

Leviticus

*This is part of an ongoing series of short articles designed to help us understand what scripture is and what is **in** each book of scripture. Previous articles can be found at www.openarms-communityofchrist.org.*

Although many find Leviticus to be a book of “do” and “don’t,” it is primarily a book of worship. Even though it is a separate book in the Bible, it is a continuation of the instructions found in the end of the book of Exodus, and early rabbinic tradition called it “the Priests’ Manual.”

It is basically divided into six sections:

1. Laws dealing with sacrifices;
2. How to consecrate the priests;
3. Laws that set apart what was clean and what was unclean (both for people and for their homes); some of this functioned as nutritional advice as well as medical advice to help avoid the spread of potentially contagious diseases;
4. The ceremony for the annual day of atonement, when the high priest acknowledged on behalf of the people that they had sinned and offered a sacrifice on their behalf so that they could return to God and make a fresh start;
5. Laws that governed Israel’s life as a holy people, and
6. An appendix on religious vows.

While both Genesis and Exodus are primarily books containing stories of events, Leviticus is not. The few events that are told deal with priesthood and include the ordination of Aaron as well as the death of two of Aaron’s sons when they disobeyed God’s instructions for offering burnt offerings.

In some ways it is a very legalistic book, but it is important to remember that it was still part of the Israelite learning what it meant to live as a people claimed by God. They were to be separate from the people around them, and the various laws were intended both to do that and also to help them return to God when they had sinned.