Alright, welcome to the Bible in Five and you are going to be spending two long weeks reading the book of Leviticus. I'm sorry but I'm kind of not sorry. Reading Leviticus is kind of like eating your vegetables, you know it's not always the funnest thing but it's really important for building healthy bones.

So the book of Leviticus is actually not that complicated. It breaks up into a number of clear parts and the main themes of the book are pretty clear. What makes it difficult for most of us is the cultural distance from this world of holiness and purity in animal sacrifices and so on.

So, the book breaks into a number of parts that focuses on these themes. The first main seven chapters, chapters one through seven, all focus on sacrifices for the people of Israel. Now this all just seamlessly fits onto the book of Exodus that came before so be sure to watch the Bible in Five before this one. Basically the book of Exodus ended and God wanted to come dwell among the people of Israel but there was a problem; namely that they are sinful and broken and rebellious. So how is a holy morally pure God going to dwell in the midst of his sinful broken people. The answer to that is animal sacrifices.

You get seven chapters and there's a whole bunch of different types of sacrifices broken down in these chapters. The details are going to be somewhat nauseating to you. That's OK. Look for the meaning of sacrifice as you read these chapters though. It's very clear what the sacrifices are for and what they accomplish. It’s said over and over and over again that they're for atonement of sins. In other words, they deal and erase the people sins and they provide forgiveness for the people's sins. It’s repeated over and over and over again in these chapters.

The basic logic of sacrifice is that sin puts his people into some kind of moral debt. We show that we aren't fit to live in God's good world when we rebel and we treat people horribly and so on. So basically the animal sacrifice is a replacement for our
punishment or for our death. That's the logic at work in sacrifices; the animal takes the hit instead of God’s people.

So with the sacrifices in place then, in these chapters eight through seventeen in the body of the book, if the people’s sins are atoned for, God calls his people to be a holy people. So what you're going to have in these chapters is the out working of this whole idea of holiness in the Bible. If God is a holy God, he wants his people to be holy, people who are pure.

There are a few ideas in these laws, this is all going to seem very bizarre to you. Some of the laws are moral in nature. In other words, God is a whole morally pure, holy God, he wants his people to be morally pure. A lot of these we’ll kind of track with, you know what I mean, like don't gossip, don't slander, have just weights and measures, just business practices, provide for the homeless, for the widow and orphan and so on. Those laws will kind of make sense to us.

The other laws that are going to be seen as bizarre to you in these chapters are what are called the purity laws. Basically these are symbolic laws. These are ways that the people of Israel did symbolic behaviors that kind of express their worldview; that God is holy and they were called to be a people who are holy.

Just sort of like here Madison, Wisconsin, in downtown on the isthmus, no buildings are allowed to be higher than the state capital. Right? That's a symbol. There's nothing inherently more valuable about buildings taller. It's a symbol to say we honor the state capital. So that's a lot what the ritual purity laws are like in the book of Leviticus. They may seem weird arbitrary to us but they're symbolic behavior and most of them revolve around the idea that God is the source of life and symbolically, God's people are to keep themselves from sources of death like dead bodies, or from lots of bodily fluids. There's a lot of talk about bodily fluids in these chapters. The whole point is that they are symbols of life going out of us, which is a sign of death. So they are marked in special ways.
So you're visiting another world and another culture when you read these laws and you know they're going to weird you out or whatever but look for the meaning in the symbolism behind the laws.

The key part of these laws in Leviticus highlights right here in chapter sixteen in the Day of Atonement. This is one day a year in Israel where there are animals sacrificed for all of the sins of the whole nation year after year. It’s a very powerful chapter. Really when the New Testament authors later in the Bible are going to come to talk about the death of Jesus and the meaning of his death, this is the language of the Day of Atonement and the language of sacrifices that they're going to draw upon.

The last big block of the book is that another series of holiness and purity laws. The book culminates in chapter twenty-six with kind of a final, “what are you going to do Israel?” It's a challenge. If you obey the covenant, if you obey the laws, then blessing is going to come on the people of Israel. If they disobey, then even if they go into the Promised Land, things are going to go horribly for them there.

So that's kind of the basic book of Leviticus in a nutshell: holiness and purity. God calls his people to be morally pure and a holy people who live out their vocation and as God’s special people. Remember of the big picture, they are called to bring blessing to the nations. So it's going to be a challenge for you to do it, but I know you can read through the book of Leviticus. Hopefully it will come together and make a little this sense to you. Alright, hope this is helpful, see you next time.

Transcribed by Tim Bean for OT Lit at Gordon College (12/10/15)
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt