

# THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS – LESSON 2

## Lesson 2 - Introduction to the Tabernacle and Defining Terms

Exodus ends with God filling the completed Tabernacle with his incredible glory.

Exodus 40:34-35

<sup>34</sup> Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. <sup>35</sup> Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

Leviticus covers a very short period of time in the travels of Israel. Beginning with Exodus the time covered in each book is approximately...

### Exodus

- About 12 months

### Leviticus

- 30 days

### Numbers

- About 39 years

### Deuteronomy

- About 30 days

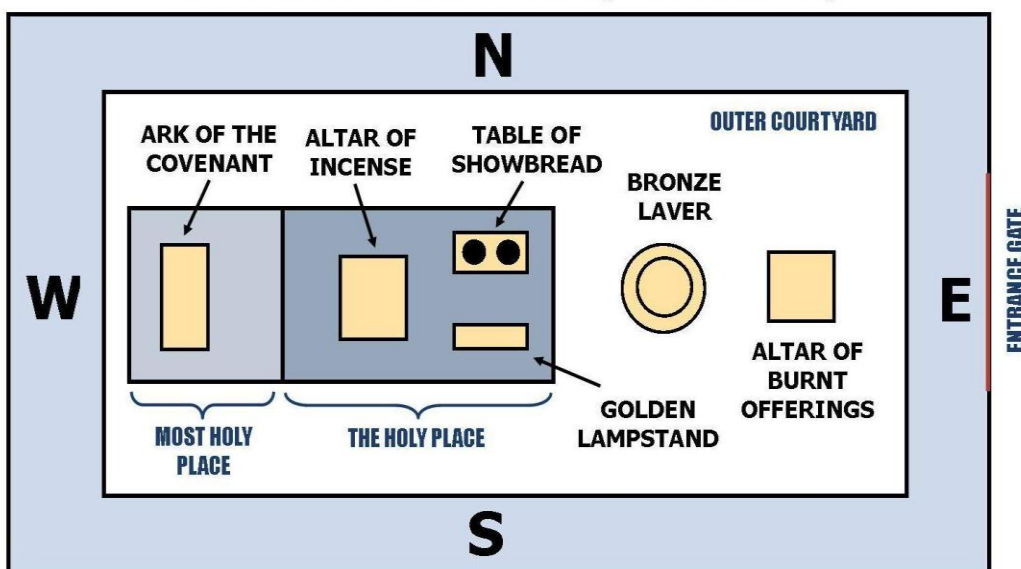
### Joshua

- Joshua begins with Israel crossing the Jordan into the Promise Land almost exactly 40 years after they came out of Egypt.

In order to understand what is being said in Leviticus, it is necessary to know a little about the Tabernacle, which would play such a prominent role in the lives of Israel for hundreds of years.

## The Tabernacle

### THE TABERNACLE OF MOSES (EXODUS 35-40)



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Hebrews 8:5

<sup>5</sup> They (the High Priests) serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: “See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.”

The first thing to understand about the Tabernacle is that it is symbolic of Heaven itself. We are not 100% sure of what each aspect of the Tabernacle stands for, but we have some pretty good ideas about many of them.

## 1. The Most Holy Place

Hebrews 9:3-5

Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, <sup>4</sup> which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron’s staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. <sup>5</sup> Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover.

- a. The Most Holy Place would probably be symbolic of the throne room of God.
  - i. The “Mercy Seat” or “Atonement Cover” (the cover of the Ark) is where God’s presence dwelled and where the High Priest would enter, at great peril to himself, once a year on the Day of Atonement in order to seek purification for the Israelites.
  - ii. There were two Cherubim on the Ark which probably stand for the Cherubim in Heaven.
  - iii. The Ark contained the 10 Commandments, the Jar of Manna and Aaron’s rod which budded. More than likely this symbolized that
    1. God’s throne is founded upon the Holiness of the Law.
    2. Jesus said he was the the bread of life that came down from Heaven, so we know that is what the manna symbolized.
  - iv. Aaron’s rod that budded was the result of some of the Israelites challenging the idea that only Aaron’s family could serve as priests. God confirmed the Aaronic priesthood by having all 12 tribes provide staffs with their tribals names written on them and Aaron’s name on the staff for the Tribe of Levi. All 12 were place into the Tent of Meeing. The next day Aaron’s staff had budded, blossomed and produced almonds! (Num 17:8) Thus God confirmed he had chosen Aaron’s



John 6:32-35

<sup>32</sup> Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

<sup>34</sup> “Sir,” they said, “from now on give us this bread.”

<sup>35</sup> Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”

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family alone for the priesthood. Whether Aaron's staff symbolizes anything else, I'm not sure.

- b. Next is the Holy Place (as opposed to the Most Holy Place) where we find the...
- Altar of Incense. It is widely accepted that incense symbolized the prayers of the faithful that "smell good" to God (Rev 5:8; 8:3f)
  - Perhaps the Menorah (the Golden Lampstand) stood for the 7 Spirits of God that were before God's throne that we read about in Rev 4.

**Revelation 4:5**  
**Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.**

- The Golden Table of Showbread.

The table had two rows of 6 loaves of bread that were baked and placed on the table each day. There is one loaf for each of the 12 tribes of Israel. There is much speculation about what this stood for. I'm not even going to try...



The Most Holy Place was where God dwelled, his very presence seated upon his throne. The Holy Place seems to be symbolic of being before, or in front of, the throne of God.

- c. The Curtain between the Most Holy Place and the Holy Place

**Hebrews 10:19-20**

**<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,<sup>20</sup> by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body...**

The curtain stood for the body of Jesus. Once Jesus died the curtain was torn in two from top to bottom (Mt 27:51) which likely symbolized that the way into the Most Holy Place, into Heaven itself and into God's presence, had been opened forever by the sacrifice of Jesus.

Inside the Tabernacle, (the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place) the items were either made of pure gold or overlaid with pure gold. Outside the Tabernacle, the items were made of a less precious metal, bronze. The fact that they are bronze rather than gold may indicate their distance from the immediate presence of God and his Holiness. These may have symbolized the earthly duties of the priests and/or the sacrifices that were offered on earth in order to please God who symbolically dwelled in Heaven (inside the Tabernacle).

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Outside the Tabernacle itself we see two additional items.

- d. The Bronze Altar of Burnt Offering  
This was where the sacrifices (or parts of the sacrifices) were offered “before the Lord” (who was in “in” the Tabernacle).

- e. The Bronze Laver  
The laver was for the priests to wash themselves before they entered into the Holy Place.



Washing symbolized the need to be “pure” or “clean” before approaching the Lord. This is a constant theme of Leviticus.



As you read through Leviticus (or several other places in the Old and New Testaments) you will see each of these items referenced several times. We can't know for sure the symbolic significance of each of them. The only way to know for certain is if the Bible explicitly states the significance for us. Where it does not, we can only guess as to their true meaning. But even if we don't know the full nature of

the symbols themselves (yet!), what we do know can deepen our understanding of God significantly. ***So don't focus on what we don't know. Focus on what we do know.*** Pray about what we don't know and ask for God to give us insight so that we can know and understand him better. Believe me, ***the things that we do know are more than sufficient to change our relationships with God forever!***



## Defining Terms Found In Leviticus

### Holiness vs Cleanness vs Uncleanness<sup>1</sup>

1. Cleanness and Uncleanness
  - a. The basic meaning of “cleanness” is purity. Cleanness is the normal condition of most things and most people. A clean person or thing can be elevated into a state of holiness through a process called “sanctification”.
  - b. Pollution of some sort (sin most commonly) degrades something that is clean into a state of uncleanness. ***Uncleanness is closely associated with sin.***

<sup>1</sup> Much of the following discussion is taken from “The Book of Leviticus” by Wenham, pgs 18ff)

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**The unclean and the holy are two states which must never come into contact with each other.**

- i. For example, if an unclean person eats holy food (i.e. part of a sacrificial animal) he will be cut off from among his people (Lev 7:20f; 22:3). Holy people such as priests and Nazarites cannot pollute themselves by coming into contact with corpses, which are by definition, unclean (21:2ff; 11-12; Num 6:6-8). If a Nazarite accidentally touches a corpse and becomes unclean, he must offer various sacrifices to cleanse himself from the uncleanness and start his period of consecration all over again (Num 6:9-12).
- c. Uncleanness can be transmitted from some unclean things by contact (11:39f; 14:36; 15:4ff). Similarly, some holy objects make everything that touches them holy (Ex 29:37; 30:29; Lev 6:11). But cleanness is not conveyed to other things. Cleanness is the ground state; holiness and uncleanness are variations from the norm of cleanness.

Holiness ↔ Clean ↔ Unclean

- d. What is intrinsically clean may become **temporarily** unclean. Temporary uncleanness may result from contact with corpses, childbirth, disease, discharges (Lev 11-15), various types of illicit sexual intercourse (Lev 18) and murder (Num 35:33). Each of these forms of uncleanness are regarded in some way as deviations from the norm. The greater the deviation from the norm, the greater the degree of uncleanness and the difficulty in cleansing.
- e. Some things are **permanently** unclean, such as certain animals in Lev 11. *Permanent uncleanness cannot be altered and is not contagious.* There are no rites that can “cure” it. Unclean animals do not pass on their uncleanness to others. They simply cannot be eaten.
- f. Paradoxically, temporary uncleanness is more serious. Some types are contagious and can be passed onto others. ALL types of temporary uncleanness require cleansing. **Those who neglect to undergo the appropriate decontamination procedures endanger themselves and the whole community (Num 19:13, 20).** This, I believe, has implications for the church today and we’ll revisit this again in a future lesson.
- g. There are also different degrees of uncleanness. The slight uncleanness that comes from marital intercourse requires the couple to wash and wait until evening for the uncleanness to dissipate. Menstrual discharge results in uncleanness lasting 7 days. But unnatural discharges from the sexual organs causes uncleanness to last 7 days *after the discharge ceases* and require washing and sacrifice to cleanse the person (Lev 15). The

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same is true for those healed of unclean skin diseases (Lev 14) some of which required the person to be expelled from the camp until healed.

**Neglect of these purity rules polluted the Tabernacle and lead to the death of the offender. Why? The Holy God and the unclean person could not co-exist. Contact between holiness and uncleanness could be disasterous, especially between Holy God and an unclean person.**

### Holiness

2. Holiness characterizes God himself and all that belongs to him. “Be holy, for I am holy” (11:44f; 19:2; 20:26). God’s name, which expresses his character, is holy (20:3; 22:2, 32). His name is profaned by idolatry, swearing falsely, and other sins (18:21; 19:12; 20:3; 21:6; 22:2). God demonstrates his holiness by judging sin (10:3; Num 20:13). ***Apart from these observations there is no explanation of what God’s holiness is in itself.*** Holiness is intrinsic to God’s character.
  - a. Anyone or anything given to God becomes holy. **A person dedicated to the service of God is holy.** The Levitical priests are the best example of this (Ex 29:1; 39:30; Lev 21:5ff).

### How is Holiness (Sancitfication) Achieved?

- b. Holiness is not acquired by ritual action alone. Nor is it achieved by moral behavior alone.

**Leviticus stresses that there are two aspects to sanctification, divine actions and human actions.**

- c. God sanctifies but man also sanctifies. The divine side is expressed in the frequent refrain, “I am the Lord your sanctifier” (Lev 20:8; 21:8, 15, 23; 22:9, 16, 32). Obedience to the commands was man’s part in sanctification. For example, the fourth commandment in Ex 20:8, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (i.e. to sanctify it). ***Once God sanctifies, it is man’s responsibility to learn to sanctify himself.*** God sanctifies as an act of grace and love. Man sanctifies himself as an act of gratitude for God has done through his grace and love.
    - d. When the whole nation was made holy though the covenant at Mt. Sinai, they had to cleanse themselves from uncleanness (Ex 19:10-15), offer sacrifice, and promise to obey the law (Ex 24:3-8). Keeping the law was one of the most important duties of the people of Israel if they were to demonstrate holiness (Lev 19:2ff; 20:7ff; Num 15:39-40).
    - e. To deliberately disobey God was a profanity worthy of death (Ex 31:14).

**The main emphasis of the book of Leviticus is on the human contribution to sanctification, what man has to do to make something holy.**

- f. Disciples in New Testament are called to be holy as well.

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1 Peter 2:9

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

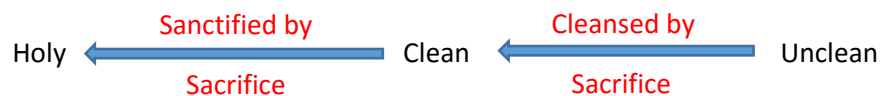
## The Role of Sacrifice

Leviticus devotes the first 17 chapters to explaining the occasions for and the correct procedures to be followed in sacrifice. The specific significance of the different sacrifices will be dealt with in subsequent lessons. For now, let's look at the role of sacrifice in general and its relationship to sin and uncleanness.

Hebrews 9:22

22 In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

1. Sacrifice (more specifically sacrificial blood) was necessary to restore the relationship between God and Israel and members of the Israelite nation to each other. Sacrifice was necessary to restore harmony between God and man, and between man and man.
2. Blood cleanses and sanctifies (makes holy) both objects that are used to worship God and the people who worship him. Nothing can be unclean before God. For example, the altar (object) and the priests (people) are sanctified through anointing oil and sacrificial blood (Ex 29:36f; Lev 8:11-15, 23-30). The man who recovered from a skin disease was anointed with blood to cleanse him from ritual uncleanness (Lev 14:6ff). The various purification and reparation offerings detailed in chs 4-5 all deal with the uncleanness associated with sin.
3. These sacrifices reach their annual climax in the Day of Atonement ceremonies when each part of the Tabernacle was smeared with blood "to cleanse it and sanctify it from the uncleannesses of the Israelites" (Lev 16:19).
4. According to Leviticus, sacrificial blood is necessary to cleanse and sanctify. Sacrifice can undo the effects of sin and human infirmity. Sin and disease lead to profanation of the holy and pollution of the clean. Sacrifice can reverse this process.



5. Contact between the Holy and the Unclean usually resulted in death. By cleansing the unclean, sacrifice made contact possible. The Holy God can meet with sinful man via the cleansing power of blood.
6. Sacrifices were offered only by priests and the most important sacrifices were only offered by the High Priest. But through the covenant Israel was made a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:6). The priesthood of Israel meant that the nation was in a unique relationship to God, able to draw near to him and, through sacrifice, mediate his presence to the world.

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7. *Where uncleanness caused by sin was left unatoned for by sacrifice, deaths were liable to occur. The Pentateuch records several incidents where the enormity of the offense led to instant judgment. Sacrifice could not be offered quickly enough to avert disaster (Ex 32:25-35; Lev 10; Num 25). In those cases, the offender was himself the sacrifice for his own sin. No substitute was allowed.*
8. There were at least three parties involved in every sacrifice.
  - a. God
  - b. The priest
  - c. The worshipper
    - i. The attitude of the worshipper was very important.
      1. In the case of unintentional sin, remorse and sacrifice were sufficient for atonement.
      2. But where the sin was “high handed” (i.e. deliberate), reparation and public confession were necessary prerequisites to sacrificial atonement. This is especially true of sins committed against a fellow Israelite.
      3. When defiant sin was committed against God, death often resulted. Occasionally God forgave deliberate sin, but not always. For example, when Israel defiantly broke the covenant at Mount Sinai by worshipping the golden calf, Moses interceded for the people and was able to save most of them. The worst offenders were executed by the Levites. We will discuss this more in a later lesson.

### The Covenant At Mount Sinai

Leviticus is the sequel to Exodus. The heart of Exodus is the Sinai Covenant. God provides laws to govern the people and agrees to be their God uniquely and to dwell among them IF they obeyed his laws and kept the terms of the Covenant. Leviticus explains how covenant worship was to be conducted (ch 1-17), then how covenant people should behave (18-25). Leviticus closes with a section of blessings they would enjoy for obeying the terms of the covenant and the curses that would result from breaking the covenant.

#### Important Features of the Covenant

1. **The law was given in the context of grace. God gave his law to Israel AFTER they had been redeemed from the slavery of Egypt, NOT as a means for securing their redemption.** In Leviticus, whenever the Exodus is mentioned, it is always as a motive, (along with the imitation of God), for keeping the law. For example...

**Leviticus 11:45**  
45 I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.
2. **Eventhough Isreal had been saved from the slavey of Egypt and called to be God’s holy people, this did not mean they were free to do as they pleased.** Quite the contrary. As a holy nation they had to keep themselves pure from sin and uncleanness let God’s wrath break out against them. The blessings that God would bestow for their obedience were part of the



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covenant. The curses for disobedience were also part of the covenant. Leviticus stresses that if the curses were brought upon Israel, it would be because of the covenant, not despite it.

**Amos 3:2**

**2 “You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.”**

The purpose of God’s punishment was to bring about repentance. It was a demonstration of God’s faithfulness to Israel. He was trying to get them to turn back, to enjoy his abundant blessings and to be saved. However long it took for them to come to their senses, confess their sins and repent, God was ready and willing to reinstate them.

**Leviticus 26:40-45**

**40 “But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers—their treachery against me and their hostility toward me, 41 which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies—then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, 42 I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. 43 For the land will be deserted by them and will enjoy its Sabbaths while it lies desolate without them. They will pay for their sins because they rejected my laws and abhorred my decrees. 44 Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them. I am the Lord their God. 45 But for their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God. I am the Lord.”**

Faithfulness is intrinsic to God’s character, even when we are unfaithful to him.

**2 Timothy 2:13**

**13 if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.**

Next up: The sacrifices of Leviticus beginning in chapter 1