

# Route 66

## *Leviticus: Sin Requires Sacrifice*

Part 3 – March 15, 2009

Leviticus is boring ... unless you read it backwards. And by backwards I mean understanding it in light of Jesus.

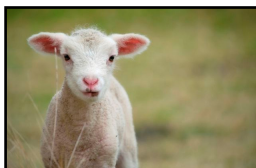
The Israelites have been miraculously freed from bondage in Egypt, led to Mount Sinai, given a set of laws, and instructed to construct a tent of worship known as the tabernacle. When Exodus ends, they've just completed the project, and God literally moves into camp, and His glory fills the tabernacle. What do you do when God moves into the neighborhood? This is where Leviticus begins.



The Lord called to Moses from the Tabernacle and said to him, "Give the following instructions to the people of Israel." - *Leviticus 1:1-2a NIV*

Leviticus is God's detailed description of how sinful man is to approach and conduct itself in the presence of a holy God.

And by verse three, a fundamental of worship is established:



If the animal you present as a burnt offering is from the herd, it must be a male with no defects. ... Lay your hand on the animal's head, and the Lord will accept its death in your place to purify you, making you right with him. - *Leviticus 1:3-4 NLT*

God, the Father of Israel, is taking the hand of His children and helping them take their very first baby step toward Jesus. He's teaching them that sin requires a substitutionary sacrifice for removal. Atonement for sin can come through the death of a substitute, *if* the substitute is a flawless, faultless, innocent male.

And God gives them five types of sacrifices: one for dedication and commitment, one for thanksgiving, one for fellowship with Him, one for sins against Him, and one for sins against others.

And then God has Moses ordain and anoint Aaron to act as high priest, and his sons and extended family to help him make the sacrifices on behalf of the people. Like Moses, they are Levites (from the tribe of Levi), and this book served as their worship instruction manual. In fact, the title, "Leviticus" is Greek for: "Relating to the Levites."

Then God gives them lots of regulations to get something basic into their cultural conscience: what is clean versus what is *unclean* – what is holy versus what is *unholy*.

Not only did these laws keep them mentally and physically fit (especially in a day when germs were unknown), but God used physical filth to help them comprehend spiritual filth. I've included the list of "Unlawful Sexual Relations" in the reading plan. The fact that it was *necessary* demonstrates just how confused and dysfunctional these post-Egyptian-slaves were!

I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. -  
*Leviticus 11:44 NIV*

Leviticus is all about instilling an understanding and appreciation for the seriousness of sin and the holiness of God. This is underscored when Aaron's sons, NAY-dab and uh-BIGH-hyoo who serve as priestly helpers decide to do things their own way.

Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. - *Leviticus 10:1-2 NIV*

They were *not* oblivious to God's power or wrath, they were just reckless with His holiness, and took His presence for granted. But God is dead serious about His holiness! He'd said to Moses, "Among those who approach me I will show myself holy." (*Lev. 10:3*)

So, we have chapter after chapter of rules, punishments, and various laws. And then, God suddenly shifts gears and tells Moses that He wants His people to regularly feast and celebrate!



The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the Lord, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies.'" - *Leviticus 23:1-2 NIV*

One set of feasts (*23:4-22*) took place every spring: the Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread: which celebrated their deliverance; the Feast of Firstfruits: thanksgiving for harvest; and the Feast of Weeks: celebrating when Moses received the Commandments.

And then another set of feasts (*23:23-43*) took place in the fall: the Feast of Trumpets: a call to come together; the Day of Atonement: when the nation was cleansed of sin; and the Feast of Tabernacles: a feast of joy! And just as the Sacrifices and the duties of the high priest point to Christ, these festivals are an incredible foreshadow.



Do not let anyone judge you ... with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. -  
*Colossians 2:16-17 NIV*

For instance, when God gave Passover instructions, He required each family to choose a spotless lamb, and to examine it for four days before butchering it, to ensure that it was faultless.



Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this [first] month each man is to take a lamb for his family ... Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight [the 9th hour]. - *Exodus 12:1-6 NIV*

As part of this celebration, the priests would select and parade a *National* Passover Lamb to the temple (on the 10th), tie it to the altar, and examine it for purity for four more days. The procession of the lamb was accompanied by people waving palm branches and carpeting the way to the temple with them, while singing from Psalm 118: "Hosanna!" which means: "Save us now!"



Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the 10th and went to the temple (*Mark 11:11*), following the exact path of the National Passover Lamb. Remarkably, literally, as Isaiah had prophesied:

He was led like a lamb to the slaughter ... - *Isaiah 53:7b NIV*

And the crowds that had gathered (many of whom had witnessed Jesus' miracles), waved and threw down their palm branches, and shouted and sang the traditional passage of Psalm 118:25-26:



"Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" - *Mark 11:9 NIV*

But they had no idea they were hailing the *true* Passover Lamb, the One to whom all the sacrifices and feasts merely pointed.

And then, from the 10th to the 14th Jesus was interrogated by a continual procession of Chief Priests, elders, and teachers who were unaware that they were examining the Lamb of God.

They sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. - *Mark 12:13 NIV*

Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. - *Mark 12:18 NIV*

And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions. - *Mark 12:34 NIV*

They dared ask Him no more questions because they could find no fault in His words, logic, or character. It was flawless!

All four gospels say that Jesus died on the Day of Preparation (*John 19:14-18*), the same day the Passover Lambs were to be killed at the 9th hour (i.e. 3:00 pm; translated as "twilight"). And when the National Passover Lamb was killed, the priest would announce it to the people with the phrase: "It is finished!" The same last words that Jesus spoke on the cross! (*John 19:30*)

And then He died at the 9th hour. And everyone was shocked that He died so quickly. But, He had an appointment to keep. And all over the city, as had been done for centuries, the Passover lambs were stretched on wooden crosses and roasted.



Three days later two things happened: Feast of Firstfruits (celebrating the beginning of the *harvest*), and Jesus rose from the grave.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. - *1 Corinthians 15:20 NIV*

Jesus rose on the Feast of Firstfruits because He was the “First Fruit” of all who would rise from death, never to die again. We know the “Feast of Firstfruits” as “Easter”. And seven weeks after the grain offering was waved during the “Feast of Firstfruits”, the “Feast of Weeks” comes:



“From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the Lord. - *Leviticus 23:15-16 NIV*

Do you know how to say “fiftieth day” in Greek? Pentecoste! In Jesus’ day the Feast of Weeks was called *Pentecost*. It’s when Moses received the law and the disciples received the Spirit!

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven ... All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. - *Acts 2:1-4 NIV*

They were presenting an offering of “new grain” to the Lord! This is the last Feast of Spring. The final three Leviticus feasts are linked together in the fall.

Days before His crucifixion, Jesus said to His disciples:



Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. - *Matthew 24:32-33 NIV*

And then he fulfilled the spring feasts. We’re in a “summer period”, between the fulfillment of the spring and fall feasts.



The first feast of fall, is the “Feast of Trumpets”.

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. - *1 Thessalonians 4:16 NIV*



Then comes the “Day of Atonement” when two goats were chosen:

[Aaron] is to cast lots for the two goats – one lot for the Lord and the other for the scapegoat. ... The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert. - *Leviticus 16:7-8;22 NIV*

One goat was sacrificed to atone for sin. The other carried the sin away, so that it could never be held against them again.



- The sacrificed goat paid the price for their sin.
- The scapegoat carried away their guilt and shame.

One goat symbolizes redemption, the other, the result!

Many scholars see in the “Day of Atonement” a foreshadowing of Israel’s future turning to Christ to be redeemed. And this is followed by the “Feast of Tabernacles” which recalls the 40 years that Israel wandered in the wilderness (because of a lack of faith) before they finally reached the Promised Land.

Leviticus, read backwards, simply sets the stage for Jesus:

When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! - *Hebrews 9:11-14 NIV*

Jesus became our High Priest, the sacrifice for the atonement of our sins, *and* the scapegoat who carries our away our shame.