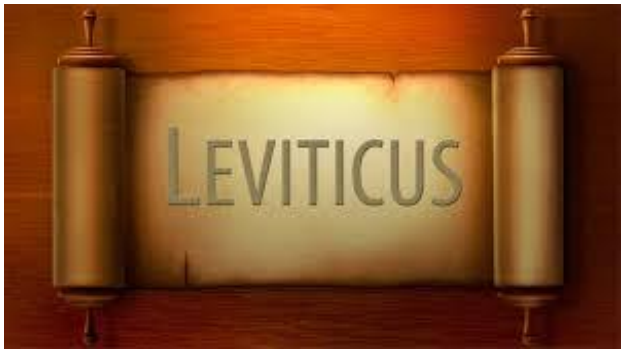
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Leviticus from a Messianic Jewish Perspective

*To Vicky Persley, faithful friend and research assistant. Always ready to find resources for my commentaries, this mature partner in ministry, as a grafted believer in **Yeshua**, couldn't love **the Torah** more. **God** and **His Word** is what she is all about.*



The Hebrew Bible expresses the central concerns of the hearts and minds of ancient people. One such concern underlines the question posed by the prophet **Micah: With what can I come before ADONAI to bow down before God on high? Should I come before Him with burnt offerings? With calves in their first year? Would ADONAI take delight in thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Could I give my firstborn to pay for my transgressions, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:6-8).** Like other **Israelite** prophets, Micah questioned the accepted norms of religious behavior, which required that **God** be worshiped through sacrifice. How shall **the human being** honor **his Creator**? What does **God** require of **His** creatures? **The prophet's** response regards burnt offerings as a poor substitute for **justice** and **mercy**.

We should regard **Leviticus 19:2b** as a **priestly** response to the same question posed by **Micah:** What does **ADONAI** require of us? **Be holy because I, ADONAI your God, am holy!**

The priestly traditions emphasized the proper worship of **ADONAI**, undertaken in the pursuit of **holiness**, which, in turn, could only be realized in the context of an **Israelite** society governed by **the Torah**. **Justice** and **mercy**, also, were a dimension of holiness, and at points, the priestly and the prophetic response converged. But the priests were concerned with the celebration of **holiness**, the preservation of purity, and the formation of a religious community that acknowledged the true **God**.

Leviticus takes its cue from the conventional charge delivered by **Ha'Shem, "Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5b-16).** How **Isra'el** was to realize the divine program is the burden of the book of **Leviticus**.[1]

Title: We now come to the third book of **Moses**. The title **Leviticus** comes from the Septuagint (LXX), or the Greek translation of the TaNaKh. It probably reflects the oldest title for the book in Hebrew, which means, "The instructions to the priests." The present Hebrew title comes from the opening words in Hebrew, which mean, **"and He called."** However, the title of this book is deceiving. Even though it is called **Leviticus**, **Levites** are only mentioned in **Chapter 25**, and only a few mitzvot apply to **them**. The mitzvot that apply to **them** are actually found in the book of **Numbers**. To whom, then, is the book directed?

To us as believers.

Authorship and Date: Though the author is not specifically identified in the book, **Moshe** should be accepted as its author for these reasons: (1) Since the contents of the book were revealed to **him** at **Mount Sinai (Leviticus 7:37-38, 26:46, 27:34)** and mostly to or through **Moses (1:1, 4:1, 6:1, 8, 19** and **8:1, etc), he** is, without a doubt, the one who recorded these divine revelations. (2) The book is a sequel to **Exodus** which specifically claims **Moshe** as the author **(Exodus 17:14, 24:4** and **7, 34:27-28)**. (3) **Yeshua** affirmed that **Moses** was the author when referring to **the Torah**, after cleansing a man from **leprosy**, (as **Moses** commanded you in **the Torah**) (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click Cn – The Healing of a Jewish Leper**). Therefore, **Leviticus** was written by **Moshe** probably shortly after the composition of Exodus in the second half of the fifteenth century BC.

Historical and Theological Setting: The historical and theological context of **Leviticus** is implied in the opening and closing verses of the book **(1:1** and **27:34)**.

Historically, Leviticus was the sequel to **Exodus**, the Levitical sacrificial system was a divine revelation to **Isra'el** given through **Moses** as a part of the covenant obligation at **Sinai**. The book opens: **ADONAI called Moses and spoke to him from the Tabernacle (1:1)**. Thus, the legislation contained in **Leviticus** follows the historical narrative concerning the construction of **the Tabernacle (Exodus 25-40)** and precedes the next major narrative of the Israelite tribes for the decampment from **Sinai (Numbers 1-4)**. The intervening exceptions are the historical narrative of the ordination of **the priests (Leviticus 8-10)** and the brief interlude in **24:10-13**. **Theologically,** the **Levitical** sacrificial system was instituted for a people redeemed from Egypt and in covenant relationship with their **God**. Thus, sacrifice in **Isra'el** was not a human effort to obtain favor with a hostile **God** but a response to **ADONAI** who had first given **Himself** to **Isra'el** in covenant relationship. Yet, whenever **sin** or impurity, whether ethical or ceremonial, disrupted this fellowship, the individual or the nation (whichever was the case) renewed covenant fellowship with **the LORD** through sacrifice, the particular sacrifice, depending on the exact circumstance of the description.

Contents and Literary Genre: Did you know that there is no other book of the Bible which **contains** more of the very words of **ADONAI** than in **Leviticus**? Here, **God** is the direct speaker on almost every page. Surely there is a message **He** wants us to grasp. That is one very important reason why we consider this book so vital to read through.[2] **Leviticus** deals with the worship of **Isra'el** – its sacrifices, priesthood, mitzvot rendering a person ceremonially unclean and so disqualifying him for worship, and various special appointed times for worship. It also contains many mitzvot pertaining to daily living and practical holiness, both ethical and ceremonial. The **literary genre** of **Leviticus** is legal literature, including both mitzvot expressing necessary conduct, like: **Do not make idols or set up an image or a sacred stone for yourselves (26:1)**, and mitzvot expressed in case decisions, like: **If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt upon the people, he must bring to ADONAI a young bull without defect as a sin offering for the sin he has committed (4:3).** Through these literary forms within the historical framework of the covenant between **YHVH** and **Isra'el**, **God** chose to reveal certain truths about **sin** and its consequences, and holiness of life before **the LORD**.

Theme and Structure: The **theme** of **Leviticus** is **the Israelite** believer's worship and walk before a **holy God**. By way of application this theme is significant for believers today **(First Peter 1:15-16)**. The theme verse, as stated above, is **Leviticus 19:2b: Be holy because I, ADONAI your God, am holy! Leviticus**,

therefore, is the book of **holiness** (Hebrew: *badal*, meaning, *being set apart*) as in **20:26**. While much stress is placed on ceremonial **holiness**, where people, animals or objects are *set apart* for the service of **YHVH**, such **holiness** is ultimately symbolic and foundational for ethical holiness **(11:33** and **19:2)**. **ADONAI Himself** is separate from all that is **sinful**. Thus, **Ha'Shem**, who was present in the midst of **His** people **Isra'el (26:11-12)**, demanded that they be **holy (20:22-26)**. The **structure** of the book corresponds with its theme. **Chapters 1-16** basically deal with the worship before **a holy God**, while **Chapters 17-27** relate primarily to the daily walk in **holiness** before **God** and people.[3]

The Use of the Complete Jewish Bible: Because I am writing this commentary on the book of **Second Corinthians** from a **Jewish** perspective, I will be using *the Complete Jewish Bible* unless otherwise indicated.

The use of ADONAI: Long before **Yeshua's** day, the word **ADONAI** had, out of respect, been substituted in speaking and in reading aloud for **God's** personal name, the four Hebrew letters *yod-heh-vav-heh*, variously written in English as **YHVH**. **The Talmud (Pesachim 50a) made it a requirement not to pronounce the Tetragrammaton**, meaning the four-letter name of **the LORD**, and this remains the rule in most modern **Jewish** settings. In deference to this tradition, which is unnecessary but harmless, I will be using **ADONAI** where **YHVH** is meant. In ancient times when the scribes were translating the Hebrew Scriptures, they revered the name of **YHVH** so much that they would use a quill to make one stroke of the name and then throw it away. Then they would make another stroke and throw that quill away until the name was completed. **His** name became so sacred to them that they started to substitute the phrase *the Name*, instead of writing or pronouncing **His** Name. Over centuries of doing this, the actual letters and pronunciation of **His** Name were lost. The closest we can come is **YHVH**, with no syllables. The pronunciation has been totally lost. Therefore, the name Yahweh is only a guess of what the original name sounded like. Both **ADONAI** and **Ha'Shem** are substitute names for **YHVH**. **ADONAI** is more of an affectionate name like *daddy*, while **Ha'Shem** is a more formal name like *sir*.

613 Mitzvot of ADONAI

Genesis 2 mitzvot

Exodus 110 mitzvot

Leviticus 243 mitzvot

Numbers 58 mitzvot

Deuteronomy 200 mitzvot

The use of TaNaKh: The Hebrew word **TaNaKh** is an acronym, based on the letters **T** (for "**T**orah"), **N** (for "**N**evi'im," the Prophets), and **K** (for "**K**etuvim," the Sacred Writings). It is the collection of the teachings of **God** to human beings in document form. The term "Old Covenant" implies that it is no longer valid, or at the very least outdated. Something old, to be either ignored or discarded. But **Jesus Himself** said: **Don't think I have come to abolish the Torah and the Prophets, I have not come to abolish but to complete (Matthew 5:17 CJB).** I will be using the Hebrew acronym **TaNaKh** instead of the phrase the Old Testament, throughout this devotional commentary.

The Use of the phrase, "the righteous of the TaNaKh," rather than using Old Testament saints: Messianic synagogues, and the **Jewish** messianic community in general, never use the phrase Old Testament saints. From a **Jewish** perspective, they prefer to use the phrase, "righteous of **the TaNaKh**." Therefore, I will be using "the righteous of **the TaNaKh**," rather than Old Testament saints throughout this devotional commentary.[4]

Genesis is the book of beginnings; Exodus shows the giving of the Torah and exit from Egypt; Leviticus is an addendum to Exodus, giving the sacrifices and allowing the Israelites to draw near to God.