

Prepare for Worship

Bible Studies

Old Testament Study: Leviticus 19

This Bible study can be used in a group setting or by an individual. It consists of a background and context section with questions for reflection, and a three-part discussion series. If you work with a group (an adult Sunday School class or women's group, for example), you may want to divide this study into four meetings: Background and Context, Discussion Part I, Discussion Part II and Discussion Part III.

What's in a name?

In the Hebrew Bible, books get their names from the first word or words of the text. Often, these words also say something about the themes, tone and meaning of the book as a whole. The Hebrew name for Leviticus, וַיִּקְרָא, *vayyikra*, means “And he (the LORD) calls.”

Background and Context

God's call is a theme that pervades the Old Testament, and especially the book of Leviticus. There are several well-known stories of God calling Moses in the book of Exodus, immediately preceding Leviticus, including God calling Moses

- from the burning bush when God establishes a relationship with Moses (Ex 3:4),
- on Mt. Sinai when Moses is given the Ten Commandments (Ex 19:3),
- and from the cloud that covers Mt. Sinai when God gives instructions to Moses on how to build the tabernacle—a moveable temple (Ex. 25–31).

The “call” Moses receives in Leviticus builds on these stories and is also different. Instead of speaking to Moses for the purposes of their own relationship, or to give Moses authority over people or instructions, God gives Moses a call to extend to all of God's people. It is a call for each individual to be holy. Fleshing out the broad outline of the Ten Commandments in more detail, God calls the people to live holy lives, and gives instructions on just how to do that.

Like most of the Bible, many scholars believe that Leviticus in the form we have it today was collected and compiled over a period of several hundred years and by many different authors. Chapters 1–16 are believed to originate from early sources, while Chapters 17–26 are believed to be contemporary with prophets like Amos and Micah, who proclaimed that to be holy is to live justly. For this reason, Chapters 17–26 are commonly referred to as the “Holiness Code.”

Leviticus was probably recorded in a form close to what we have today during the time when the Israelites were exiled in Babylon. This piece of information is especially important in light of the World Day of Prayer theme for 2013. The people of Israel, who were exiled to Babylon as captives, had been attacked, had seen their cities fall and had been forced from their homes into a new land. As they tried to make a new life in this strange place, they struggled with many questions: *How will we teach our children who they are and where they come from? How will we be able to preserve our traditions and beliefs? How will we protect ourselves from the influences of people who see the world differently than we?* In the midst of these questions, a book like Leviticus provided a strong foundation for them, demonstrating what it meant to be a follower of God in a foreign land.

Questions for Reflection

Put yourself in the shoes (sandals?) of the Israelites in exile. What would be the most important things you would want to preserve or pass on?

Put yourself in the shoes of a migrant person living in the USA today. What does it feel like? What are your concerns or worries about preserving your culture, teaching your children, and telling your own story?

Discussion and Activities

The following activities can be done in a group, or by an individual on their own. It might be helpful to have large sheets of newsprint or a chalkboard or whiteboard in the room, so that you can record the answers and ideas the group comes up with.

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Part I: Understanding Text and Context

The following questions deal with Leviticus 19. Before addressing the questions, read through Leviticus 19 as a group, taking turns reading out loud.

- A. Notice when the text is punctuated, almost like a litany, by the sentence “I am the LORD your God” or “I am the LORD.” How does this sentence divide up the chapter? Are there different themes or topics you can identify for the passages in between the markers “I am the LORD your God” or “I am the LORD?”
- B. Look up one or both versions of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–17 and/or Deuteronomy 5:6–21). How do they compare to the themes and commands of Leviticus 19? What similarities and differences do you notice?
- C. Identify and make a list of all of the groups of people who are mentioned in the commands in Leviticus 19. What are the actions commanded toward the people mentioned? What kind of place or status are they given by the commands?
- D. What vision of human beings and their relationship to God and one another can we draw from this chapter?
- E. Read Verse 34 and Verse 18 again. What do these verses command from us?

Part II: Connecting to Our Lives

If you are using Part II as its own Bible study, take some time to remember the conversation your group had during Part I. Re-read Leviticus 19:2, 18 and 34 to remind you of the context of World Day of Prayer 2013. Depending on your group, you may decide to spend 10 or 15 minutes with individuals jotting down their personal answers to the questions, then come back together to share your reflections as a group.

- A. What does God’s command to “be holy” mean for your life?
- B. What do Leviticus 19:2, 18 and 34 mean to you personally? How do you “remember when you were an alien?”

- C. Does this affect the way you think about migrant and immigrant people? How?

Part III: Faith in Action

Read through the following stories, in a group or on your own. Read with respect for the women who have shared these stories, and ask God to open your heart to understand their lives. The first four stories come from women in France, the writer country for World Day of Prayer 2013. The last story comes from the United States. After you have read the stories, discuss the questions at the end of this section.

Khadija

My name is Khadija, and I am from Morocco, where I lived in extreme poverty. I came to France on a tourist visa to try to find work and am living at my sister’s home. Since I have not been able to get a work permit, I have to work illegally in a private home for very little money. I live in fear knowing I could be sent back to my country at any time, where I would have even less than what I have here in France.

Zaira

My name is Zaira, and I came to France from Chechnya ten months ago with my four children, seeking asylum from violence. We were housed in a hotel paid for by the French state. One evening, we were all kicked out, along with three other families, fourteen children and two pregnant women. We didn’t know where to go. Our rooms had not been paid for because of poor administrative and political coordination. After sleeping outside one night, a temporary housing solution was identified, thanks to a Christian organization. But what will happen two months from now?

Sabina

My name is Sabina and I am Nepalese. I met and fell in love with a Frenchman who was living and working in Nepal. We were married at the French Consulate in Katmandu. When I arrived in France, I was told I had no right to legally live with my husband because I had not yet obtained my residence permit. We are still going through the bureaucracy, paperwork and red tape.

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Céline

My name is Céline and I am the principal of a primary school. One day in November, all the children were playing in the schoolyard when the police came without warning to arrest the four children of a Kosovan family. They were taken with their parents to a deportation center. Then, just before Christmas, the family was deported. These children will not be able to continue with the same quality of education as their schoolmates, who are all still as shaken as I was by what we witnessed.

Patricia

My parents decided to move to the United States in 2007 after my father had been working in another city, separated from our family (except on weekends) for about 12 years. My mom was sure that moving to the United States would give us a better opportunity to grow as a family. School was difficult for me initially, but once I learned the language and joined extracurricular activities, things got better. While my school offered many academic and social activities, my undocumented status prevented me from participating fully in many of them. For example, there was a national debate tournament in Los Angeles that I was not able to be a part of because I did not have an identification card. Last spring, I graduated from high school and was accepted to Texas A&M University. However, my status prevented me from securing a scholarship or financial aid. I am now attending a community college, but I hope to switch to a four-year college or university in the future.

- Read Leviticus 19:33–37. In light of the stories you read, what does the command “you shall not oppress the alien” mean to you now?
- In the stories, did the “strangers” feel welcomed or not? What made them feel that way?
- How would Leviticus 19:33–37 call us to respond to these women and others who find themselves “aliens” and “strangers?”

- Commit to one thing you or your church or women’s group will do differently as a result of what you learned in this study.

Words Matter

In Hebrew, as in Greek, several words are used to refer to a “stranger.”

Hebrew:

ger: “the immigrant,” often translated in the Bible as “alien”

nokri/nera: “from another land”

tzar: “the stranger perceived as an enemy, a danger to group cohesion”

Greek:

paroikos: “from another household; to live as a stranger in a country”

xenos: “noncitizen, a stranger from another country”

allogrios: “the other, the unknown person, stranger to this land”

The book of Leviticus only uses the term *ger*—“immigrant.” Matthew 25:31–46 uses the word *xenos*—“noncitizen.” How does that affect the way you understand the passages?

In English we use several words to refer to the kind of “stranger” in Leviticus 19 and Matthew 25, including:

Stranger	Alien
Immigrant	Migrant
Undocumented person	

What other words can you think of that are used in English to refer to “the stranger?” Add them to the list. Discuss with a small group the connotations of each word. Which have positive connotations? Which have negative connotations? If you were an immigrant living in another country, which would use for yourself?

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New Testament Bible Study: Matthew 25:31-46

This Bible study can be used in a group setting or by an individual. It consists of a background and context section with questions for reflection, and a three-part discussion series. If you work with a group (an adult Sunday School class or women's group for example), you may want to divide this study into four meetings: Background and Context, Discussion Part I, Discussion Part II and Discussion Part III.

Background and Context

Throughout the book of Matthew, Jesus uses the *apocalyptic tradition* to illustrate his points. This tradition, perhaps most commonly known in the book of Revelation, finds its earlier Biblical roots in the book of Daniel. Written at a time when political powers were shifting, Daniel features stories about Jewish people in the courts of foreign kings. These stories reflect the immigrant experience explored by World Day of Prayer's 2013 theme. Hebrew Bible scholar Amy-Jill Levine tells us that "by juxtaposing the wisdom of the Jewish courtiers in negotiating the difficulties of living under an often arbitrary and dangerous foreign rule with its visions of wars, persecutions, and, finally, salvation under God's sovereignty, the book of Daniel offers its readers both advice and consolation."^{*}

Jewish people at the time of Jesus, even those living in the geographic area of Palestine, were living under the foreign rule of the Roman Empire. As we study this apocalyptic parable, it is important to understand Jesus' context: an oppressed minority ethnic group living under foreign power, much like the Jewish heroes lifted up in Daniel, and much like many immigrant people today.

The *apocalyptic tradition* uses images such as the coming of the end of the world, with cataclysms, trials and tribulations, the coming of the "Son of Man," the judgment of all nations and the advent of a new world sent by God. When Jesus refers to himself as "the Son of Man" throughout the Gospels

he is identifying himself with this apocalyptic figure. "The Son of Man," first mentioned in Daniel 7:13, has been understood in a few main ways by Jewish and Christian communities over time. In some cases it is understood, simply, as a human being. In some cases, it is thought to refer to a faithful community as a corporate symbol, and in others a figure who would serve as a divine judge at the end of days.

As we learn about the apocalyptic tradition in Daniel and Matthew, as well as the cultural contexts of both writings, we begin to understand something of the experiences of people on the margins—people who may be "strangers" for one reason or another. Taken in this context, Jesus' apocalyptic words reflect the struggles of oppressed people and the desire for justice. Before the separation of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31–46, Matthew 25 has two other apocalyptic parables: the 10 bridesmaids with lamps, and the parable of the talents. Both of these stories emphasize the ongoing nature of the struggle for justice, and encourage the reader not to give up.

Questions for Reflection

Have you ever had an experience where you were "a stranger in a foreign land?" (That could be interpreted literally, as in visiting a foreign country, or figuratively, as in participating in an experience that was new or different to you.) How did you feel? How would you have liked to feel?

Discussion and Activities

The following activities can be done in a group, or by an individual on their own. It might be helpful to have large sheets of newsprint or a chalkboard or whiteboard in the room, so that you can record the answers and ideas the group comes up with.

Part I: Understanding Text and Context

Read through Matthew 25:31–46 as a group. If you want, read all of Matthew 25 in order to gain a larger sense of the context, and then go back and read Verses 31–46 again.

^{*}Amy Jill-Levine, "Daniel" in Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Fully Revised Fourth Edition (New York: 2010), 1234.

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- A. Make a list of all the things in Matthew 25:31–46 that describe the greatness of the “Son of Man.”
- B. Make a list of the conditions that describe the need of “the least of these.”
- C. Compare your two lists. What words would you use to describe the difference between the two (for example: *powerful/powerless*, etc.)?
- D. In the story, the people seem surprised—they do not understand at first when they had seen God hungry or thirsty. Why do you think they are surprised?
- E. How do you think Jesus’ hearers responded to a story about a king (someone with power) siding with “the least of these” (the powerless)?

Part II: Connecting to Our Lives

If you are using Part II as its own Bible study, take some time to remember the conversation your group had during Part I. Re-read Matthew 25:31–46. Depending on your group, you may decide to spend 10 or 15 minutes with individuals jotting down their personal answers to the questions, and then come back together to share your reflections as a group.

- A. Have you ever been in a situation where you needed food, clothes, or visiting? What was it like? What do you wish it had been like? If your answer is “no,” how does that affect the way you think about your life? Does it affect your ability to have compassion for others?
- B. Around the world, women do the lion’s share of work with poor folks, hungry folks, and incarcerated folks, running food pantries and clothes closets. To some women, this passage feels like an overwhelming reprimand—we are trying our best and there is simply not enough time to feed, clothe and visit everyone! Is there anything hopeful for you about this passage? What?
- C. Notice that at the beginning of this passage, the “king” draws “the nations” together. Would it make a difference if the king holds groups of

people to account, rather than individuals? What is the difference?

Part III: Faith in Action

If you are using Part III as its own Bible study, take some time to remember the conversation your group had during Parts I and II. Re-read Matthew 25:31–46.

- A. Make a list of ministries you participate in—at your church, with your women’s group, in your community—that address the needs of “the least of these.”
- B. Re-read verse 40. Jesus calls “the least of these” “members of my own family” or “my brothers and sisters.” What does being a member of a family mean to you? What does it look and feel like?
- C. Compare the experience of belonging to a family with the experience of asking for help, or the experience you imagine someone might have who is visiting one of the ministries you listed in question A above. Do we treat “the least of these” more like “strangers” or “brothers and sisters?”
- D. Commit to one thing you or your group will do differently as a result of this study.



Engage in Prayerful Action

WDP 2013 Action Guide

Learn More and Become a Teacher

Bible studies

The two WDP 2013 Bible studies focus on the ways God calls us to welcome the stranger. Available in the *Leader's/Planner's Guide* or to order separately, the Bible studies can be used in existing adult education classes, or can be used in a new group. Invite women and men from your church or other churches in your neighborhood to study with you.

Online resources

Learning more about the facts of Immigration and Migration is easy at www.wdp-usa.org/2013-france/take-action! Browse the list of resources and organizations to find help learning about the aspects of immigration and migration that interest you. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS) created helpful “Mythbuster” sheets that use visuals to communicate what is actually happening with immigrant communities in the United States.

Download these sheets at

<http://www.lirs.org/mythbusters>.

At www.wdp-usa.org/2013-france/take-action, find a list of your denomination's resources and/or staff people to be in touch with as you learn more about this issue.

Host a speaker

Inviting local immigration professionals, social service providers, people from refugee communities in your area, and immigrants to share their stories and expertise can help you gather information about immigration issues in your community and provide and opportunity to ask questions. Invite all the churches in your area to this ecumenical event as a precursor to WDP or as a follow-up.

Screen a movie

Watch a movie to learn more, or host a movie night in your home or church. Visit www.wdp-usa.org for a list of recommended films which will inspire deeper conversations. As you watch, try to put yourself in the shoes of the characters in the movies, and remain mindful of God's call for us to welcome the stranger.

Pray

Pray for God to make you open to welcoming strangers. Ask that God remove judgment from your heart and help you see each person as a human being, a child of God, worthy of respect and dignity. Pray for all without a home in their country of origin, all who have had to leave their home for one reason or another, all who live in a place that is strange or frightening to them. Lift up these prayers personally and add them to prayers read and spoken in your church on Sunday.

Direct Services

The wheels of justice can turn slowly. Already in the United States, immigration reform has been debated for a decade or more. While continuing to work within our democratic process, people of faith can undertake the task of education and direct service partnerships. This can help meet the immediate needs of a broken immigration system, and prepare people for a debate and discussions that are consistent with the gospel mandate to love our neighbor.

Direct service partnership requires the input and voice of your entire community. Whether you are a congregation of migrants or a mostly nonimmigrant congregation, working with people and organizations representing the breadth of diversity in your community is the best way to establish the resources and meet the needs that exist. Find ideas on how to get involved at www.wdp-usa.org/2013-france/take-action.

Legislative Action

Advocating through our democratic process is a great way to effect change. Find out who represents you by searching www.congress.org/congressorg/directory/congdir.tt. Then give your representative a call or send a letter urging them to support policy that “welcomes the stranger,” upholding the dignity and human rights of all people. Identify yourself as a person of faith and as their constituent. Follow legislation and advocacy actions at www.wdp-usa.org/2013-france/take-action.

Engage in Prayerful Action

2012 Grant Information

Information on grants from WDP USA using the 2012 offering will be available later this fall on our website at www.wdp-usa.org/grants.

In Memoriam

Paula Lamberg, WDP USA grants committee chair



Paula K. Lamberg, 64, of Lee Lake, Wisconsin, died on Tuesday evening, July 10, 2012, with her family and friends by her side, after a brief battle with cancer. She was born on January 20, 1948, in Evanston, Illinois, to the late Paul and Helen (Drenkow) Sutton. She attended East High in Green Bay,

where she met the love of her life, Richard Lamberg. They were married on September 14, 1968, in Green Bay. Paula graduated from St. Cloud State University with a degree in psychology. She worked at the Brown County Mental Health Center and Social Services for many years. She was the founder and director of the Fort Howard/ Jefferson Family Resource Center in Green Bay.

Paula was an advocate for social justice and dedicated her life to helping others in need.

She was involved in many charities and organizations including serving on the World Day of Prayer USA board of directors. While living in Green Bay, she was a member of Incarnation Lutheran Church and more recently was a member of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Suring, where she led the women's group. The biggest joy in Paula's life was being with her family, especially her grandchildren. Her natural ability to bring people together in celebration was one of her most well-known traits. Paula had a gregarious spirit and was a true social butterfly.

One of Paula's colleagues on the WDP USA board said, "Paula was a diligent contributor to our work, and quick to respond. It was joyful to work with someone who was so invested in her task."

Thank you for being a part of the community that brought Paula such joy.

Other Announcements

Worship Bulletin and Evaluation

If you would prefer to use a more "bare bones" worship bulletin, download our free template at www.wdp-usa.org! The 2013 evaluation form can also be downloaded there.

Offering Checks

WDP 2013 offering checks should be made out to "WDP USA Committee" and sent to

**World Day of Prayer USA
PO Box 96433
Washington, DC 20090-6433**

Mailing your offering by April 15 will allow us to award 2013 grants in a more timely fashion. Tax receipts will be sent for donations above \$250, pursuant with current tax law. Your cancelled check

can serve as your receipt for donations below that amount. Offerings are received by a secure lockbox company, so please be sure to send only checks to this address. Any other information, notes, pictures or evaluations must be sent to our office address (see back cover) in order to be received.

E-Newsletter!

Sign up to receive our e-newsletter by sending an email to info@wdp-usa.org, "E-Newsletter Sign-up" in the subject line. Send any other information (address, phone number, church affiliation) that you would like us to update in our database. You also may put out a sign-up list during your service for others who would like to sign up for the e-newsletter. Just mail it in to our office—and please pay careful attention to penmanship!

World Day of Prayer USA Committee

Committee Members

Jane Lee Wolfe, chair (The Episcopal Church)
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Julia Tulloch, secretary (United Methodist Church)
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Patricia Jones Penn (African Methodist Episcopal Church)

Staff

Meagan Manas, program coordinator
Andrea Miskow, administrative coordinator

WDP International Committee Representatives

Rosangela Oliveira, executive director (WDPIC)
Corinna Harbig, chair (WDPIC)



World Day of Prayer USA
475 Riverside Drive, Suite 800
New York, NY 10115
212.870.2466, FAX 212.870.2456
Orders: 888.937.8720
info@wdp-usa.org
www.wdp-usa.org
www.facebook.com/WorldDayOfPrayerUSA