declared that he was their God and they were his people.

But what now? How were they to live in the land that God had promised to give them? How were they to relate to God? How were they to relate to the nations around them? What values ought to characterise them as a nation?

These questions and more are answered in the Book of Leviticus.

Structure of Leviticus

PRIESTLY RESPONSIBILITY [1-15]
<p><i>Sacrifice 1-7</i></p> <p>The different types of sacrifices are explained. You will note that they are explained twice – first for the people (1-5); second there is further details added for the priests themselves (6-7).</p>
<p><i>Priesthood 8-10</i></p> <p>In order for the sacrifices to be offered, a priesthood is required – so the ordination of the priests is detailed in this section.</p>
<p><i>Clean and Unclean 11-15</i></p> <p>The third section details the times and details of sacrifices that must be made in the case of uncleanness. Many things (such as touching certain animals, catching a disease, or moral failure) can make a person unclean and offering a sacrifice was part of the cleaning process.</p>
ATONEMENT [16-17]
<p><i>Atonement 16-17</i></p> <p>At the heart of the book is the description of the day of atonement when the sins of Israel are taken away. Chapter 17 identifies that the blood represents the life of the animal. Being right with God requires a blood sacrifice.</p>
NATIONAL HOLINESS [18-27]
<p><i>Holiness 18-22</i></p> <p>This section contains a list of laws that must be kept by Israel if they are going to be the holy nation they have been called to be (Exodus 19:6). The relationship between the different laws is not always obvious, but the thread that binds them together is the holiness of God that they are to replicate.</p>

Feasts and Festivals 23-26

The Israelite year is to be filled with a rhythm of feasts and festivals. From weekly Sabbaths to week long festivals which remind Israel of the grace of God and celebrate communion with Him.

Vows and Redemption 27

This final chapter operates as an appendix and deals with the issue of redemption.

The first 16 chapters of Leviticus deal almost entirely with Israel's priestly responsibilities. By preserving her purity in this way, the nation was able to remain in contact with God and witness to his presence in the world. In the closing chapters (17-27) the focus is on the demand for national holiness. The constant call of these chapters is that the people should be holy. Leviticus 19:2 says "Be Holy, because I the Lord your God am holy."

Leviticus 1-7 - Sacrifice

Launching Question

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

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?
Burnt Offering Leviticus 1				
Grain Offering Leviticus 2				
Fellowship Offering Leviticus 3				
Sin Offering Leviticus 4-5:13				
Guilt Offering Leviticus 5:14-6:7				

What are your overall impressions of these sacrifices?

Explanation

What do these sacrifices tell you about God's attitude towards sin and humans? Consider especially the sin and guilt offerings.

Read Hebrews 10:1-18

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

How is Jesus sacrifice different to those in Leviticus?

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 you life?

Leviticus 8-10 - Priesthood

Launching question

Discuss the following quote:

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

Introduction

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. Chapters 8 to 10 of Leviticus tells us how the priesthood, that would carry out these sacrifices, was instituted and describes the first sacrifices offered.

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?

Scan over Exodus 32 (especially verses 1 to 8 and verse 35)

What sin did the people commit?

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?

Read Leviticus 8

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

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 (read Lev 9:6) and he did (read Lev 9:23-24).

What does this tell you about this newly prepared priesthood and Tent of Meeting?

Explanation

The purpose of the rituals, cleansing and sacrifice is so that God could and would dwell with His people. But it could not be done in any fashion that mankind decided to achieve this. Only what God had prescribed would be acceptable to Him (see chapter 10 for what happens when unauthorised offerings are made). So too for us, we can only dwell with God as He Himself has made way to be with us.

Read Hebrews 8:1-6 (the rest of the chapter is also helpful)

According to Hebrews, what was the point of the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices?

What has God now prescribed as the means of accessing His presence?

We no longer need earthly priests. True or false? Explain.

Application

Consider how amazing it is that Jesus is our great High Priest. Read Hebrews 4:14-16. What does that passage tell us to do? Turn the message of Hebrews 4 into a prayer of thanks.

Leviticus 11-15 - Clean and Unclean

Launching Question

What is the strangest thing you have ever eaten?

Introduction

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

Read Leviticus 10:10

From what you know so far, what do all these terms mean?

- holy
- common
- clean
- unclean

Leviticus 11-15 provide 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			
Lev 13:1-8			
Lev 15:1-8			

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?

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?

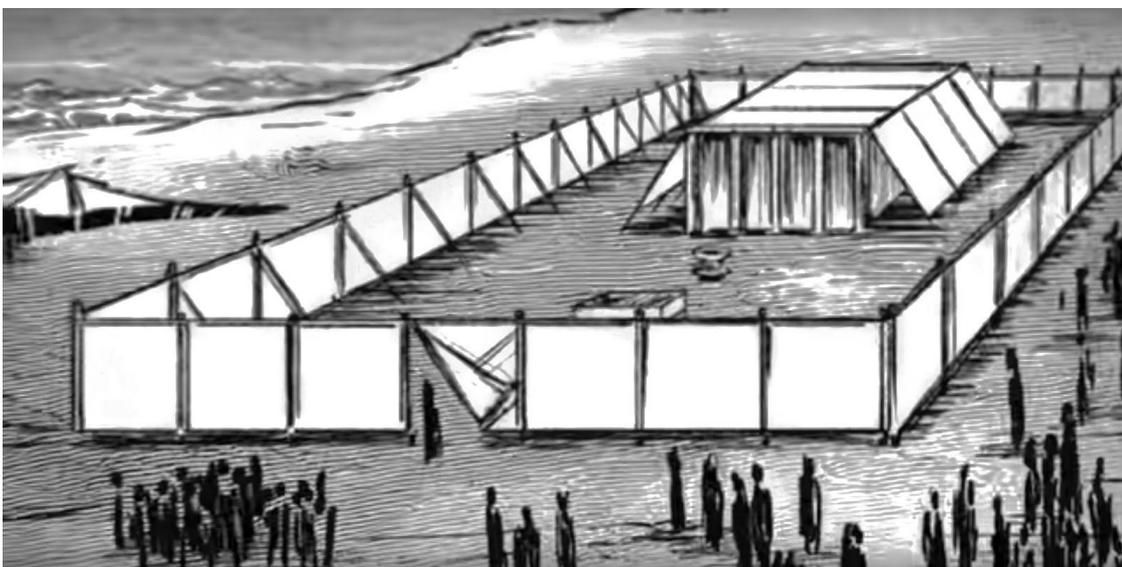
Leviticus 16-17 - Atonement

Launching Question

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.



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?

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.

Why would Aaron die if he failed to follow the practice set out in v13?

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?

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??

Read Leviticus 17:10-12

Why is there such a fuss over the blood?

What does this teach you about the cross?

Explanation

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

What does Leviticus 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 (v13) 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?

Since there is no longer need to offer sacrifice, what can be done to impress upon our minds the need to take sin more seriously?

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

For further learning

Download a PDF of The Tabernacle Mini Model and build a miniature cardboard version of the Tabernacle and courtyard. Not only would this be fun to do, but help form an appreciation of the structure.

<https://visualunit.me/2015/01/21/the-tabernacle-mini-model/>

Leviticus 18-22 - Holiness

Launching Question

“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 the above quote.

Read Leviticus 18-19, 20:22-27

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

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

What does it mean that God is holy? See Leviticus 20:26

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

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

Explanation

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

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

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?

Read Titus 2:11-14

What surprises you about this passage?

Application

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

Launching Question

In 2016, the average Australian household had a debt of \$250,000¹. 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?

¹ <https://www.finder.com.au/australias-personal-debt-reported-as-highest-in-the-world>

What do these same verses say about...

- God?
- the way people are to treat each other?
- the way people should view their land?

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?
- the obligations of family and friends to one another?
- the treatment of foreigners in the land?

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

Read Leviticus 25:39-55

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

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?

How does Leviticus 25 shape the way you think about...

- your possessions?
- your family?
- the poor and foreigners in your midst?

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?

Leviticus 27 - Vows and Redemption

Launching Question

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

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?

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?

Explanation

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

Application

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?

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

Final reflection

What have you learned from the book of Leviticus?

How will you apply it?

