

The Bible begins with man existing in God's presence, but they are banished because of their rebellion.

But, God wants to be in a relationship with us, so He chooses a family – Israel - that He will use to restore the world back into His presence.

Once he frees Israel from slavery in Egypt, He gives them plans to build a place where He can dwell in the middle of them.

But that creates a problem...

His presence is so intense that even Moses can't go in and if the priests enter inappropriately, they will die.

Q: If God's presence is good, how is it dangerous for people?

A: Think of it this way: His presence is like the sun, powerful and good, providing warmth and light. But when something mortal gets too close to it, the intensity of that heat and light can destroy.

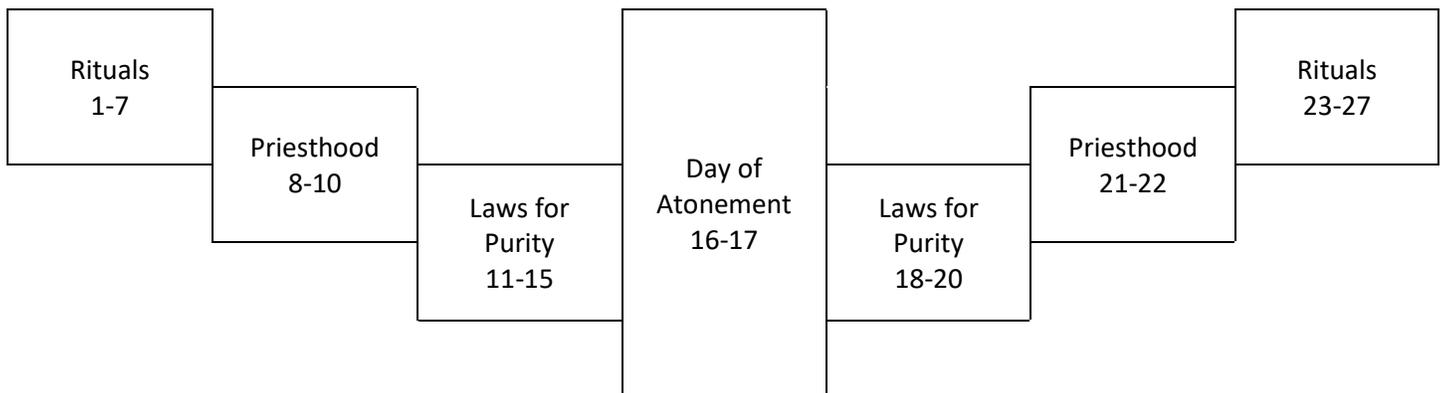
Q: So how is it possible for people to approach Him?

- The word "holiness" is used in Leviticus to describe God's pure and powerful presence, which, like the sun is both good and dangerous.
- The main point of Leviticus is to show how corrupt Israelites can live in God's presence (i.e. "be holy" without being destroyed).
 - Leviticus is about God's grace!

In the book, there are three main ways that this plays out:

1. Rituals
2. A priesthood
3. Laws for purity

The book breaks down into seven sections, with each solution explored in two sections apiece:



1. Rituals

- Involves a lot of sacrifices (1-7).
 - Leviticus begins with detailed instructions on how to make these sacrifices.
 - Some are ways of saying "thank you" to God (grain offering, fellowship offering).
 - Others are ways to say "I'm sorry" to God (burnt offering, sin offering, guilt offering).
- Leviticus ends with another set of rituals involving certain sacred days and festival days (23-27).
 - All of them are celebrations that re-tell some part of the story of how God rescued Israel and set them apart from the nations:
 - Sabbath, New Moon, Passover, Tabernacles/Booths
 - Each of these days also include additional sacrifices.

2. Priesthood

- Being in the presence of God is dangerous, so God appoints priests (the sons of Aaron – Exod. 28:1) as special representatives to go into His presence on behalf of Israel.
- The first section (8-10) begins with how the priests are ordained into the priesthood.
- The second section (21-22) describes the higher standards that the priests are to live by because they work so closely to God's presence.

3. Purity laws

- These tend to be the commands that are the hardest for us to understand...
- Details how one is considered "clean" or "unclean."
 - Or, another way to put it is how one is "pure" or "impure".
 - Purity defines one's ability to be in God's presence.
 - Since an impure person cannot be in God's presence, it becomes very important for a person to know what state they are currently in at any given time.
 - Important: being "impure" does not necessarily equate to being "sinful"!
 - i. More on this in a second...
- The first section (11-15) details ritual purity.
 - It begins with a list of clean and unclean animals.
 - This list is divided up based on where the animal lives: land, sea or air.
 - The text doesn't necessarily explain why some animals are considered clean and others are considered unclean.
 - Some, for instance, may be unclean because they are carrion eaters...
 - However, what seems to be emphasized is that holiness is to affect every part of their lives, *including* what they eat.
 - This section also deals with various rules about things like skin diseases, touching dead bodies and what to do with bodily fluids.
 - The inclusion of this list isn't random, though.
 - These are things that Israelites would associate with life and death, which are sacred things because God is the author of life.
 - Again, we need to understand that being ritually "unclean" does not mean that one is "sinful."
 - One simply needs to wait a few days, take a bath and offer a sacrifice and they are once again clean/pure.
 - However, attempting to present oneself before God in a state of uncleanness is what is inappropriate.
- The second section (18-20) focuses on moral purity.
 - These are laws about social justice, healthy relationships and sexual integrity.

All of these sections center around a specific ritual day: the Day of Atonement (16-17).

- Israel is now a large nation, so chances are that there is a lot of sin that goes unnoticed, and as a result, isn't being dealt with.
- So, one time a year, the High Priest is commanded to take two goats:
 - The first goat is killed and its blood is carried into God's presence to symbolically cover, or "atone," for the sins of the people.
 - The next chapter gives the meaning of this sacrifice by explaining that the life of a creature is in the blood, so the goat's life is offered as a substitute for the lives of the people.
 - It bears the punishment for Israel's sin so that the people don't have to.
 - The High Priest will place his hands on the second goat and confesses all of the sins of Israel - essentially placing the sins on the goat – and then the goat (the "scapegoat") is cast out into the wilderness.

- An image of God's gracious "removal" of sin from the people.

As a whole, Leviticus is a difficult book for us to read and comprehend because the things described in the book seem either trivial, oddly specific or even cruel in some cases.

- However, think of it in context of purpose, time and setting:
- God has delivered a single family from out of a pagan nation to then form a new nation with a unique identity.
 - Israel's identity – both as a family and as a nation – is based on their covenant relationship with God.
 - Because of this, they need:
 1. To understand the God who delivered them
 - His character, His holiness, His authority and His care for them.
 - Keep in mind the pagan nations of the day:
 - Like Israel, those nations based much of their religious worship on symbolic rituals and festivals, many of which were hedonistic or barbaric.
 - However, their gods were also unpredictable and fickle and one never knew if they would ignore you or turn on you.
 - It's in this cultural setting that we see Israel's God as totally different.
 - He does get angry about human corruption, but it's never arbitrary.
 - He loves His people, so He provides a clear way for Israel to know with confidence that they are forgiven and that, despite their corruption, they are safe to live near His presence.
 2. To understand their unique purpose as a reflection of God's character and holiness.
 3. Structure and guidance to grow and sustain itself.
 - This structure comes in the form of commandments ("Thou shalt..."), statutes (law) and teaching/instruction (principles).
- With these in mind, Leviticus is a revolutionary statement for its day.