

LifeChange

A NAVPRESS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

*A life-changing
encounter with God's Word*

LEVITICUS & NUMBERS

*A picture of the habits of holiness
and how committed God is to seeing us
become who he created us to be.*

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NAVPRESS 

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Along with all the volumes in the LIFECHANGE series of Bible studies, this guide to Leviticus and Numbers shares common goals:

1. To provide you with a firm foundation of understanding, plus a thirst to return to Leviticus and Numbers throughout your life.
2. To give you study patterns and skills that help you explore every part of the Bible.
3. To offer you historical background, word definitions, and explanation notes to aid your study.
4. To help you grasp as a whole the message of both Leviticus and Numbers.
5. To teach you how to let God's Word transform you into Christ's image.

As you begin

This guide includes twelve lessons, which will take you chapter by chapter through all of Leviticus and Numbers. Each lesson is designed to take from one to two hours of preparation to complete on your own. To benefit most from this time, here's a good way to begin your work on each lesson:

1. Pray for God's help to keep you mentally alert and spiritually sensitive.
2. Read attentively through the entire passage mentioned in the lesson's title. (You may want to read the passage from two or more Bible versions—perhaps at least once from a more literal translation such as the New International Version, English Standard Version, New American Standard Bible, or New King James Version, and once more in a paraphrase such as The Message or the New Living Translation.) Do your reading in an environment that's as free as possible from distractions. Allow your mind and heart to meditate on these words you encounter, words which are God's personal gift to you and to all His people.

After reading the passage, you're ready to dive into the numbered

questions in this study which make up the main portion of each lesson. Each of these questions is followed by blank space for writing your answers. (This act of writing your answers helps clarify your thinking and stimulates your mental engagement with the passage, as well as your later recall.) Use extra paper or a notebook if the space for recording your answers seems too cramped. Continue through the questions in numbered order. If any question seems too difficult or unclear, just skip it and go on to the next.

Each of these questions will typically direct you back to Leviticus or Numbers to look again at a certain portion of the assigned passage for that lesson. (At this point be sure to use a more literal Bible translation, rather than a paraphrase.)

As you look closer at this passage, it's helpful to approach it in this progression:

Observe. What does the passage actually *say*? Ask God to help you see it clearly. Notice everything that's there.

Interpret. What does the passage *mean*? Ask God to help you understand. And remember that any passage's meaning is fundamentally determined by its *context*. So stay alert to all you'll see about the setting and background of Leviticus and Numbers, and keep thinking of these books as a whole while you proceed through them chapter by chapter. You'll be progressively building up your insights and familiarity with what they're all about.

Apply. Keep asking yourself, *How does this truth affect my life?* (Pray for God's help as you examine yourself in light of that truth, and in light of His purpose for each passage.)

Try to consciously follow all three of these approaches as you shape your written answer to each question in the lesson.

The extras

In addition to the regular numbered questions you see in this study, each lesson also offers several "optional" questions or suggestions that appear in the margins. All of these will appear under one of three headings:

Optional Application. These are suggested options for application. Consider these with prayerful sensitivity to the Lord's guidance.

For Thought and Discussion. Many of these questions address various ethical issues and other biblical principles that lead to a wide range of implications. They tend to be particularly suited for group discussions.

For Further Study. These often include cross-references to other parts of the Bible that shed light on a topic in the lesson, plus questions that delve deeper into the passage.

(For additional help for more effective Bible study, refer to the "Study Aids" section on page 135.)

Changing your life

Don't let your study become an exercise in knowledge alone. Treat the passage as *God's Word*, and stay in dialogue with Him as you study. Pray, "Lord, what do You want me to notice here?" "Father, why is this true?" "Lord, how does my life measure up to this?"

Let biblical truth sink into your inner convictions so you'll increasingly be able to act on this truth as a natural way of living.

At times you may want to consider memorizing a certain verse or passage you come across in your study, one that particularly challenges or encourages you. To help with that, write down the words on a card to keep with you, and set aside a few minutes each day to think about the passage. Recite it to yourself repeatedly, always thinking about its meaning. Return to it as often as you can, for a brief review. You'll soon find the words coming to mind spontaneously, and they'll begin to affect your motives and actions.

For group study

Exploring Scripture together in a group is especially valuable for the encouragement, support, and accountability it provides as you seek to apply God's Word to your life. Together you can listen jointly for God's guidance, pray for each other, help one another resist temptation, and share the spiritual principles you're learning to put into practice. Together you affirm that growing in faith, hope, and love is important and that *you need each other* in the process.

A group of four to ten people allows for the closest understanding of each other and the richest discussions in Bible study, but you can adapt this guide for other sized groups. It will suit a wide range of group types, such as home Bible studies, growth groups, youth groups, and church classes. Both new and mature Christians will benefit from the study, regardless of their previous experience in Bible study.

Aim for a positive atmosphere of acceptance, honesty, and openness. In your first meeting, candidly explore everyone's expectations and goals for your time together.

A typical schedule for group study is to take one lesson per week, but feel free to split lessons if you want to discuss them more thoroughly. Or, omit some questions in a lesson if your preparation or discussion time is limited. (You can always return to this guide later for further study on your own.)

When you come together, you probably won't have time to discuss all the questions in the lesson, so it's helpful to choose ahead of time the ones you want to make sure to cover thoroughly. This is one of the main responsibilities that a group leader typically assumes.

Each lesson in this guide ends with a section called "For the Group." It gives advice for that particular lesson on how to focus the discussion, how to apply the lesson to daily life, and so on. Reading each lesson's "For the Group" section ahead of time can help the leader be more effective in guiding the group.

You'll get the greatest benefit from your time together if each group member also prepares ahead of time by writing out their answers to each question in the lesson. The private reflection and prayer that this preparation can stimulate will be especially important in helping everyone discern how God wants you to apply each lesson to your daily life.

There are many ways to structure the group meeting, and in fact you may want to vary your routine occasionally to help keep things fresh.

Here are some of the elements you can consider including as you come together for each lesson:

Pray together. It's good to pause for prayer as you begin your time together, as well as to incorporate a later, more extensive time of prayer for each other after you've had time to share personal needs and prayer requests (you may want to write these down in a notebook). When you begin with prayer, it's worthwhile and honoring to God to ask especially for His Holy Spirit's guidance of your time together.

Worship. Some groups like to sing together and worship God with prayers of praise.

Review. You may want to take time to discuss what difference the previous week's lesson has made in your life, as well as recall the major emphasis you discovered in the passage for that week.

Read the passage aloud. Once you're ready to focus attention together on the assigned Scripture passage in this week's lesson, read it aloud. (One person could do this, or the reading could be shared.)

Open up for lingering questions. Allow time for the group members to mention anything in the passage that they may have particular questions about.

Summarize the passage. Have one or two persons offer a summary of what the passage tells us about.

Discuss. This will be the heart of your time together and will likely take the biggest portion of your time. Focus on the questions you see as the most important and most helpful. Allow and encourage everyone to be part of the discussion on each question. You may want to take written notes as the discussion proceeds. Ask follow-up questions to sharpen your attention and to deepen your understanding of what you discuss. You may want to give special attention to the questions in the margin under the heading "For Thought and Discussion."

Encourage further personal study. You can find more opportunities for exploring this lesson's themes and issues under the marginal heading "For Further Study" throughout the lesson. You can also pursue some of these together during your group time.

Focus on application. Look especially at the "Optional Application" listed in the margins throughout the lesson. Keep encouraging one another in the continual work of adjusting our lives to the truths God gives us in Scripture.

Summarize your discoveries. You may want to read aloud through the passage one last time together, using this opportunity to solidify your understanding and appreciation of it and to clarify how the Lord is speaking to you through it.

Look ahead. Glance together at the questions in the next lesson, to see what's coming next.

Give thanks to God. It's good to end your time together by pausing to express gratitude to God for His Word and for the work of His Spirit in your minds and hearts during your time together.

THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

Blood and Fire, Grace and Law

The book of Leviticus is not an easy one for believers today to study.

“No book in the Old Testament presents a greater challenge to the modern reader than Leviticus, and imagination is required to picture the ceremonies and rites that form the bulk of the book. However, it is important to try to understand the rituals in Leviticus for two reasons.

“First, rituals enshrine, express, and teach those values and ideas that a society holds most dear. By analyzing the ceremonies described in Leviticus, we can learn about what was most important to the Old Testament Israelites.

“Second, these same ideas are foundational for the New Testament writers. Particularly the concepts of sin, sacrifice, and atonement found in Leviticus are used in the New Testament to interpret the death of Christ.”¹

Studying Leviticus takes diligence and concentration, but that effort yields a uniquely satisfying reward.

The Setting of Leviticus

The events recorded in Leviticus took place when the Israelites, having left Egypt, were encamped before Mount Sinai. Here they stayed for about a year. “During that time Moses spent eighty days on the mountain with God. Then the people of Israel, at Moses’ instruction, built the wilderness tabernacle. During this year Moses organized the nation, built up the army, established courts and laws, and ordered formal worship. It was a busy year.”²

It was also a time when God graciously revealed Himself, to the lasting benefit of His people.

“Leviticus is . . . more than a description of past historical events and more than a collection of dated laws. It tells us about God’s character and will, which found expression in his dealings with Israel and in the laws he gave them. Those who believe that God the Lord ‘is the same yesterday and today and for ever’ may look to the book’s theology for insights that are still valid and relevant.”³

Learning from Leviticus Today

Leviticus helps believers today especially in their understanding of holiness, worship, and atonement for sin—as well as in many other ways. And its lessons come to us in a rich and profound context.

“Though at first glance the book [of Leviticus] looks like an accumulation of laws, this impression is inaccurate. Leviticus is really part of the great history of Israel’s journey from Egypt to the promised land. The law-giving was one of the most important events in this story.

“In interpreting Leviticus, and especially in seeking to apply it to the modern situation, the historical context of the laws should be borne in mind. They are not timeless universal precepts such as are found in the book of Proverbs. The laws of Leviticus were revealed to the covenant nation at a particular phase of their history. They were designed to mold Israel into a holy people in a particular historical environment. Though God’s holiness is unchanging, its expression may vary from age to age.”⁴

Traditionally, Moses is viewed as the author of the Pentateuch—the first five Old Testament books, including Leviticus. However, there are indications in the text of editing and updating done by others after the time of Moses.

1. *New Geneva Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), introduction to Leviticus: “Characteristics and Themes.”
2. R. Laird Harris, “Leviticus,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 501–502.
3. Gordon J. Wenham, “The Book of Leviticus,” in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 16.
4. Wenham, 50.

LEVITICUS 1-7

Sacrifices Pleasing to God

These, then, are the regulations . . . which the LORD gave Moses on Mount Sinai in the Desert of Sinai on the day he commanded the Israelites to bring their offerings to the LORD.

LEVITICUS 7:37-38

1. For getting the most from Leviticus, one of the best guidelines is found in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, words that Paul wrote with the Old Testament first in view. He said that *all* Scripture is of great benefit to (a) teach us, (b) rebuke us, (c) correct us, and (d) train us in righteousness. Paul added that these Scriptures completely equip the person of God “for every good work.” As you think seriously about those guidelines, in which of these areas do you especially want to experience the usefulness of Leviticus? Express your desire in a written prayer to God.

2. In Jeremiah 23:29, God says that His Word is like fire and like a hammer. He can use the Scriptures to burn away unclean thoughts and

For Thought and Discussion: As you launch into a closer look at Leviticus, how would you summarize what you already know about this book? And how would you describe the general impression that most Christians have of Leviticus?

For Further Study: In Exodus 40:34-38, notice the facts and imagery given in that book's concluding paragraph. How might this serve to prepare readers for what is coming in Leviticus?

desires in our hearts. He can also use Scripture, with hammer-like hardness, to crush and crumble our spiritual hardness. From your study of Leviticus, how do you most want to see the “fire-and-hammer” power of God’s Word at work in your life? Express this longing in a written prayer to God.

3. Think about these challenging words of Paul to his younger helper Timothy: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). As you study God’s word of truth in Leviticus, He calls you to be a “worker.” It takes *work*—concentration and perseverance—to fully appropriate God’s blessings for us in this book. Express here your commitment before God to work diligently in this study of Leviticus.

4. The book of Leviticus is linked strongly with Exodus, the book it follows. What are the most important themes and events, as you understand them, in the book of Exodus?

The LORD called (1:1). In Hebrew tradition, the opening verb “He called” also served as the title for this book. Leviticus continues God’s gracious communication to His people.

5. Glance ahead through the pages of Leviticus, and look for a recurring principle or concept in each of the following verses: 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:26; 21:8. What is that principle or concept? Why is it important to God, and why is it important for you and for all of God’s people in all ages?

In Leviticus, God is in the details.

“Precisely because the rituals of Leviticus are so central to Old Testament thinking, they are often obscure to us, because the writers did not need to explain them to their contemporaries. Every Israelite knew why a particular sacrifice was offered on a specific occasion and what a certain gesture meant. For ourselves, every hint in the text must be grasped to understand these things, and a judicious reading between the lines is sometimes required.”¹

6. The first three chapters of Leviticus deal with the three most common types of offerings in

For Further Study:

The theme of holiness in Leviticus has its foundation in the two earlier books of the Pentateuch. How is God’s holiness portrayed in Exodus 3:5 and 15:11? And how is holiness for God’s people taught in these passages: Genesis 2:3; Exodus 12:16; 16:23; 20:8-11?

Israel. As you read over these chapters, imagine you are living in the time of Moses. Which details in these chapters would be of most interest to you?

7. In chapter 1, what exactly was a person to offer for a burnt offering, and what exactly was he to do with it? (See verses 2, 3, 5, 10, and 14.)

Brings an offering to the LORD (1:2). This phrase represents the central human action presented in these chapters. In Leviticus, God takes the initiative to direct His people in exactly how to come into His presence. It must be according to *His* instructions, not according to our own ideas.

Lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering (1:4). This symbolizes an acknowledgment that the animal serves as a substitute for the person bringing the offering.

8. From chapter 1 (as well as from 6:8-13), how would you summarize the most significant procedures to be followed by the priests in regard to burnt offerings?

9. In 1:4, what is given as the *purpose* for the burnt offering, and what is the significance of this? What does it teach us?

10. In chapter 2, what exactly was a person to offer for a grain offering, and what exactly was he to do with it? (See verses 1, 4-7, 11, and 13-15.)

11. From chapter 2 (as well as from 6:14-23), summarize the most significant procedures to be followed by the priests in regard to grain offerings.

12. In chapter 3, what exactly was a person to offer for a fellowship offering (also called peace offering), and what exactly was he to do with it? (See verses 1, 6-7, and 12; look also at 7:12-13.)

“Using a little imagination every reader of the Old Testament soon realizes that these ancient sacrifices were very moving occasions. They make modern church services seem tame and dull by comparison. The ancient worshiper did

For Further Study:

The phrase “an aroma pleasing to the LORD” is found seventeen times in Leviticus. Earlier, its first use in Scripture was in Genesis 8:21, for an offering made by Noah after the Flood. Later, in the New Testament, how does Paul use this image in Ephesians 5:2 and Philippians 4:18?

For Further Study:

From Genesis 8:21-22; 2 Samuel 24:25; 2 Chronicles 29:7-8; and Job 1:5, what do we learn about the purpose burnt offerings accomplish?

For Further Study: Hundreds of years before the sacrificial regulations in Leviticus were given to Israel at Mount Sinai, men were offering sacrifices to the true God. Look at the following passages to see some of them: Genesis 8:20; 22:13; 31:54; 46:1.

not just listen to the minister and sing a few hymns. He was actively involved in the worship."²

13. From chapter 3 (as well as from 7:11-34), what were the most significant regulations to be followed in making fellowship (peace) offerings?

14. In chapters 4–6, we read about the sin offering and the guilt offering (also called trespass offering). Summarize the kinds of offenses for which these offerings were needed, according to 4:2,13,22,27; 5:1-4,15,17; and 6:2-3.

The LORD said to Moses (4:1). More literally, “The LORD spoke to Moses, saying . . .” Notice the majestic repetition of this phrase at the beginning of chapters 6, 8, 11–25, and 27, and also at 5:14; 6:8,19,24; 7:22,28; 14:33; 21:16, 22:17,26, 23:9,23,26,33; 24:13. Take note of the natural divisions they mark in the text.

“At the beginning of nearly every chapter, and often several times within a chapter, it says, ‘The LORD spoke to Moses.’ In other words, all the laws are set within a narrative framework. According to the author they were revealed to Moses during Israel’s wilderness wanderings to meet specific problems that arose at that time.”³

15. For the sin offering and guilt offering, what exactly was the offending person to offer, and what was he to do with it? (See 4:1-6:7)

16. What were the most significant regulations to be followed in making sin and guilt offerings? (See 4:1-6:7, 6:24-30, and 7:1-10.)

17. What is stated as the *purpose* for the sin and guilt offerings (see 4:20,26,31,35; 5:6,10,13,16,18; 6:7), and what is the significance of this?

In this way the priest will make atonement for them before the LORD, and they will be forgiven (6:7). “To make atonement for sin is to have the penalty paid and the guilt removed. Here lies the significance and the glory of the Old Testament sacrifices, although they were not in themselves efficacious. They were only types and shadows (Hebrews 8:5) and therefore were repeated regularly and often, until the Great High Priest should come who would in a new priesthood offer a final sacrifice to effect atonement for his people.”⁴

These are the regulations (6:9). Or, in many other English translations, “This is the law . . .” We see this phrase used repeatedly throughout

For Thought and Discussion: How serious is God about our holiness and the purity of our worship before Him? What are His expectations in this regard?

For Further Study: For the perpetual burnt offering mentioned in 6:8-9,12-13, compare Exodus 29:38-42. What did God want His people to experience and understand through this continuous offering?

Leviticus. These regulations are a part of God's continual grace toward His people.

"The law was given in a context of grace. . . . God gave his law to Israel after they had been redeemed from Egypt, not as a means for securing their redemption. God's call to Israel to be his holy people preceded the revelation of the law at Sinai, but only obedience could make holiness a living reality."⁵

18. What do the provisions for the sin and guilt offerings teach us about God's holiness?

19. Read closely the summary of these first seven chapters as stated in 7:37-38. What is the significance of each part of this summary statement?

"In one sense . . . the whole ceremonial law in Leviticus is obsolete for the Christian. We are interested in the sacrifice of Christ, not in animal sacrifice. But in another sense the Levitical rituals are still of immense relevance. It was in terms of these sacrifices that Jesus himself and the early church understood his atoning

death. Leviticus provided the theological models for their understanding. If we wish to walk in our Lord's steps and think his thoughts after him, we must attempt to understand the sacrificial system of Leviticus. It was established by the same God who sent his Son to die for us; and in rediscovering the principles of Old Testament worship written there, we may learn something of the way we should approach a holy God."⁶

Optional Application: In order to better please God in our personal and corporate worship, what can we learn from Leviticus 1-7?

20. In what ways do you see God's *grace* in the system of sacrifices outlined here in Leviticus?

21. What would you select as the key verse or passage in Leviticus 1-7—the passage that best captures or reflects the dynamics of what these chapters are all about?

22. What would have been the special significance of these chapters for Israel as they faced their journey across the wilderness and a new national existence in the Promised Land?

23. List any lingering questions you have about Leviticus 1–7.

For the Group

(In your first meeting, it may be helpful to turn to the front of this book and review together the section called “How to Use This Guide” on page 5.)

You may want to focus your discussion for lesson 1 especially on the following issues, themes, and concepts. (These things will likely reflect what group members have learned in their individual study of this week’s passage, though they’ll also have made discoveries in other areas as well.)

- The theological meaning of sacrifice, and the need for sacrifice
- How to please God
- The cost and injury of sin
- Atonement for sin and forgiveness of sin
- The meaning of peace
- Requirements for fellowship with God
- Appropriate worship of God

The following numbered questions in lesson 1 may stimulate your best and most helpful discussion: 6, 9, 17, 20, 21, 22, and 23.

Look also at the questions in the margin under the heading “For Thought and Discussion.”

1. *New Geneva Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), introduction to Leviticus: “Characteristics and Themes.”
2. Gordon J. Wenham, “The Book of Leviticus,” in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 55.
3. Wenham, 5.
4. R. Laird Harris, “Leviticus,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 523.
5. Wenham, 31.
6. Wenham, 36–37.