



# Don't Stop Reading Just Because You Got to Leviticus

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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## Introduction:

How many of us start off the New Year with the plan to read the Bible daily, whether to read the whole thing in one year or just start reading it regularly? We do well through Genesis. At the beginning of Exodus we pick up steam because it is really getting interesting, but then toward the end of Exodus we start to fizzle out. I mean, it was great when we were reading about the fickle Pharaoh, rivers of blood, snake eating staffs, and powerful plagues. But then we get to all that stuff about tabernacle plans. We push through Exodus waiting for it to get better, but then we get to Leviticus. BORING! We know we need to read our Bibles today, but we just can't get up the motivation. We set them down and decide to try again next January. Don't let this happen to you. Don't stop reading just because you got to Leviticus. Of course, you could take the easy way out and skip it. After all, Numbers gets back to the interesting stories with spies, rebels, battles, and stories of the earth opening up to swallow sinners. Or you could step up to the plate and dig into Leviticus like a studious and mature Christian and find out it really can be mined for great truths to help you glorify God.

## Discussion:

### I. Why we stop reading at Leviticus.

#### A. It's boring.

1. As I stated in the introduction, most of us view Leviticus as boring. We'd rather watch grass grow than read a list of sacrificial laws. Paint drying seems more exciting than the regulations for cleansing the leper. And who wants to read a list of animals the Jews couldn't eat? Although most of us would be glad to know that bats and mole rats and centipedes made the list, and many of us are glad that we are no longer under the prohibition against catfish. It's true, I would much rather read about the parting of the Red Sea, the fall of Pharaoh, the conquest of Israel. About the only part of the Bible more boring than Leviticus is the first ten chapters of I Chronicles.
2. But the thing we need to understand is the Bible wasn't written to entertain us. It's not a novel or a movie script. In fact, when Hollywood has tried to base entertainment on the Bible, they always mess it up, missing its point. I like what a fellow named Bob Deffinbaugh said about this point in a sermon that helped me with this lesson a great deal. He compared this to modern media:

My second response is that our culture has concluded that anything which is not entertaining is not worth listening to. The media has the task of grabbing a person's attention, of taking them from whatever they are doing and setting their eyes and minds on the printed page or the television screen. They do this in a competition with other media, trying to do the same thing. And so we have come to the conclusion that we deserve to have all communication be entertaining and exciting.

I would like to suggest that in most (not all) cases the level of drama and hype is directly related to the irrelevance of what we are watching. You have to spice up the kinds of things we see in the media because they have little value, other than entertainment. On the other hand, the greatest and most significant communications of history have not been particularly entertaining. The Magna Carta, the Declaration of Independence, or the Constitution of the United States are not written to entertain us. If we want to be entertained we turn to writings which begin, "once upon a time," and end "happily [ever] after." If we want to be informed about things vital to the present and to eternity, we most often must set aside our desire for entertainment.<sup>1</sup>

#### B. It's hard to understand.

1. Leviticus is confusing. It lists all of these different sacrifices that can probably only be truly understood by those who grew up offering them. What is the difference between a peace offering and thanksgiving offering? How does a house get leprosy? Why wouldn't God want Aaron to eat the sin offering in **Leviticus 10:19**? I've read and reread Leviticus, and I just have to say there is a whole lot I don't get.
2. But that is not a reason to stop reading the book. Rather, it is a reason to read it again and again. Nothing is in God's book by accident. God isn't in heaven slapping Himself on the forehead saying, "Why did I put that in there?" That often happens to me when I preach. I often say, "Why did I say that?" And "Wish

<sup>1</sup> <http://bible.org/seriespage/learning-love-leviticus>

I hadn't said that." But God doesn't. He has Leviticus there for a reason. Perhaps the reason is not so much that we get to the goal of the perfect understanding of the book, but the fact that struggling with this book (and others) helps us grow. Don't be a child who tosses Leviticus aside like broccoli in favor of tastier things. And it may be that the way we deal with a book like Leviticus says something about the way we deal with the rest of the Bible. If we are only reading the interesting parts because they are entertaining and easy, we are probably missing the hard parts that God has included there too.

C. It's too legalistic.

1. Leviticus is a book of codes and regulations. It establishes regulations for sacrificing, diet, cleanliness, sexuality, leprosy, priestly service, worship, and much more. It goes on and on with "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt nots." People die for breaking what seem to be minor laws. Even for our brothers and sisters who view the New Covenant in more legalistic ways, Leviticus just seems over the top. Certainly, those of us who take comfort in the grace of God's gospel might go too far and rebel against anything that suggests law really matters.
2. Under grace, we are not saved by law (**Romans 6:14**). With that in mind, we find it easy to dispense with a book that seems so wholly devoted to law, especially a law that we are not under. But please understand, grace matters because we do have a law that matters (cf. **I Corinthians 9:21**; **I John 3:4**). Additionally, it was through this Old Law that God revealed Himself to His Old Covenant people. By learning the basis for God's law for them, we learn a great deal about God Himself. No doubt, we take joy that these legal regulations are not stipulations for our present covenant with God, but they reveal our God in a way that will help us understand our present covenant. In fact, if we do not meet God in the book of Leviticus, we cannot really understand Him in the New Covenant books we love and cherish. As **Galatians 3:24**, this law was a guardian/tutor that points to Jesus Christ so we can be saved by faith in Him. If we ignore the tutor, we will not fully understand our Master.

D. It doesn't seem relevant.

1. Some of us even make this a scriptural argument. After all, we are separated from the writing of this book not only by time, geography, and culture, but also by covenant. With all the other things we have against reading this book, we can always rely on this one to save us from having to devote any time to its reading and study—we aren't under that covenant. But usually, when we say it isn't relevant, we aren't actually referring to its being a different covenant. After all, that doesn't keep us from reading Genesis, Joshua, Psalms, and Proverbs. What we usually mean is we just can't see how it is going to help us today. I am focused on being a better parent, spouse, child, worker today. Can Leviticus help with that? I've read Leviticus and just didn't "feel it," if you know what I mean. It just didn't hit me where I'm hurting. So I abandon it for what seems a whole lot more applicable to what I'm dealing with today.
2. First, we need to keep in mind what Paul said to Timothy in **II Timothy 3:14-17**. He was referring to the Old Covenant Scriptures when he said these sacred writings would make him wise unto salvation. He also said they were profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. He didn't make an exception for Leviticus.
3. Second, allow me to rely on another statement from Bob Deffinbaugh:

Also, I must say that our preoccupation with the relevance of any text of Scripture points out that Christians today are far too "relevancy oriented." We are very pragmatic in our orientation. We are not very interested in truths that do not immediately and practically relate to our lives. This is similar to the thinking of the ancients, who thought that the sun must rotate around the earth, rather than the earth around the sun. Preachers are told to introduce their sermons by addressing some "felt need" and then to show how the truth of the text meets that need. The whole orientation thus is around self, and not God. Enough! I must protest.

We smile (sometimes) at the little child's foolishness, who, when given a quarter, spends that quarter for immediate gratification. He goes out and buys a candy bar, rather than to deny himself an immediate pleasure in order to obtain something far better in the future. When we come to the Bible, we are far more interested in finding candy than we are in learning those truths and those principles which will put us in good standing in the future. Let us determine that we will study Leviticus (as well as other Scripture) for what God has for us in it, whether or not it immediately addresses and soothes some need. In a day when warmth and fuzziness is held at a premium I must tell you that God's word often does not promise us a "warm fuzzy." It is high time that we began to orient ourselves to God, and not insist that God orient Himself and His word to us.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## II. Why we need to keep reading.

### A. We meet the Father in Leviticus.

1. Very interestingly, the first word in the Hebrew of Leviticus is a connecting conjunction. The book very literally starts with the word “and.” In other words, it is a continuation of what happened in Exodus. Notice what happened at the end of Exodus. In **Exodus 40:16-17**, on the first day of the first month in the second year of Israel’s exodus from Egypt, Moses completed the Tabernacle of God according to His specifications. In **Exodus 40:34-38**, the glory of God filled the Tabernacle. God began to dwell with Israel. Leviticus begins with “and” because it is the natural next step of Exodus. Exodus gives the plans for construction of the Tabernacle, and Leviticus gives the plans for its use. Exodus brings the presence of God into the camp of Israel, and Leviticus explains the implications of that presence. Throughout the book of Leviticus, we find out what it means for God to dwell with man. In **Revelation 21:3**, we see the great blessing of the ultimate fulfillment of this dwelling. In Leviticus, we see its beginning.
2. In Leviticus we learn what it means to have God in our midst. In **Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:26**, we hear Him tell the Israelites to be holy because He is holy (repeated in our New Testaments in **1 Peter 1:15-16**). Over and over again, the regulations of Leviticus are based on the nature of Jehovah God. See **Leviticus 18:2, 4, 5, 6, et. al.** God says the reason the Israelites should live in this way is because He is their God. Read these laws and see what they say about God, His nature, and what He longs for.
3. But perhaps the most important aspect of meeting God in Leviticus is found in passages like **Leviticus 11:45; 19:36; 22:33**. God explained that they should follow these laws not because He would judge them if they didn’t, but because God had delivered them from Egypt. If there is one thing we need to learn about God from Leviticus it is about the deliverance He has provided. He didn’t deliver them to condemn them, restrict them, harm them. He delivered them so they could serve and worship Him. We need to think about that today because we have been delivered from a more terrible master than Pharaoh. We have been delivered from the mastery of sin. Why? So we could live how we wanted? No. So we can glorify and serve God (cf. **Ephesians 2:8-10**). We meet this God of deliverance in Leviticus.
4. You need to keep reading Leviticus to meet God the Father. As you read, consider what these laws and regulations are telling you about the God who is dwelling with us (cf. **Ephesians 2:22**).

### B. We meet the Son in Leviticus.

1. I know this sounds odd. We don’t see Jesus physically in Leviticus. We don’t even see a heavenly being that people debate about possibly representing Jesus. But, brothers and sisters, we meet God the Son in this book. We have already expressed that Leviticus is about God dwelling with man. But we know there is a problem. God can’t dwell with sin (**Psalms 5:4**). We know from Exodus and Numbers the Israelites were constant sinners. Over and over and over again they betrayed the God who delivered them. How then can God dwell with them?
2. When Leviticus carries on Exodus’ message of God’s glory filling the Tabernacle, the first instruction of God is, “When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD...” (**Leviticus 1:2**, ESV). Then for seven chapters we hear about the sacrifices that Israelites had to offer so they might be accepted before the Lord (**Leviticus 1:3-4**). Can you imagine coming to the Tabernacle with one of your best animals, placing your hand on its head, then killing it before the Lord? What a visceral reminder of the price of sin and God’s grace. Then in **Leviticus 16:7-8, 15-16, 20-22**, we read of the annual Day of Atonement. A bull was offered for the priest and his house. Then there was a dual goat sacrifice. One was killed to make atonement for the people, and one was a scapegoat, carrying the sins of the people off into the wilderness. Notice very specifically **Leviticus 16:16**. The purpose of all this was because the Tabernacle of the Lord was dwelling with people in the midst of their uncleanness. God could not dwell with His people because of their uncleanness and sin, but He developed a plan whereby His dwelling place could be among them. The plan was sacrifice.
3. Don’t misunderstand; these sacrifices were not an end unto themselves. They weren’t sacrifices for sacrificing’s sake. They were an object lesson. They were pointing to something, or rather to Someone. As **Hebrews 10:1-4** explains, these sacrifices offered again and again couldn’t actually accomplish the forgiveness and cleanness the people really needed to have God dwell with them. They actually needed something else. And thus, in **John 1:29, 36**, when John the Baptizer saw Jesus coming, in the context of millions of sacrifices, he pointed to Jesus and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (ESV). We long for God to dwell with us today. In Leviticus we actually meet the means by which God does that—Jesus Christ, the sacrifice that makes us clean. He is the sacrifice that really

works. He is the sacrifice that allows us to be the dwelling place of God. Without Jesus, without His sacrifice, we could not dwell with God either here on earth or in eternity (cf. **Ephesians 2:13-22**).

4. You need to keep reading Leviticus to meet God the Son. While we don't actually see Jesus, we learn why His role is so important. As you read, consider the importance of the sacrifice and why that makes Jesus so important to us and how that sacrifice should impact our lives.

C. We meet the Spirit in Leviticus.

1. If saying that we meet the Son in Leviticus is odd to you, I know that claiming to meet the Holy Spirit is going to be more so. However, follow the thread throughout Scripture. In **Exodus 25:31-40**, God instructed Moses to make a lampstand that had seven lamps on it. In **Exodus 37:17-23**, it was made according to God's specifications. In **Leviticus 24:1-4**, we see the lampstand in operation as the people were to bring the oil that would burn perpetually on the lampstand before the Lord.
2. Now follow how the Scripture uses this imagery in reference to the Holy Spirit. Fast forward to **Zechariah 4:1-6** where we see the seven lamps again. The meaning of them is explained, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts" (**Zechariah 4:6**, ESV). The lampstand represents the Spirit of the Lord and His strength that empowers God's people to accomplish God's will. We see this boldly in **Revelation 1:4; 4:5**. The "seven spirits" is a representation of the Holy Spirit in completeness, then represented not merely by seven lamps, but by seven torches.
3. **Zechariah 4:11-14** demonstrate that the two olive trees that were providing oil for the lamps in Zechariah's vision were the two anointed ones, referring to the Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah who led them to rebuild the temple, and Jeshua, the high priest at the time. The trees providing the oil for the lamp were the ones God was using to accomplish His will. In **Leviticus 24:1-4**, we see all of Israel was to bring the oil. They were the people God was using by His Spirit to accomplish His will.
4. Consider now a verse we often wonder about: **I Thessalonians 5:19**. "Do not quench the Spirit" (ESV). How can we quench the Spirit? This brings to mind the picture of Israelites who were bringing the oil that kept the lamp which represented the Spirit of God burning. When we cease to bring our oil, we quench the Spirit. When we cease to participate in the Lord's work, the working of the Spirit is quenched in the world. If Zerubbabel and Jeshua had ceased their work, then the Temple wouldn't have been rebuilt. If we cease our work, the Spirit's work is quenched.
5. I also notice that following this picture of the Spirit in **Leviticus 24**, we see the second of two actual stories in the book. In **Leviticus 24:10-15**, a man whose mother was an Israelite and whose father was an Egyptian blasphemed God. The penalty was death. I can't help but think of another New Testament teaching that gives us trouble found in **Matthew 12:22-32**. In **Leviticus 24**, blasphemy of God results in death. In **Matthew 12**, blasphemy against God will be forgiven, but blasphemy of the Spirit will not. The point being that if we quench the Spirit, if we deny the light the Spirit offers, if we hide the light the Spirit offers, and follow our own path, we cannot be forgiven. Rather than ignoring the Spirit and quenching the Spirit, we need to fan the flame of the Spirit into life by bringing our oil, if you will, by bringing our lives and our spirits to commune with God, to glorify God, to serve God. The only other option is death.
6. You need to keep reading Leviticus to meet God the Spirit. As you read, consider how the work of God's people coincided with the work of God's Spirit. Think about how ours should.

D. We meet Christians in Leviticus.

1. I have no doubt that this really sounds odd to you. Of course, we don't see any literal Christians. Since Jesus had not yet died and His church had not been established, I don't mean we literally meet real Christians. But we do see foreshadowing for us as Christians. We see pictures of those who point toward us. While their law was not ours, we can learn some things about how God views His people. I see this in two big pictures that point to us. Some of what we learn in these pictures will be by contrast with Christianity and some by comparison.
2. First, consider the lepers in **Leviticus 13-14**. Can any of us deny that Jesus used leprosy as a model for us as Christians (cf. **Mark 1:40-45**). Just as Jesus cleansed leprosy, He cleanses us of our sinful uncleanness. We don't have time to consider all possible connections between these lepers and modern Christians. But notice two that I think are profound. First, we learn that cleanness is for all, no matter our class or background. In **Leviticus 14:10**, the text says the cleansed leper was to bring two lambs. That would seem to limit being ceremonially clean to those who can afford two lambs. But then we get to **Leviticus 14:21-22**, if he can't afford two, he can take one and some birds. **Leviticus 14:32** demonstrates this is for all, even those who cannot afford the offerings for cleansing. The second parallel that I

want to highlight is seen in **Leviticus 13:46**. The confirmed leper must live alone outside the camp. But notice what **Hebrews 13:11-13** says about our Savior. Where did He die? Outside the gate. He went outside the camp. He came to us, lonely lepers outside the gate. Of course the Hebrew writer explains that means we need to become comfortable with our place of reproach outside the camp. If Jesus was willing to come outside the camp to save spiritual lepers like us, we need to be willing to stay outside the camp and suffer reproach with Him.

3. The second picture is that of the priests. In **Leviticus 8-10**, we especially see the place and role of the priests. Do you remember that **I Peter 2:9** claims we are a royal priesthood. **Revelation 1:5-6** says we have been made priests by the blood of Christ. In **Leviticus 8:6**, the priests were ordained by being “washed with water.” Can’t you see the automatic parallels with us and our baptisms (cf. **I Peter 3:21; Hebrews 10:22**). These priests are a foreshadowing of us. As we read about them, we need to examine the parallels and contrasts. I don’t have time to share them all, but let me share two striking ones. The obvious one we have all noted before is in **Leviticus 10:1-3**. Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire that was not authorized. Moses’ response was clear, “This is what the LORD has said, ‘Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified’” (ESV). We are priests before God, but if we want to serve Him, we are to glorify Him His way. The second is seen in the description of the Day of Atonement sacrifice. **Leviticus 16:2** starts off this description warning Aaron not to come into the Holy Place at just any time, otherwise he’ll die. Then it goes on to explain that he can enter it under certain conditions, but only once per year. He had to offer certain sacrifices and dress in certain ways. Can you imagine the fear he must have felt coming into the presence of God? But we come to **Hebrews 10:19-23**. We learn that through Jesus’ sacrifice, we have no fear. We can come into the holy presence of God at any time. We are washed with the pure waters of baptism and cleansed by the pure blood of Jesus. What a wonderful picture that we might miss if we hadn’t read Leviticus.
4. You need to keep reading Leviticus because you actually meet us there. Sure, sometimes we learn by contrast with the New Covenant picture of Christianity and sometimes by comparison. But our understanding of what God has done for us and our place in Christ is deepened by our time in Leviticus.

#### Conclusion:

If you’ve set your Bible reading aside this year because you got to Leviticus, let me encourage you to pick it back up. Don’t wait until next January to try again. If you need to, skip Leviticus and just keep reading. What is important is not that you face up to your “whole Bible in a year challenge,” but that you spend time each day in God’s Word. However, let me encourage you to take another stab at Leviticus. This time don’t get lost in the confusing details of sacrifices and cleansing rituals. Open your eyes to the nature of God and His people, both Old and New, that you can learn from this book. You really can gain some fascinating insight that will help you in your present walk with the Lord.