

# LEVITICUS - ויקרא

## The Third Book of Moses

A study by Dr. David A. DeWitt



[The picture is of a one of the Dead Sea Scrolls. This scroll was discovered in 1956, when a group of Ta'amireh Bedouin happened on Cave 11, but it was first unrolled fourteen years later, at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Inscribed in the scroll are parts of the final chapters (22–27) of Leviticus ([www.loc.gov/exhibits/scrolls](http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/scrolls)).]

## Chapter 1

The title “Leviticus” comes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (called the LXX or Septuagint). “Leviticus” means “pertaining to the Levites.” Although the book is a manual for the Levite priests, especially of the family of Aaron, it has many laws concerning all the Israelites. And the book is not just about the Levites. Even the sacrificial laws include instruction for non-Levites. The Hebrew title of the book (also given above) comes from the first word(s) of the book, “And He Called.” The first words of the book are used to derive the title of each book of the Pentateuch:

LXX Title	Hebrew Title
Genesis	“In the Beginning”
Exodus	“Now These Are the Names”
Leviticus	“And He Called”
Numbers	“In the Wilderness”
Deuteronomy	“These Are the Words”

The Hebrew title for this third book of Moses is descriptive of the content of the book. Leviticus is a call from God to Moses. This is significant for several reasons:

1. This call of God was to Moses, not to individual Israelites. The individual believer heard nothing from God.  
AS AN APPLICATION: We should not conclude that because God spoke to Moses, He may speak to anyone. The point of Leviticus is that God did not speak these words to anyone except Moses. The people were to get the word of God from Moses as he wrote down that which God revealed.
2. This call was something God initiated. This was not, as, say, with Job, a request on the part of Moses to communicate with God. This was God telling Moses what He wanted Him to know. It was a directive from God, not an answer to prayer.  
AS AN APPLICATION: We should spend more time listening to what God has to say to us, than telling Him what we want.
3. The title begins with the Hebrew letter ו which is a continuative usually translated “and.” This ties Leviticus to the book of Exodus. Exodus ends with the construction and setting up of the Tabernacle. The revelation of the Law in Exodus was from Mt. Sinai. The revelation

of Leviticus was from the Tabernacle prescribed in Exodus. The Tabernacle prescribed a way for an unholy person to approach a holy God.

AS AN APPLICATION: We cannot come to God as we are, in our sinful condition. *For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy* (Leviticus 11:44; 19:2; 20:7; 1 Peter 1:16).

**Leviticus 1:1 Then the LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting**

Fifty-six times within the book it says that the LORD spoke these words to Moses. Moses then wrote down what God said, or he was able to remember what God said and had others write it down. At any rate, the majority of the text of Leviticus is dictated from God. Generally, interpretation comes through the personality and style of the author. But in the case of Leviticus, most of the book comes directly from God. There are some brief editorial comments, like verse 1, which may have been added by Moses or later by Ezra when he explained the Old Testament to the people (Nehemiah 8:8). God called to Moses from what we usually call the Tabernacle, and the tabernacle is no “Shack.” It is a Holy Place prescribed by God. [Picture from [www.keyway.ca/htm2002/levit.htm](http://www.keyway.ca/htm2002/levit.htm).] After the Hebrew text says that God spoke *from the tent*, it adds the word מוֹעֵד (*mo'ed*) which means *an appointed time or place*. So God spoke to Moses from the appointed tent. This appointed tent, or Tabernacle, seems to be a copy on earth of the Temple/Tabernacle of God in heaven. When the Apostle John was taken into the presence of God, he observed:



*Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, “Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it ... And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm* (Revelation 11:1, 19).

It seems that God directed Moses to build a Tabernacle on earth, which was a physical, earthly copy of the real Temple/Tabernacle of God in heaven. So this was *an appointed place* which represented the holiness of God and a way to gain access to a holy God.

The one speaking to Moses throughout the book is called *the LORD*. God identifies Himself as יהוה (*yhwh*). This is the personal name God uses for Himself throughout the Old Testament. For example, in Leviticus He says that He is יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ (*yhwh elohim*) the *LORD God*, or *the LORD your God* (Leviticus 11:44). When God spoke to Moses through the burning bush in this same area, near Mt. Sinai, before the Exodus and deliverance through the Red Sea, we read:

*Then Moses said to God, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’”* (Exodus 3:13-14).

This phrase אֲנִי אֶהְיֶה אֲנִי אֶהְיֶה (*I AM WHO I AM*) is the basic “to be” verb “I am,” but it is only one letter short of being the word we translate LORD. The difference is the first letter א *aleph*, but that letter is silent in Hebrew. The point is, God had chosen a personal name which basically just says *I AM WHO I AM*.

But Jesus seemed to use this same expression to identify Himself. John wrote: *Jesus said unto them, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am”* (John 8:58; see also John 8:24, 28;

14:6). Therefore, many conclude that it is actually Jesus, God the Son, who is revealing these things to Moses in Leviticus. This is possible. John 1:18 says: *No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.* This statement would say that personal bodily revelations of God (like to Abraham in Genesis 18 or to Joshua in Joshua 5) would be God the Son. In Leviticus, Moses heard a voice but, as far as we know, saw no form of God. Nonetheless, Jesus' *I Am* statements seem to identify Himself with the voice from the burning bush of Exodus 3. So, although there is no way to know for sure, it is not unreasonable to assume this voice is also His.

**Leviticus 1:2** *Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, When any man of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of animals from the herd or the flock.*

Animal and vegetable sacrifices are as old as Cain and Abel. We read:

*So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard (Genesis 4:3-5).*

We know of no previous instruction to Cain and Abel concerning sacrifices, but, after the fact, we learn that God preferred the animal sacrifice. When Noah was told to build an ark, God said nothing about sacrifices. But part of the instruction was:

*You shall take with you of every clean animal by sevens, a male and his female; and of the animals that are not clean two, a male and his female; also of the birds of the sky, by sevens, male and female, to keep offspring alive on the face of all the earth (Genesis 7:2-3).*

The implication of taking seven clean animals and birds seems to be to use them for a sacrifice, because, after the Flood, that's what Noah did. After the Flood, we read:

*Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. The LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done (Genesis 8:20-21). [Picture from [www.answersingenesis.org](http://www.answersingenesis.org).]*



Abraham also sacrificed to God. We read:

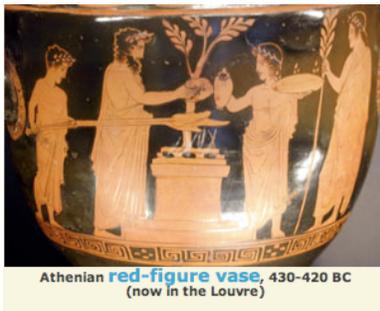
*So He [the LORD] said to him, "Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon." Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds (Genesis 15:9-10).*

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob also built altars in several places. (See Genesis 12:7, 8; 13:4,18; 26:25; 33:20; 35:1, 3, 7.) These altars imply sacrifices, since we know that was assumed in the planned sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22:9).

Animal sacrifice was practiced all through the ancient world. Wikipedia reports:

*The practice of sacrifice is found in the oldest human records. The archaeological record contains human and animal corpses with sacrificial marks long before any written records of the practice... Animal sacrifice is the ritual killing of an animal as part of a religion. It is practiced by many religions as a means of appeasing a god or gods or changing the course of nature. Animal sacrifice has turned up in almost all cultures, from the Hebrews to the Greeks and Romans (particularly the purifying ceremony Lustratio) and from the Aztecs to the Yoruba. However, the practice was a taboo among the Ancient Egyptians, and they tended to look down on cultures that practiced this custom (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacrifice).*

Most likely, the ancient cultures which practiced animal sacrifice learned of it through Noah and took it with them as they spread all over the world after the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). Since



anything valuable was used for sacrifice, some undoubtedly just conjured it up on their own and perverted them with human sacrifices and by offering them to polytheistic gods. But clearly, all ancient sacrifices were preceded by those of Cain, Abel, and Noah. And Noah was still alive at the time of the Tower of Babel, so those scattered were aware of Noah's animal sacrifices and probably practiced their own before and after the scattering. [The picture is of an ancient Greek animal sacrifice (www.historyforkeds.org)]

It is also interesting that Egypt was one of the few cultures which did not practice animal sacrifice. This, in part at least, explains why the Israelites asked the Egyptians if they could travel into the desert to do a sacrifice to God (Exodus 8–10). At any rate, the commands of Leviticus 1 are not so much that animal sacrifices be done. It was assumed that they would be done. The commands of the first part of Leviticus focus on *how* animal sacrifices were to be done.

**Leviticus 1:3** *If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer it, a male without defect; he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD.*

There are five offerings described in Leviticus 1. The burnt offering is dealt with in 1:1-17 and 6:8-13. The burnt offering was completely burned up on the altar, that is, it belonged totally to God. It was a soothing aroma to God. The burnt offering was not so much to gain forgiveness for a particular sin but to make atonement for the offerer's sinfulness. Exodus ends with God's presence filling the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-38). If a sinful, impure person approached the presence of the Holy God, he would die (Exodus 19). The burnt offering provided a divine solution for man's fallen sinful condition.



Historically, the burnt offering was the most common offering. After the Flood, Noah's offering was a burnt offering. God's command to Abraham concerning Isaac was to offer him as a burnt offering (Genesis 22:2). Moses told Pharaoh that Israel needed to go into the wilderness to offer a burnt offering (Exodus 10:25-26). Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, offered a burnt offering to God in Exodus 18:12. And the Israelites offered burnt offerings to God in conjunction with their meeting with God and receiving His covenant on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 20:24; 24:5). [Picture from omeyearbibleimages.com.]

The burnt offering was offered in the morning and evening, each Sabbath day, at the beginning of each month, at the celebration of Passover on the 14th day of the first month, along with the new grain offering at the feast of weeks, at the feast of trumpets, and on other sacred days (Numbers 28–29). The burnt offering was required for cleansing for a woman after childbirth, for a leper, of a man with a discharge, a woman with an abnormal discharge, or a Nazirite who was unintentionally defiled by contact with a dead body (Numbers 6:11).

**Leviticus 1:4** *He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf.*

The flawless animal was brought to the doorway of the Tabernacle, and the one sacrificing would lay his hand on its head because it was to be a substitute for himself. This process, not the animal itself, was done to make an atonement for him. The word כָּפַר (*kaphar*) for atonement means *to cover over, pacify, or make propitiation* (Strong's). It is translated: *appease, cancel, forgive, pardon, or make atonement*. Other than *atonement*, the word is most commonly translated as some form of *forgiveness*.

### Leviticus 1:3-17

Here is the procedure that must be followed in offering a burnt offering:

1. He shall select *a male without defect*.
2. *He shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting.*
3. *He shall lay his hand on the head.*
4. *He shall slay the animal.*
5. *Aaron's sons, the priests, shall offer up the blood and sprinkle the blood around on the altar.*
6. *He shall then skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces.*
7. *Its entrails, however, and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall offer up in smoke all of it on the altar.*



If the offering was a sheep, the procedure was similar. If it was a bird, there were a few differences, but the procedure generally followed these steps. [Picture from [blog.kingsolomonslodge.org](http://blog.kingsolomonslodge.org).]

AS AN APPLICATION: God is holy. Man is sinful. Therefore, there is no way a sinful man can approach a Holy God. No one can just decide he or she is going to come to God on his or her own. Only God can provide a way to Himself. The way to God is for an atonement to be made. There must be a propitiation, that is, a satisfaction made to God. God's character requires holiness, and the only way for that is to come to Him by whatever means He considers a satisfactory payment for our sin.

FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST: Jesus Christ is the sacrificial Lamb of God. He is the Lamb who was slain and who is, therefore, worthy to open the book in Revelation 5. Christ is the ultimate and final atoning sacrifice. ... *and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world* (1 John 2:2).

But it is hard to say specifically that the burnt offering is a type of Christ. The primary offering, by people who could afford it, was a bull, and Jesus was never called the bull of God. The burnt offering was burned up, but Jesus' body was buried, then resurrected, not burned. So the burnt offering only is a type of Christ in the general sense that all sacrifices are an atonement made to God for the sin of the people.