



Leviticus: Be Holy

Leviticus 16-27

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Structure of Leviticus¹⁵

Part 1: The Laws of Acceptable Approach to God: Sacrifice (1-17)

- V. The Laws of Acceptable Approach to God (1-7)
 - a. Laws of approach to God when in fellowship
 - b. Laws of approach to God when out of fellowship
 - c. Laws for administering offerings
- VI. The Laws of the Priests (8-10)
 - a. The consecration of the priesthood
 - b. The ministry of the priesthood
 - c. Failure of the priesthood
- VII. The Laws of Israel regarding Purity (11-15)
 - a. Laws concerning clean and unclean food
 - b. Laws concerning childbirth
 - c. Laws concerning leprosy
 - d. Laws concerning discharge
- VIII. The Laws of National Atonement (16-17)
 - a. Laws concerning national cleansing through the Day of Atonement
 - b. Laws concerning the location of sacrifices
 - c. Laws concerning the use of blood

Part 2: The Laws of Acceptable Walk with God: Sanctification (18-27)

- VI. The Laws of Sanctification for the People (18-20)
 - a. Laws of sexual sins
 - b. Laws of social order
 - c. Laws of penalties
- VII. The Laws of Sanctification for the Priesthood (21-22)
 - a. Prohibited practices for the priests
 - b. People prohibited from the priesthood
 - c. Sacrifices prohibited of the priesthood
 - d. The purpose of the Laws of the priesthood
- VIII. The Laws of Sanctification in Worship (23-24)
 - a. Laws of sanctified feast of worship
 - b. Laws of sanctified elements of worship
 - c. Law of the sanctified name of God
- IX. The Laws of Sanctification in the Land of Canaan (25-26)
 - a. Laws of sanctification in the Land of Canaan
 - b. Results of obedience and disobedience in the Land
- X. The Laws of Sanctification Through Vows (27)
 - a. The special consecrating of acceptable things
 - b. Things excluded from consecration
 - c. The conclusion of Leviticus

¹⁵ Nelson's Complete Book of Maps and Charts, pp. 41-42



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Clean and Unclean

The word sin and unclean are not synonyms but they are clearly related. One can become unclean, or defiled from breaking on of God's commands such as the ones pertaining to sexual morality (Lev. 18). But you can also become unclean for other reasons, such as: leprosy (skin disease), touching blood or a dead body, eating unclean foods, menstruation, etc. (See Lev. 11-15).

Whatever is clean (*tahor*) becomes defiled by contact with unclean [*tamei*] things. The power of uncleanness overcomes the holy and the clean.

The prophet Haggai (cf. 2:12-14) asked the priests of Israel:

"If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and touches bread with this fold, or cooked food, wine, oil, or any other food, will it become holy?"

And the priests answered, "No."

Then Haggai said, "If one who is unclean from a corpse touches any of these, will the latter become unclean?"

And the priests answered, "It will become unclean."

Then Haggai said, "So is this people. And so is this nation before me," declares the LORD, "and so is every work of their hands. And what they offer there is unclean."

Dr. Ed Nelson writes: "We are helped to understand that clean and unclean issues concern our external condition as to whether we are appropriate, or worthy, in our current external condition to be in the



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Presence of God. In this way, clean and unclean issues are understood to be ceremonial of a greater reality.

“Sin demands a just, legal verdict. Issues of sin and holiness, or of sin and righteousness, not only are internal conditions of the heart, but also deal with matters of legal justice. Sin demands a verdict of condemnation because our sins are crimes against God and our neighbor. Because there is no cure for our incorrigible sinful nature, the judgment for our sins is the penalty of death.”¹⁶

Self-Hiding and Self-Uncovering before the LORD

The affect of both Sin and Uncleaness is a self-hiding from the LORD: the former because of guilt, the latter because of impurity or dirtiness. Remember what Adam and Eve did in the garden after sinning? They became aware of their nakedness, sewed fig leaves, and “hid themselves from the presence of YHWH among the trees.” (Gen. 3:7-8)

The problem with both sin and unclean was in the approach to a Holy, Holy, Holy God. How can one enter into his presence without our every fault, blemish and defilement being exposed? And so we hide from God.

The sacrifices make it possible for the Lord’s holiness and just wrath at sin to be satisfied (propitiated) and a sinful and shameful people to dwell in the presence of YHWH. Sin requires a penalty to be paid. Uncleaness requires washing and healing. In both cases, the uncovering of self before the Lord’s presence leaves the worshiper free, clean and holy.

In both the context of the relationships to one another and to the surrounding natures and cultures, the Israelites had occasion to both sin and become unclean. God’s aim and calling to the Israelites was to “be Holy as I am Holy”. If the laws of the first half of Leviticus detail how to approach and dwell in the presence of a Holy God, the Laws of the second half of Leviticus deal with how Israel was to walk in

¹⁶ Ed Nelson, Clean and Unclean a Lost Emphasis, <http://www.ed-nelson.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=54>



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*“And this shall be an everlasting statute to you, to make an atonement for the people of Israel for **all their sins** once a year.”*
(16:34)

that Holiness of life in the contexts of their relationships with God, one another and the surrounding pagan cultures of Egypt and the land of Canaan.

The Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16-17)

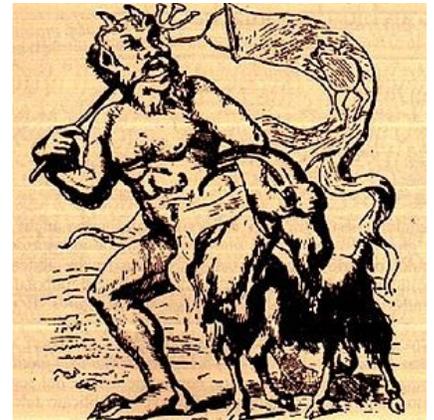
The center command and hinge of the book of Leviticus is chapter 17 dealing with The Day of Atonement (Heb. *yom kippur*). This annual ritual was the central ritual for the Israelites. It included atonement for the Holy of Holies itself, the priests and all the people and worked out to the removal of the sins from the camp by the “Azazel” goat (or scapegoat).

One of the main differences of the Day of Atonement vs. all the other sacrifices was in the direction of the ritual sacrifices. On the Day of Atonement, the ritual moves in to out and the other sacrifices out to in. The Day of Atonement is the sacrifice of the sanctuary itself and makes all other sacrifices acceptable and possible. In the same way, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross as a sacrifice of atonement (Romans 3:21ff.) makes our sacrifice of ourselves as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1ff) acceptable and pleasing to God.

The Goat for YHWH and the Goat for Azazel

“And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel.”

Traditionally, Azazel has been translated as “scapegoat” (Heb. *ez* meaning “goat” and *azel* meaning “going away”). However, in its parallel to the goat “for YHWH”, it may also be a proper name for a fallen angel or demonic presence or place. In this case, the sending of the goat into “the wilderness to Azazel” (16:10) would be to return the sins of the people back to the primary source of sin, Satan.



A depiction of Azazel in his familiar form of a goat-like demon, from Collin de Plancy's *Dictionnaire Infernal* (Paris, 1825).



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Leviticus Part 2: Be Holy As I am Holy

The Laws of Acceptable Walk with God: Sanctification (18-27)

The contrast for the Israelites is to the practices of the Egyptians and Canaanites. The abominations and unclean acts which are expressly forbidden in Leviticus are part of the surrounding and accepted cultural practices. Israel is in a covenanted relationship with YHWH, they are not to serve foreign gods and “walk in their statutes”. Hence, “You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am YHWH *your God*”. (18:4)

The calling of Israel was to be a Holy Nation. “You shall be holy, for I YHWH your God am holy. (19:2) To be holy is to be “set apart, unique and distinct.”

Holiness of life covers all areas of relationship: sexual relationships and marriage, familial relationships, work relationships, relationships to foreigners and strangers. The context of Holiness is relationships, relationships that are set apart to be the people that God intended from the start. Keeping the commandments means life. Echoing Genesis 2:17, it is in breaking the Rules and Statutes of the LORD “you shall surely die.”

Laws of sexual sins

The Israelites are to be different from their neighbors by returning to the distinctiveness of marriage with male and female as complements to one another. Animals are clearly not suitable helpmates, and men are called to leave their family of origin for union with their wives. Thus, homosexuality, bestiality and incest are all forbidden for the Israelites.

The Lord’s ultimate aim for the Israelites it that they would be fruitful and multiply, in protecting the sanctity of marriage, Israel would be blessed with fertility and an abundance of descendants.

Laws of social order

Many of the laws are written to protect the dignity of the individual person who is made in the royal image of God, both male and female, rich and poor, young and old, slave and free, neighbor and stranger, citizen and alien.



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If the Israelites keep all of the social order laws, their relationships with one another will be characterized by honor, love and life. The fabric of their community will be strong and united. The poor would be cared for by leaving the gleaning on the edge for their provision. It is in breaking of these basic commands to love one another that society disintegrates.

Laws of Distinctiveness

Some of the Laws give may seem rather arbitrary to modern ears. Laws that encourage the separation of crops and livestock, laws that prohibit the mixing of fabrics, may seem strange to us. On the one level the prohibitions against mixing of seeds and livestock serves to preserve the distinctiveness of the things which God has made. Mixing in this way is a tampering with life itself.

Israel also was to be distinct in their appearance and dress from the surrounding cultures. The commands on hair and beards and fabrics may be to create this external distinctiveness. It may also set apart the mixed fabrics of the Holy of Holies and the high priest's garments from the common garments.

Seven Feasts

Leviticus mandates a weekly Sabbath to the Lord and seven solemn feast days which marked the history of Israel's relationship with God and their ongoing relationship of blessing with YHWH.

Spring

1. Passover
2. Unleavened Bread
3. First Fruits

Summer

4. Pentecost

Fall

5. Trumpets
6. Atonement
7. Tabernacles

Annual celebrations and sacrifices serve more than anything else to preserve the memory of God's mighty acts on behalf of Israel and the need for ongoing redemption, provision and relationship.



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“For it is to me that the people of Israel are servants. They are my servants whom I brought out of the Land of Egypt. I am YHWH your God.”
(Lev. 25:55)

Jubilee (Leviticus 25)

The fiftieth year was to be a Jubilee year. The number seven is instructive to Israel as God is making a new creation in the people. The Sabbath, the Sabbath Year (the seventh year), and the Sabbath of Sabbaths (seven weeks of years, or seven times seven years) all marked Israel as the new creation of God. The Jubilee was a recognition that over time relationships and financial and otherwise get out of balance. The Jubilee year provided a regular reset and a fresh start for society where property rights were returned, burdensome debts were forgiven, and slaves released. In order for Jubilee to truly work, the people must recognize that the land and the people ultimately belong to the LORD.

Blessings and Curses

The laws of God are “your life” Moses tells the people. It is in keep *all* of the Laws of God that a new Garden of Eden is established where the kingdom of God is on earth as in heaven. YHWH promises increasing blessing for covenant faithfulness and holiness.

However, in violating the laws of God tremendous negative consequences ensue.

Both the Blessings and the Curses grow in magnitude depending on the strength of commitment to YHWH or negatively to the failure to turn back and walk in holiness.

Leviticus 26:⁴⁰ “But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me,⁴¹ so that I walked contrary to them and brought them into the land of their enemies—if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity,⁴² then I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.