

The Word of the Lord: Leviticus

The story so far

God's people are out of Egypt, but are they out of Egyptomania?

God shows up to the people gathered at Sinai—they are in awe of God, and God consecrates them as a priestly people, and they say to God: “Everything you have spoken, we will do.”

They hear the law and the instructions for building the Mishkan (God-with-us), Moses goes up the mountain to talk to God, and leaves Aaron (his brother in charge).

They build the Golden Calf.

Themes

Holiness

Living near God's high voltage zone, a position both privileged and precarious (cf. Ellen Davis in Opening Israel's Scripture)

Holiness is closeness to God in the presence and action

Sacred housekeeping + the care, keeping, and maintenance of holiness

What is the everyday-ness of life with God?

Idolatry

What is louder than the presence of God? What in your life, left unregulated, distracts you from God?

Some debate as to whether the Golden Calf is representing a part of God as the whole of God (confusing creator/created)

Repentance

Living into the everydayness of the covenant is repentance/antidote for the Golden Calf incident

Forgiveness

God tells them how to build the Mishkan before they build the Golden Calf—God always makes a way for us to get home

Holiness is and is not abstract

God is all up in all your interactions and interpersonal relationships

Discussion questions

1. What theme are you most curious about? Which ones sound familiar to you? Which ones sound far off?
2. Christian character is formed through joy, relational attachment, identity, and community—who are we and how do we live? Where do you hear these heartbeats in Genesis?

When, how, who & the writing process

Leviticus stands on its own and within the Torah/Pentateuch/Books of Moses. Traditionally, people say Moses wrote it—but scholars describe how various sources were integrated (see Genesis).

The book's Hebrew name translates to "Book of the Levites" referencing the tribe of Levi, and those serving as priests.

Source theory:

- notes that Leviticus is composed in two halves, the first 16 chapters by the priestly source, and the last half by the Holiness source.
- disagrees on when: reaching final form in the post-exile period? Or pre-monarchic?

Reading Leviticus devotionally

Read it as a whole: the dietary practices are what Leviticus is most known for, a means of sanctifying everyday life, but they are part of a bigger, more complex worldview than do/do not.

Leviticus assumes the immediate presence of God.

Ellen Davis in *Opening Israel's Scriptures*: "Leviticus articulates an embodied and enacted spirituality, one that touches potentially on every aspect of human life, including our most common social behaviors, public or intimate, and our bodily functions, voluntary or involuntary.

This, then, is a second reason to take Leviticus seriously: it stands at the heart of Torah as a hedge against a faith abstracted from physical, material, social, and economic practices. One prominent area of practice addressed is interpersonal relations. "You shall be-loving to your neighbor, as [one] like yourself" (19:18b), reads the most famous instruction of the book. The unusual inclusion of the preposition *to* in the verbal phrase (overlooked in the conventional translation, "Love your neighbor as yourself") suggests that love for the neighbor is a matter of action and attitude. Enacting love to the neighbor is the opposite of the kind of action and attitude we find prohibited in the first part of the verse— taking vengeance and harboring a grudge against "your kin" (19:18a). Another area of concrete practice treated in Leviticus concerns the proper use of arable land; the book might well be considered one of the greenest in the Bible."

Do not slaughter and sacrifice more than a household can eat.

Unlikely that this was ever popular religion, for example, not mating 2 different animals would mean no mules.

"Cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas, studying ritual impurity in traditional societies has enhanced our understanding of the kind of thinking undergirding purity regulations. In her study, *Purity and Danger*, she shows that the distinction between purity and impurity is, again, not in the first instance a matter of moral judgment; rather, it has to do with the material circumstances of an act. Douglas posits that Israel's dietary regulations reflect an attempt to observe distinctions among the different categories of creation, as Israel conceived those categories. Animals that can be eaten and sacrificed are those that can be clearly classified: "Holiness is exemplified by completeness. Holiness requires that individuals shall conform [completely] to the class to which they belong. And holiness requires that different classes of things shall not be confused." In this system, if the "complete fish" has fins and scales, then cat-fish, with fins but no scales, are not to be eaten."

Lot of blood.

Blood of the covenant thrown on the altar and people at Sinai (Exodus 24).

Revelation 7—the people are in God's high voltage zone and their robes have been washed by the blood of the Lamb.

This and Hebrews, root of blood atonement

Read together: Leviticus 25