

LEVITICUS

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WISDOM COMMENTARY

Volume 3

Leviticus

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A Michael Glazier Book

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For my mother Leah, the strongest woman I have ever known.

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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
AJSR	<i>Association for Jewish Studies Review</i>
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
ApOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
b. Ar	b. Arachin
b. Hul	b. Hullin
b. Kid	b. Kiddushin
b. Meg	b. Megillah
b. Pes	b. Pesachim
b. Sanh	b. Sanhedrin
BDB	F. Brown, S.R. Driver, and C.A. Briggs, <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series

BR	<i>Biblical Research</i>
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAR	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte
CAD	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
ETR	<i>Etudes théologiques et religieuses</i>
EvQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
FAT	Forschungen Zum Alten Testament
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
HALOT	L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
HAR	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HS	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IFT	Introductions to Feminist Theology
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
IVP	InterVarsity Press
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JANER	<i>The Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBQ	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
JFSR	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>

<i>JHebS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal for Near Eastern Studies</i>
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JSB	Jewish Study Bible
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplementary Series
LHB/OTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament Studies
<i>JSQ</i>	<i>Jewish Studies Quarterly</i>
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
m. Ker	m. Keritot
m. Mid	m. Middot
m. Qidd	m. Qiddushin
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
PL	Patrologia Latina
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
<i>ST</i>	<i>Studia Theologica</i>
StBibLit	Studies in Biblical Literature (Lang)
SymS	Symposium Series
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> , ed. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren
<i>TWOT</i>	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i>

UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
URJ	Union of Reform Judaism
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monografien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

Contributors

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Author's Introduction

Reading Leviticus with a Feminist Lens

*The Adoration of Innana of Ur*¹
Knowing Wise, Queen of all the Lands,
Who Multiplies (all) living creatures (and) peoples—
I have uttered your Holy Song.
Life-Giving Goddess, fit for the ME,
Whose acclamation is exalted,
Merciful, Life-Giving, Woman, Radiant of Heart,
I have uttered it before You in accordance with the ME.
I have entered before You in my holy gipar,²
I, the En, Enheduanna,
Carry the masab-basket, I uttered a joyous chant . . .

This commentary reflects my interactions with the book of Leviticus and the community of scholarship that enfolds it from the perspective of a female Jewish feminist biblicalist. I write about Leviticus because I love it—I find it endlessly fascinating. It is a part of my people's

1. Betty de Shong Meader, *Inanna, Lady of the Largest Heart: Poems of the Sumerian High Priestess Enheduanna* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

2. The *gipar* was the sacred space for the priestess. The last known Mesopotamian *gipar* was built by Nabonidus for his daughter around 590 BCE, attesting to the longevity of this holy space for over two thousand years. Enheduanna's *gipar* had a sacred washing room and food preparation areas for the ceremonial meals. "Its principal occupants were the moon-goddess Ningal and the en-priestess who so intimately assumed the goddess's role on earth. All the activity in the *gipar* focused on maintaining the link between these two" (ibid., 65).

tradition and thus a part of me. Unfortunately, within the history of biblical scholarship, Leviticus has been a site for conscious and unconscious anti-Semitism. Therefore, in full disclosure, I cannot read the text without some degree of defensiveness, and it is my hope that I will be successful in uncovering and exposing the gems in the text as I also call the text to account where it promotes oppressive or potentially harmful positions.

Ritual or Text?

Perhaps the greatest challenge in exploring the book of Leviticus is identifying the genre of the material, which, as John Barton explains, is important for understanding a text. For example, when we hear “Not Guilty!” we know that the context is a criminal trial.³ Regarding Leviticus, however, we cannot easily identify its genre, its context, or its earliest purposes. If we consider the first seven chapters of Leviticus, we encounter instructions regarding ritual offerings to the deity. Do these first chapters of Leviticus constitute a manual for priests, or a work of fictional literature, or perhaps an ideologically rich political platform? The uncertainty of genre constrains our ability to understand the text.

While there are many theories regarding the nature of this biblical book, a comparison between two specific approaches is illuminating. Baruch Levine, in his commentary on Leviticus,⁴ states that his approach to the material is via realism; he assumes that the texts accurately portray some of the practices of ancient Israel and that, while the book may have taken its final shape in the early postexilic world, it was composed of a collection of earlier works that reflect actual rituals. Simultaneously, he acknowledges that the Aaronide priesthood seems to be a late construction because there is no mention of an Aaronide line from Judges through Kings and Ezekiel. Levine also asserts that while late Second Temple Judaism makes many references to an elaborate cult in Jerusalem, we cannot determine the degree to which the temple relied on the book of Leviticus.⁵ Thus, while the final composition of Leviticus projects back

3. John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, rev. and enl. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 32.

4. Baruch Levine, *Leviticus: A JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1989).

5. The significant corpus of Qumran scrolls interprets and leverages Leviticus for the various needs of early Jewish sectarianism and has helped scholars to better understand the world of Second Temple Judaism(s). While this body of literature is essential for understanding the reception history of Leviticus, the focus of this commentary is on the theology and ideology of the book of Leviticus itself.

into early Israel, the Aaronides and the tabernacle narrative, the building blocks of the book, are likely rooted in actual ancient practices. Levine's ultimate goal is therefore to reconstruct as much as possible the realia of the ancient biblical cult.

Jacob Milgrom engaged a lifetime of research on Leviticus and priestly (P) literature with the assumption that Leviticus reflects the actual practices of ancient Israel. His focus, however, was less on a reconstruction of those ancient practices (although he does do a lot of this) than on uncovering the rationale behind the priestly laws. Milgrom believes that the ritual law reflects a coherent and consistent belief system. He argues that the sacrificial system is the manifestation of a profound theological worldview and that a close study of the regulations and rituals can reveal the underlying system of thought. As Stephen Geller has expressed it, the priestly writers do not present systematic theologies; they embed their theology into the fabric of the ritual descriptions:

The intellectual problem represented by P has nothing to do with the embarrassment he may cause to belief or to taste—both outside the realm of scholarly inquiry—but with the puzzling contrast between the clearly extensive ideational process implied by his massive editorial-compositional activity as creator of the Pentateuch and his reticence to verbalize his underlying concepts. P certainly has ideas but he rarely presents them openly. His motto seems to be, "Never explain!"⁶

In recent years, anthropologists and other scholars from intersecting fields have questioned to what degree rituals actually communicate coherent systems of meaning. Critics have proven that different participants in the same ritual understand the significance of the ritual differently and that, in many cases, participants cannot provide a consistent rationale for their activities. The functions of rituals change over time. The description of a ritual is not the same thing as an experience of a ritual.⁷

Many years ago, a friend told me a story of a synagogue that had an interesting custom. During Torah services on Sabbath morning, when the Torah was carried around the sanctuary in a procession, whoever was carrying the scroll would bend down at a particular point in the sanctuary and then rise up and continue the procession. A curious visitor began asking around to determine the meaning of this ritual act, but nobody

6. Stephen A. Geller, "Blood Cult: Toward a Literary Theology of the Priestly Work of the Pentateuch," *Prooftexts* 12 (1992): 99.

7. For a recent and comprehensive review of different interpretations of rituals and their influence on Leviticus studies, see James W. Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1–26.

could give a reason: “That’s just what we do” was a typical response. The visitor finally found one of the oldest members of the congregation and asked her about the ritual. The elderly woman remembered that before the sanctuary had been remodeled there was a low beam at that spot in the sanctuary, so people would have to bend down to avoid hitting the beam! How many times might we, as interpreters, develop complex explanations because we don’t know that there was once a low beam? While this may be an extreme example, it mandates caution in reading rituals as logical and coherent.

Another important factor to consider is that rituals reflect and reinforce social structure and priestly privilege. As Saul Olyan has written, “Ritual, in my view, is not simply a reproductive activity in which social distinctions are mirrored, but also a productive operation in which social difference is realized. Rites shape reality for participants; they do not simply reflect some preexisting set of social arrangements brought into being elsewhere.”⁸ This commentary will pay particular attention to the interplay between rituals and power dynamics.

In addition, somewhat influenced by our access to new documents from the Second Temple period and a dissolution of the boundaries between Hebrew Bible scholars and scholars of the Second Temple period, more recent research shows that, as the biblical books began to take their final shape, readers of Leviticus were already interpreting the texts actively and creatively. Gary Anderson refers to this phenomenon as the “scripturalization of the cult.”⁹ Textual witnesses such as the Temple Document, the Book of Jubilees, and portions of the Mishnah “seek to reconstruct a model of sacrifice that is not simply reflective of actual practice, but results from learned exegesis of the Bible in its final canonical form.”¹⁰ In fact, in the aftermath of the destruction of the temple, the study of the text replaced the cult; b. Menachot 110a reads: “Whoever engages in the study of Torah portion on *olah*, is as if he sacrificed an *olah*, the portion on *mincha*, as if he offered a *mincha*, the portion on *hattat*, as if he sacrificed a *hattat*.” The study and interpretation of the text becomes the ritual activity itself.

In recent years, many scholars have shifted from thinking about Leviticus as a book of rituals to Leviticus as text that uses ritual language.

8. Saul Olyan, *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of Cult* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4.

9. Gary A. Anderson, “Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings (OT),” *ABD* (1992), 5:882.

10. *Ibid.*, 5:873.

Wes Bergen has pointed out that texts about ritual probably arise from the absence of ritual. He likens Milgrom's approach to that of the rabbis who wrote after the destruction of the Second Temple. With the absence of ritual came the rise of the text. "So it would not be surprising for the rabbis to highlight the interior motivation (guilt) rather than the exterior action (bringing offering) of the one performing the ritual, given that the exterior action is no longer performed. This is the use Milgrom makes of them, in corroborating his own preference for the interior."¹¹

The most eloquent proponent of the view that we ought to read Leviticus as text, and more specifically as text that has a rhetorical function, is James Watts. In response to scholars who believe that P's descriptions reflect actual practice, Watts states that "the setting of these ritual instructions in the Tent of Meeting, which no longer existed when P was written, gives the entire composition a utopian and even nostalgic cast." He further claims that just because the texts became authoritative does not mean that P's intended interpretations became authoritative.¹² Watts, therefore, advocates for a reading of Leviticus that asks about the rhetorical message of the text.

Watts rightly critiques Jacob Milgrom for reading this material strictly as ritual and not as literature.¹³ Nevertheless, even Watts, for whom this work is rhetorical, delves into the detailed philological and exegetical work of identifying obscure references that are not necessarily central to the rhetoric of the literature. Part of the challenge lies in the likelihood that Leviticus contains embedded in it materials from different periods of the priestly authors. Some of this material may have originated as priestly instructional materials, but we know that by the post-Second Temple period it served as sacred literature. Thus, this literature is probably based on a complex combination of "realia" and "fantasy," that is, references to specific ritual practices packaged in rhetorical wrapping. The topics must be familiar enough for the early audiences of these texts to accept them; however, it is not simply a descriptive document. Therefore, I choose to adopt an eclectic approach to Leviticus, one that seeks to understand the material as recorded ritual and as a sacred, written document.

11. Wesley J. Bergen, *Reading Ritual: Leviticus in Postmodern Culture*, LHB/OTS 417 (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 7.

12. Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric*, 27–29.

13. *Ibid.*, 50–54.

As we engage in exegesis, therefore, we will focus on the rhetorical features that the texts employed, and we will try to discern theological components of the writers of these texts. We will often need to engage in philological and historical discussions, but not for the purpose of locating these texts in a particular historical period or for the purpose of imagining any realia behind them. We are seeking to understand what messages they were conveying, not what actions they were prescribing.

The Gross Factor

Another challenge in reading the first parts of Leviticus is that the topic feels alienating, if not downright offensive, to many modern Westerners. Leviticus confronts us with slaughter, butchery, and blood manipulation. It is no surprise that both Jewish and Christian clergy tend to flounder for good sermonic material in this part of the Bible. We tend to read the text as reflecting primitive thought, an aspect of our past for which we must produce apologetics. Rabbi Maurice Harris shares a story about teaching this part of the Bible to a group of thirteen-year-old kids in Hebrew school. As usual, the kids described the text as gross and barbaric. Then one of his students exclaimed in response to the claim that animal sacrifices are gross:

Well which do you think is more moral? Doing a sacred ritual and dealing with God every time you kill an animal for its meat, or anonymously shoving millions of animals into crowded pens and cages so that they're growing up in their own feces on factory farms, and filling the animals up with drugs . . . and then cutting up their body parts, shrink wrapping them in plastic and lining the walls of grocery store refrigerator cases with a horror show of dead animal parts from factory farms while you and your parents stand there talking about soccer?¹⁴

Perhaps it is not the fact of animal sacrifices that has put off generations of interpreters but the experience of having those Levitical practices placed at front and center.

Leviticus and Feminist Studies

In the *IVP Women's Commentary*, Susan M. Pigott asks:

14. Maurice D. Harris, *Leviticus: You Have No Idea* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 36.

What has Leviticus to do with women? On first glance it might seem little, if anything. The regulations are placed in the mouth of a man, Moses, and are directed primarily to men. No women play prominent roles in Leviticus as they do in Genesis, Exodus or even Numbers. The book focuses heavily on the role and responsibilities of the Aaron priests, none of whom were women. Laws about women focus on childbirth and menstruation, the two most intimate and unique aspects of sexuality that set women apart from men, both of which resulted in the epithet unclean. And when women vowed themselves to Yahweh, they were valued less than men were.¹⁵

Few feminists run to the book of Leviticus for inspiration! There have been, however, an increasing number of studies on Leviticus written by women and reflecting feminist values. Ironically, gender-sensitive readings of Leviticus came to the fore as (male) scholars began challenging the normative interpretation of the so-called ban on homosexuality in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.¹⁶ In the past decade, a number of women in the field of biblical studies have produced monographs on Leviticus and gender. These studies focus mainly on the purity/impurity laws, especially as related to the parturient, menstruation, and sexual taboos. These studies include the work of Liz Goldstein,¹⁷ Tarja Philip,¹⁸ Deborah Ellens,¹⁹ Eve

15. Susan M. Pigott, "Leviticus," in *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 50.

16. One notable exception is Mayer I. Gruber, who was one of the first male writers to note the important role of women in the Israelite cult ("Women in the Cult According to the Priestly Code," in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Baruch A. Levine, and Ernest S. Frerichs [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], 35–48).

17. Elizabeth W. Goldstein, *Impurity and Gender in the Hebrew Bible* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

18. Tarja S. Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth in the Bible: Fertility and Impurity* StBibLit 88 (New York: Lang, 2006); "Gender Matters: Priestly Writing on Impurity," in *Embroidered Garments: Priests and Gender in Biblical Israel*, ed. Deborah W. Rooke (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 40–59.

19. Deborah L. Ellens, "Leviticus 15: Contrasting Conceptual Associations regarding Women," in *Reading the Hebrew Bible for a New Millennium*, ed. W. Kim et al. (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 2:131–36, 138–41; "Menstrual Impurity and Innovation in Leviticus 15," in *Wholly Woman, Holy Blood: A Feminist Critique of Purity and Impurity*, ed. Judith A. Herbert, Judith Ann Johnson, and Anne-Marie Korte (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 29–44; *Women in the Sex Texts of Leviticus and Deuteronomy: A Comparative Conceptual Analysis*, LHB/OTS 458 (London: T&T Clark, 2008).

Levavi Feinstein,²⁰ Sarah Shechtman,²¹ Dorothea Erbele-Küster,²² and Hilary Lipka.²³ Nicole Ruane's study on how gender hierarchy is reflected and reinforced in the biblical laws of sacrifice is groundbreaking.²⁴ It is a pleasure to foreground these scholars in a Leviticus commentary.

This feminist commentary on Leviticus seeks to accomplish several goals. One goal is to pay attention to ignored, overlooked aspects of the text and to ask questions that have not yet been asked of the text. For example, who is behind the production of the grain offerings, whether cooked or offered raw, given that women were the primary producers of breads? Another goal is to name the problematic and oppressive aspects of the text and to expose the ideologies of power that stand behind them. An obvious example is the fact that only men born of a certain family may gain access to the most holy spaces and objects. As we will note, this has ramifications for class distinctions between Aaronide and non-Aaronide women. A third goal, and perhaps the most challenging, is to uncover the ideologies and practices that actually undermine our assumptions about what we expect to find in a patriarchal system. Several recent monographs have addressed this question by differentiating between the patriarchal environment in which the writers lived and reflected, on the one hand, and the more egalitarian theologies and ideologies of the priestly writers, on the other hand. A fourth goal emerges from feminist scholarship of the 1980s—attempting to fill in the gaps and the silences and sometimes using what I like to call informed imagination, somewhat akin to the Jewish textual practice of midrash. For example, Athalya Brenner reflects:

How does the priest's daughter's case differ from that of other daughters in a similar situation of presumably independent sexual behavior? . . . This harshness toward the priest's daughter is highly suspect, decidedly gratuitous—unless, unless, once upon a time, a priest's

20. Eve Levavi Feinstein, *Sexual Pollution in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

21. Sarah Shechtman, "The Social Status of Priestly and Levite Women," in *Levites and Priests in Biblical History and Tradition*, ed. Mark A. Leuchter and Jeremy M. Hutton (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2011), 83–99; *Women in the Pentateuch: A Feminist and Source-Critical Analysis*, HBM 23 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009).

22. Dorothea Erbele-Küster, *Körper und Geschlecht: Studien zur Anthropologie von Leviticus 12 und 15*, WMANT 121 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2008).

23. Hilary B. Lipka, *Sexual Transgression in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006).

24. Nicole J. Ruane, *Sacrifice and Gender in Biblical Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

daughter belonged to the succession line, somehow, together with her brothers. Other explanations are of course possible, but why not also consider this one?²⁵

In other words, a feminist commentary acknowledges that a significant part of biblical interpretation is based on patriarchal assumptions about how things must have been for the lives of the writers of the texts. I am not condoning assumptions and informed suppositions; our sources are so limited that informed conjecture is a necessity of the field of biblical interpretation. If we do need to fill in the blanks with our best guesses, however, then why use patriarchal assumptions? In this commentary I will, from time to time, use a feminist informed imagination as Athalya Brenner boldly proposes.

Translation Matters

There are particular challenges in rendering the book of Leviticus into English, so while the primary translation provided is from the NRSV, I will often suggest alternative translations. Levine points to translation challenges in the introduction to his commentary when he cites Leviticus 1:4 and then remarks that to understand this verse, one must understand what an *עלה* is; identify what the verb *סמך* means in this particular context; comprehend the concept of *נרצה* and appreciate what *כפר* signifies when it appears with the preposition *על*.²⁶ Levine is pointing to the fact that the language of Leviticus is highly technical and specific. It is not enough to look up the Hebrew words in a lexicon because P may assign a very particular use to a word that appears elsewhere in more general terms.

Another challenge in translating Leviticus emerges from the tension between translating certain terms to best convey their meaning versus translating terms to best represent their rhetorical effect. For example, Milgrom translates the *הטאת* as a purification offering because he believes that the primary function of this offering was to purify the sancta. Watts points out that by translating *הטאת* as purification offering, Milgrom obstructs the rhetorical power of the repeated root, which is that *הטאת* as an offering is connected to the verb *הטא* and that the terms are used in interesting configurations. In a case like this one, there is significant

25. Athalya Brenner, "Gender in Prophecy, Magic and Priesthood: From Sumer to Ancient Israel," in *Embroidered Garments: Priests and Gender in Biblical Israel*, ed. Deborah W. Rooke (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 9.

26. Levine, *Leviticus*, xviii.

tension between capturing the meaning of the text and representing the literary form of the text.

Furthermore, Franziska Bark notes that we often have the context of narrative that assists us in determining the nuance of a word in translating biblical texts. Bark writes,

It relieves her [the translator] of having to distinguish a thematic argument of the keywords, precisely because they do not form the complimentary or contrasting backdrop for some narrative. In fact, in Leviticus one often feels provided with hardly anything but keywords. The interdependence between what the text communicates and how this is signified, between its semantic and its structural make-up, is exceedingly dense. Here the keywords not only enforce the development of the thematic argument, but actually constitute it.²⁷

Organization and Structure of the Book

While the P source is interwoven throughout the first four books of the Pentateuch,²⁸ there is a priestly block of material that extends from Exodus 25:1 through Numbers 10:10. A commentary on the book of Leviticus must investigate the integrity of the book, but to understand its contents, we must consider the material in Exodus and Numbers from time to time.

Most commentators agree that Leviticus 1–16 constitutes the first section of the book and chapters 17–27 represent the work of another priestly school. From this starting point, commentators break down the book in different ways. Gordon Wenham sees four sections in Leviticus (chaps. 1–7, 8–10, 11–16, and 17–27), while John E. Hartley breaks the book into six sections (chaps. 1–7, 8–10, 11–15, 16, 17–26, and 27). For Hartley, chapter 16 sets the transition from a priesthood and community that needs to be cleansed and forgiven to a people who are ready to live by the laws prescribed in chapter 17 onward.²⁹

27. Franziska Bark, "'Listen Your Way in with Your Mouth': A Reading of Leviticus," *Judaism* 48 (1999): 201.

28. I use the term P to designate the priestly writings in the Pentateuch. In this commentary, I will not differentiate between various redactions of the priestly material. For the most part, I am interested in the final form of P texts. In this work I will use "priestly" to refer to a modality of thinking or worldview.

29. John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, WBC 4 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1992), xxxv. For a detailed study of the compositional history of Leviticus 17–26 in particular, see Henry T. C. Sun, *An Investigation of the Compositional History of the So-Called Holiness School: Leviticus 17–26* (PhD diss., Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, CA, 1990).

In recent years, several scholars have approached the question of the book's organization through a more complex lens. Mary Douglas has argued that the book of Leviticus is constructed with a series of ring structures, or set of sequences with a reversal midpoint through the ring, and that these rings are combined to form larger, more complex rings. The final composition of Leviticus is thus composed of three concentric rings with the sanctity of the tabernacle at the center. The outer ring represents the outer court, the middle ring represents the inner sanctuary space, and the inner ring corresponds to the holy of holies. She calls this kind of organization "analogical" and conceptually premodern. In short, she argues that the entire book is an intentionally crafted complex of concentric circles that were meant to correspond to priestly theology.³⁰

More recently, Moshe Kline, building on Douglas's work, has argued that Leviticus is composed of "prime pericopes" that are then organized into rows of dyads or triads and then brought together into a three-by-three "table of prime pericopes," which Kline calls "units." Each of the nine pericopes that make up a single unit is connected vertically and horizontally. Kline identifies twenty-two units in Leviticus, which are arranged into larger units or structural elements. The structural elements are arranged in a complex chiasmic construction. Ultimately, Kline sees an extraordinarily complex structure in the book that is very difficult to describe without recourse to diagrams and tables. He suggests that the author of Leviticus created this complex structure in order to create "an experience for the reader that bears a resemblance to the experience of the high priest on the Day of Purification. This would imply that the author was in possession of a way to re-create the highest order of religious experience and that this was somehow embedded in the book. Leviticus could then be viewed as a manual for arriving at this experience."³¹

The approaches of Douglas and Kline assume a single author who crafted a brilliantly complex edifice in order to offer the reader a particular experience. Kline, in particular, seems to imagine the book as a

30. Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). See also Bryan D. Bibb, *Ritual Words and Narrative Worlds in the Book of Leviticus*, LHB/OTS 480 (London: T&T Clark, 2009).

31. Moshe Kline, "Structure Is Theology: The Composition of Leviticus," *Current Issues in Priestly and Related Literature: The Legacy of Jacob Milgrom and Beyond*, ed. Roy Gane and Ada Taggar-Cohen (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 255.

guided meditation, beckoning the reader to enter into the high priest's shoes on the Day of Purification. As a feminist, this nonlinear approach to the book, an approach that invites the reader not just to receive information and to analyze but also to engage emotionally and creatively, is appealing. Nevertheless, a few important questions bear consideration. If Douglas and Kline are correct in their general conclusions, can a modern reader share the experience of earlier generations of readers? If nobody else has detected these structures before, are they truly embedded in the text or have these structures been imposed on the text? A number of the smaller building blocks that they each identify feel forced. Still, this approach to Leviticus is bound to yield interesting new investigations into Leviticus and into ancient methods of composition.

Authorship and Date

Assigning a date to the P texts continues to be the source of much disagreement among biblicists. Julius Wellhausen's theory set the stage for the debate. He understood the history of the religion of the Israelites as one that began with spontaneous simple worship (reflected in the J/E sources), then reached its apex as a religion rooted in ethics and right behavior (reflected in the prophets and in the D source), and finally took an unfortunate turn with the highly legalistic work of the priests in the postexilic period (reflected in P source). He argued that in the postexilic period, in the absence of kings, the priests rose to power and systematized worship. The P source was thus the latest of the sources of Torah and reflected an emergent Judaism characterized by ritual legalism.³²

Alternatively, Yehezkel Kaufmann's view was that P predates Deuteronomy (D) and betrays its antiquity in a number of ways. He argued that many terms and rituals contained in P were not readily understood in the postexilic period, so they must be older in origin. He also posited that D refers to P, but not the other way around.³³ Menahem Haran used comparative studies with ancient Near Eastern materials to show that similar cult practices as those described in Leviticus existed at earlier times in

32. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, trans. J. S. Black and A. Menzies (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003). Originally published as *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (Berlin: Druck und Verlag von G. Reimer, 1882).

33. Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*, trans. Moshe Greenberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

the ancient Near East.³⁴ Avi Hurvitz generally followed Kaufmann with linguistic analyses of P material,³⁵ noting that the language predates the language of Ezekiel. Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and even Ezekiel share a common vocabulary and language for the cult, but P does not, so P material must be from an earlier time. These studies were in part provoked by Wellhausen's assumption that ritual legalism was the immediate forerunner to Judaism, while Christianity promoted the visions of the prophets. In recent years, scholars vary significantly in their dating of the P materials, although the current trend is to view P against the backdrop of the Persian Empire and the politics of repatriation.³⁶

In recent decades, the dating of P has been interwoven with the dating of Holiness Legislation (H).³⁷ Scholars have long recognized that chapters 17–26³⁸ had a distinctive voice and perspective. For centuries this body of material was dated as a pre-P text that was absorbed into P in its final form. These chapters were titled the "Holiness Code" because of the central admonition to the people to be holy. Israel Knohl's study effected a significant change in perspective. He argued for an early preexilic date for P material and a later (but still preexilic) date for H. Knohl convincingly showed that H is a complement or supplement to P

34. Menahem Haran, "Behind the Scenes of History: Determining the Date of the Priestly Source," *JBL* 100 (1981): 321–33. See, more recently, Ziony Zevit, "Converging Lines of Evidence Bearing on the Date of P," *ZAW* 94 (2013): 263–75.

35. See, for example, Avi Hurvitz, "On the Usage of the Priestly term קֹדֶשׁ in Biblical Literature," *Tarbiz* 40 (1970–1971): 261–67 (Hebrew); "The Evidence of Language in Dating the Priestly Code: A Linguistic Study in Technical Idioms and Terminology," *RB* 81 (1974): 24–56; and "Dating the Priestly Source in Light of the Historical Study of Biblical Hebrew: A Century of Wellhausen," *ZAW* 100 (1988): 88–100. Joseph Blenkinsopp's "An Assessment of the Alleged Pre-Exilic Date of the Priestly Material in the Pentateuch," *ZAW* 108 (1996): 495–518, ought to be taken more as a corrective than as a flat-out rejection of the possibility of a preexilic date for much of P.

36. See, for example, Mark Leuchter, "The Politics of Ritual Rhetoric: A Proposed Sociopolitical Context for the Redaction of Leviticus 1–16," *VT* 60 (2010): 345–65. Leuchter argues that Leviticus 16 was written to counter Nehemiah's appointment of Levites and teachers to positions of religious leadership.

37. In this commentary, H indicates Holiness Legislation instead of Holiness Code, following Baruch Schwartz's observation that H materials are found outside of this cluster of chapters and that calling the material a Code makes assertions about the composition, function, and style of the material. See Baruch J. Schwartz, *The Holiness Legislation: Studies in the Priestly Code* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1999), 17–24 (Hebrew).

38. The origins of chapter 27 remain a matter of great debate, as will be discussed below.

written by priestly schools who heeded the words of Isaiah and that ethics must be a part of the priestly vision.³⁹ Milgrom,⁴⁰ Baruch Schwartz,⁴¹ and David P. Wright⁴² have followed Knohl's model with some modifications. Other scholars agree that H postdates P but argue that both works are postexilic. In other words, the dating of these materials continues to be a contentious issue.

For the purposes of this commentary, I believe that most of the P material existed in some raw form in the preexilic period and that the work took its final shape in the postexilic era. I follow Knohl, Milgrom, Schwartz, and Wright in believing that there is a distinct body of literature produced by a priestly group that is differentiated from the works of P by literary style, philological variation, worldview, and theology, and that is chronologically later than most of the P writings. I believe that H is a polemical response and supplement to P thinking. I find Avi Hurvitz's linguistic evidence to be compelling, and I am sympathetic to the sophisticated theological observations made by Milgrom and Knohl in considering H as a priestly revision of preexilic P cultic writings. I am convinced by the positions of Milgrom and Knohl⁴³ regarding the following points:

H is a polemical rejoinder to and theological revision of earlier P cultic material.

39. Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007). Knohl has identified the work of H in other Pentateuchal passages besides Lev 17–26, such as Lev 7:22–36; 10:6–11; 11:43–45; 15:31; and 16:29b–33. He also identifies H interpolations in the book of Numbers.

40. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, AB 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), *Leviticus 17–22*, AB 3A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), and *Leviticus 23–27*, AB 3B (New York: Doubleday, 2001).

41. Schwartz, *The Holiness Legislation*; as argued similarly in his article, "'Profane' Slaughter and the Integrity of the Priestly Code," *HUCA* 67 (1996): 15–42, esp. 16 n. 2.

42. David P. Wright, "Holiness in Leviticus and Beyond: Differing Perspectives," *Int* 53 (1999): 351–64.

43. Knohl, *Sanctuary of Silence*; and Jacob Milgrom, "The Changing Concept of Holiness in the Pentateuchal Codes with Emphasis on Leviticus 19," in *Reading Leviticus: A Conversation with Mary Douglas*, ed. John F. A. Sawyer (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 71. See also Baruch J. Schwartz, "Israel's Holiness: The Torah Traditions," in *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus*, ed. Marcel Poorthuis and Joshua Schwartz, *Jewish and Christian Perspectives 2* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 47–59; and Wright, "Holiness in Leviticus and Beyond."

H represents a priestly response to prophetic critiques regarding the needs of ordinary Israelites.

H democratizes P's holiness, extending it beyond the priests to all of Israel and beyond the sanctuary to the entire land of Israel.

H uses anthropomorphic language to describe a God invested in the affairs of human beings.

H expands proper conduct beyond the realm of the purely cultic to include ethical behavior as well.⁴⁴

Theology in Leviticus

Purity and Impurity

Anyone who encounters Leviticus, or works of interpretation about this book, invariably comes across the word טמאה, which is most often translated as "uncleanness" or "impurity."⁴⁵ Jewish practices and complex Christian theologies have been deeply informed by interpretations of this Hebrew word. Yet there is no single English word that best captures the meaning of this elusive term. We know that the counterpart to טמאה is טהרה and that the concept of holiness, קדושה, is interrelated with these two terms. Leviticus presents two sets of dualities: pure versus impure and holy versus common. God is holy and pure and therefore cannot tolerate impurity. People are generally not holy but can live in a state of purity or impurity. According to P, the community of Israel must keep itself pure to ensure God's continued presence in the tabernacle. As David Wright has defined it, impurity is "that which is a threat to or opposes holiness, and hence must be kept separate from that sphere."⁴⁶ Therefore, in this commentary I translate the term טמאה as "impurity" or "ritual impurity."

The central question that has plagued biblical scholars is the relationship between impurity and sin.⁴⁷ Jonathan Klawans detects two categories

44. These last two points are argued specifically by Knohl, *Sanctuary of Silence*, 225–30, contra Milgrom (*Leviticus 1–16*, 13–35) who believes there are ethical underpinnings in the priestly law.

45. The appearance of this root in non-priestly texts (e.g., Deut 12:22; 14:4; 24:4; Isa 6:5; 52:1; Jer 2:23; Hos 6:10) does not connote the same technical meaning that P uses.

46. David P. Wright "Unclean and Clean (OT)," *ABD* 6:729.

47. For a concise, yet thorough presentation of the priestly views on impurity and purity, see Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical

Leviticus 1:1–3:17

Offerings, Offerers, and Considerations of Gender

The first seven chapters of Leviticus describe five types of offerings that an Israelite could bring to the tabernacle: עֹלָה (burnt offering), מִנְחָה (grain offering), שְׁלָמִים (well-being offering), חֲטָאת (purification/sin offering), and אֲשָׁם (guilt offering). The burnt, grain, and well-being offerings appear frequently in other biblical texts while the purification and guilt offerings appear only in P texts. It is important to remember that the description of the sacrificial system in these chapters does not necessarily correlate with the actual practices of the people of ancient Israel; nor do P's ritual descriptions correlate with other biblical texts. The first three chapters of Leviticus assume that the reader is familiar with the purpose of the burnt, grain, and well-being offerings so the writer focuses on how the offerer and the priest are to perform the ritual.

Bringing the Community into the Tabernacle (1:1)

The book of Exodus ends with a description of the intensity of YHVH's¹ presence in the inner sanctum of the tabernacle. The book of Leviticus

1. The Bible refers to God with a variety of names and epithets, but two terms stand out as the most common. The first is אֱלֹהִים, translated as "God," and refers to

Lev 1:1

^{1:1}The LORD summoned Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying:

opens with a divine summons to Moses from that same inner sanctum. This is the only narrative in which YHVH speaks to Moses from the tent of meeting. At other times, we note that Moses is permitted to enter into the inner sanctum, to stand before the curtain to the ark (see Exod 25:22; 30:6, 36; Num 7:89; 17:19) and to hear God's words emanating from the holy of holies. By starting Leviticus with Moses outside the inner sanctum, the writer creates a smooth flow from the end of one book to the beginning of the next.

The tent of meeting (Lev 1:1) refers to the inner portion of the tabernacle or *משכן*, inside the curtain that divides the tabernacle into two equal parts and before the veil that separates the ark, the holy of holies, from the inner courtyard. The term "tent of meeting" appears in two different sources of the Bible, P and E. The priestly tent of meeting stands within the tabernacle, which in turn is stationed at the center of the Israelite camp. Moses enters the tent of meeting to communicate with God, and the priests, on rare occasions, enter the space in order to fulfill the laws of cultic worship. Given the fact that only priests could enter the inner sanctum, it is safe to conclude that, according to the priestly tradition, women never would have had access to this holy space. E does not, however, exclude women from the sacred space. In the E tradition, the tent of meeting stands at the outskirts of the camp, at the liminal place

the biblical God of Israel who is later associated with the one God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The Bible also uses God's personal name, rendered יהוה in Hebrew and often translated as "LORD." (In some progressive Jewish communities, the term "LORD" is replaced with other less hierarchical epithets like "Holy One.") In Jewish tradition, the divine name is never pronounced so among many Jewish (and some non-Jewish) scholars, the divine name is represented by its four consonants as YHWH. The third consonant was originally pronounced like a "w" and the name of the letter is called "waw" in academic circles; however, in modern Hebrew the consonant is pronounced like a "v" and the letter is called a "vav." I have adopted the convention of rendering the divine name as YHVH, which both acknowledges the divine name as presented in the Bible and acknowledges my identity as a modern Jew who reads Hebrew with a "vav" and not a "waw."

between the ordered world of the Israelite camp and the chaos and danger of the wilderness. When Miriam challenges Moses's authority along with her brother Aaron, God calls all three of them to the tent of meeting. God speaks directly to Miriam and Aaron about the special status of Moses (Num 12).

Before a single sacrifice is mentioned, Leviticus makes it clear that this information is to be shared with all of Israel. Jacob Milgrom reads this instruction as indicating "a gaping chasm that separates Israel from its neighbors," citing a Mesopotamian ritual text that permits only the *mudu* to lead the ritual and to see the actual text. In addition, he cites the Book of the Dead, which forbids anyone from looking at its content.² Based on this evidence, he adduces that publicizing these ritual texts democratizes information. Milgrom's argument assumes that Leviticus 1–9 was written primarily for priests about actual practices. If, however, a reader follows James Watts's view that references in Leviticus are more rhetorical and literary than referential of actual events, then providing everyone with access to this information would have been just the point! The formulation of the book's opening verse is poetic in its profundity: the deepest point inside will be exposed publicly; the public has literary, if not physical, access to the most holy of spaces.

Who Is Sacrificing? (1:2)

The legislation begins in verse 2 with the statement: "an אדם when s/he offers from among you (m. pl.) an offering." Readers of the Bible will usually think of אדם (*adam*) as the first human created by God, the human who was male and female at the beginning. Most often, אדם refers generically to a person. Several translations choose to translate אדם as "man." NRSV avoids making a gender reference by translating "when any of you" from the Hebrew phrase כִּי אָדָם, which is very rare (see Lev 13:2 in connection with skin disease and Num 19:14 in connection with the handling of a corpse).

John E. Hartley believes that the use of אדם indicates the universal nature of ritual offerings; i.e., a Gentile could bring an offering.³ Nobuyoshi Kiuchi argues that אדם here must mean "male" and that the term cannot be inclusive because the animal represents the offerer and, regarding

2. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, AB 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 143–44.

3. John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, WBC 4 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1992), 11.

Lev 1:2

²Speak to the people of Israel and say shall bring your offering from the herd
to them: When any of you bring an or from the flock.
offering of livestock to the LORD, you

the burnt offering, the animal must be male.⁴ This argumentation would suggest that those rituals for which a female animal is prescribed were for female offerers only, and yet a female animal is prescribed for one of the purification offerings (Lev 4:28) and we know that men offered these sacrifices.⁵ According to the Sotah ritual prescribed in Numbers 5, the suspected adulteress is brought into the tabernacle with a grain offering on her behalf. The text does not suggest that there is anything unusual or that special provisions must be made to accommodate the presence of a woman. In Proverbs 7, a woman reports that she must bring an offering to God as part of a vow that she has fulfilled. Her husband has left town without leaving any money, so she intends to seduce a man in order to make money for the offering. Outside of the central cultic system, the necromancer of Endor sacrifices a calf for Saul following the death of Samuel. Even as she stands outside of the state-sponsored cultic system, the text expresses no judgment on, or surprise by, her actions (1 Sam 28:24). Leviticus itself mandates that a parturient or a woman after menstruation or other blood-based genital emission must bring an offering to YHVH. Therefore, there is no compelling reason to believe that Leviticus 1:2 addresses only males. Both men and women could bring offerings to the tabernacle. The gender or biological sex of the offerer is not a relevant category in this material! In fact, Dvora E. Weisberg reports that the rabbis approved of both men and women slaughtering animals and that late medieval historical documents reveal that women routinely served as slaughterers for kosher meat in parts of Europe.⁶

4. Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *Leviticus*, ApOTC 3 (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007), 55.

5. Jacob Milgrom argues that males were used more often than females because they were more expendable, the females being the ones who bear offspring and provide milk (*Leviticus 1–16*, 147).

6. Dvora E. Weisberg, "Post-biblical Interpretations: VaYikra," in *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, ed. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss (New York: URJ Press, 2008), 588–59.

Women in the Shit

The first time I practiced slaughtering chickens, the wife of the chicken farmer walked in, and, in Hebrew, she asked: “You want to do this? You know there are better professions for women.” My Hebrew language skills and American sense of politeness prevented me from responding: But we women are always in the shit—sometimes literally. Why should this be any different? My grandmother used to gut the chickens herself—the revolting smell of partially and fully digested feed was her normal. My sister-in-law is usually covered in poop or baby cheese. We are always doing the messiest work.

Halakhah didn’t explicitly forbid women from becoming *shochetot* until the *acheronim* (read: sixteenth century and later). Prior to their rulings, women were permitted to do this work “just like men” (Ramban, the Rosh, the Tur). I won’t enter an academic argument about what changed, but I will say the reasons given to deny women access to *shechitah* are offensive: even a woman who is an expert should not be given a certificate of *shechitah* because, as you well know, women faint (the Rama, the Rashal, Simlah Hadashah). Um, no.

Now I didn’t learn this skill for the sake of bucking halakhah, though even as an observant Jew, I do celebrate righteous subversiveness. I wanted to learn to slaughter chickens so I knew that I could. I had to know where my meat came from—real living creatures, different from me only by DNA and, depending who you ask, soulfulness. I had to know that I could pick up the knife, pick up the animal, slit its throat, drain it of lifeblood, and, after all of that mess, still eat it. Just in case it’s not obvious: looking a living creature in the eye, sensing its fear, and killing it, is really, really hard. The animal knows, and you know, and you do it anyway. What does that say about the slaughterer? About humans?

When you make your own decisions about meat, and kosher slaughter, remember this: in our time of disconnection and distant connection, kosher slaughter connects us to our gross, visceral selves, our insides and the insides of the creatures around us. It’s messy work, necessary not only for the immediate product—meat—but for our own spiritual and moral accountability in eating that meat. Get to know kosher slaughter as the messy work it is.

Kerry Chaplin

The term קרבן appears only in P and twice in Ezekiel (2:28; 40:43). The term is best translated as “offering” because the Hebrew root means “nearness,” whether as an adjective that means “near” or a *hiphil* verb that describes the act of bringing something near or close, or a nominal form like קרבן that is used in cultic contexts to describe something that is brought close to the Divine. This word reflects specialized P terminology for any offering including animals, grains and precious metals (Num 7:13; 31:50). In other non-P texts, we find the term זבה most commonly used. It is possible that P uses a unique term in order to indicate that its system should not be confused with the more popular practices that are referred to in the non-P Torah texts, Deuteronomic narratives, and prophetic literature.

To summarize, the opening of Leviticus ties itself to the end of Exodus and indicates that the teachings about the most holy space are for the entire community, that anyone might bring an offering, and that the use of the new word קרבן communicates that what follows is a unique system. For a system that will restrict access only to priests, the opening verses of the book do not make reference to or assumptions about gender.

The Burnt Offering (1:3-13)

The remaining verses of Leviticus 1 (vv. 3-17) describe the procedures for three types of burnt offerings: those from the herd, those from the flock, and those from the birds.⁷ The text does not provide any information about the function of this ritual offering or guidance regarding the use of these three categories of animals. The chapter is simply about the mechanics: if you bring a burnt offering, here is how it should be done. A person should bring the offering to the entrance of the tent of meeting (v. 3), that is, to the outer court, which contained the altar and laver. The person should then lay a hand on the animal and slaughter it (vv. 4-5). The priest should capture the blood and sprinkle it on the altar (v. 5). In the next stage, the offerer should skin and cut up the animal and the priest should get a fire started on the altar (v. 6). The priest should arrange

7. Leviticus prescribes specific types of quadrupeds for specific offerings. These offerings may be bovines, ovines (sheep), or caprines (goat). There are a number of different subcategories within these three classes. For a presentation of the various classifications, see Naphtali S. Meshel, *The “Grammar” of Sacrifice: A Generativist Study of the Israelite Sacrificial System in the Priestly Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), esp. 33–62.

Lev 1:3-13

³If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, you shall offer a male without blemish; you shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, for acceptance in your behalf before the LORD. ⁴You shall lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be acceptable in your behalf as atonement for you. ⁵The bull shall be slaughtered before the LORD; and Aaron's sons the priests shall offer the blood, dashing the blood against all sides of the altar that is the entrance of the tent of meeting. ⁶The burnt offering shall be flayed and cut up into its parts. ⁷The sons of the priest Aaron shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. ⁸Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the parts, with the head and the suet, on the wood that is on the fire on the altar; ⁹but its entrails and

its legs shall be washed with water. Then the priest shall turn the whole into smoke on the altar as a burnt offering, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD.

¹⁰If your gift for a burnt offering is from the flock, from the sheep or goats, your offering shall be a male without blemish. ¹¹It shall be slaughtered on the north side of the altar before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall dash its blood against all sides of the altar. ¹²It shall be cut up into its parts, with its head and its suet, and the priest shall arrange them on the wood that is on the fire on the altar; ¹³but the entrails and the legs shall be washed with water. Then the priest shall offer the whole and turn it into smoke on the altar; it is a burnt offering, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD.

the body parts on top of the wood fire (vv. 7-8). The offerer should wash out the intestines and hind legs before the priest sets them on the fire (v. 9). The ritual description ends here. If words were spoken, formally or informally, they are not mentioned in this text. The concern is with the ritual actions involved in a burnt offering.

References to the עֹלָה ("burnt offering") appear both in P and throughout the Hebrew Bible. The עֹלָה is often paired with זֶבַח (e.g., Exod 10:25; Deut 12:6, 11; Josh 22:26; 1 Sam 6:15; 2 Kgs 5:17; 10:24; Isa 43:23; Jer 6:20). We should keep in mind that P's prescription for the burnt offerings' procedures does not necessarily reflect or align with the functions of the burnt offerings mentioned in other texts of the Bible. In Genesis, the burnt offerings seem to be spontaneous offerings that are not connected to the tabernacle or the priesthood. Historical narratives have the kings offering up burnt offerings and well-being offerings in celebration (1 Sam 6:14; 2 Sam 6:17-18; 1 Kgs 9:25; see also Gen 8:20; Exod 10:25; Judg 6:26). Abraham is commanded to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering

(Gen 22:2, 7, 8, 13), and the Moabites offer up burnt offerings (2 Kgs 3:27). The prophets refer to the burnt offering as a general all-purpose offering. The עֹלָה seems to have been the most common kind of offering, and rituals combined this sacrifice with other types of offerings in many contexts. In Leviticus, it is the only offering that is completely burnt up (excluding the skin, which goes to the priest; see Lev 7:8) on the altar; that is to say, no part of the meat is set aside for the priests or the offerer.

Unblemished Male

This first instruction contains a number of code words or terminology that we will encounter throughout these initial chapters. The text indicates that when presenting an animal from the herd for the burnt offering, it must be an unblemished male. While male animals are required predominantly, the הַטָּאָה offering for an individual's sin must be a female goat and the שְׁלָמִים offerings can be either male or female animals (Lev 3:1, 6; 4:28, 32; 5:6). The text never provides any rationale for the use of a male or female animal, but this is not surprising because the material in these opening chapters of Leviticus does not address the "whys."⁸ (See commentary on Lev 4 for a more detailed discussion of gender and offerings.)

In addition to being a male animal, the offering must also be תָּמִים. The Hebrew term תָּמִים is usually translated as "without blemish," but the Hebrew word has the sense of "wholeness." A more accurate translation is therefore "a whole male animal." The tendency to translate the positive word תָּמִים in the negative "unblemished" is overly specific. Unfortunately, the P source never defines what it means to be "whole." The H source defines P's use of תָּמִים by listing a series of defects (מוֹם), which disqualify an animal from use as an offering. According to Leviticus 22:22-24, defects include any animal that is blind, injured, maimed, oozing, scarred, or scabbed or whose testicles are bruised, crushed, torn, or cut. In addition, all offerings except for a free-will offering cannot have extended or contracted limbs. In Numbers 19:2 the red heifer ritual requires a female animal that is "whole" and "in which there is no defect [מוֹם]." Since the list of defects does not refer to female anatomy, we have to wonder whether any variations in female genitalia were of issue to the writers. Many scholars have noted that the defects are all visible

8. Meshel observes that all sacrificial animals are identified via three categories: zoological class, sex, and age (ibid., 33).

conditions on the exterior of the animal and that the issue has more to do with appearance than health. Setting aside the point that a careful examination of a female animal may show some anomalies with regard to the animal's femaleness (e.g., genital disfigurement or deformities of the udders), what becomes clear is that regarding biological sex, a whole male is one whose genitalia conform to the idealized male and that a whole female is essentially a non-male. The Temple Scroll (11QT 52:5-7) ironically gives more attention to female animals by arguing that pregnant animals are considered to be defective as well.⁹

Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert suggests that while we usually translate זכר תמים as "male and unblemished," we can also understand it as "unblemished with regard to its maleness." In other words, the ritual requirement may be for a male animal that is unambiguously male—a biologically "complete" male with no damage to its testicles. Fonrobert points to a rabbinic text that addresses the types of defects that would prohibit an animal from sacrificial use. As the rabbis attempt to make sense of the biblical list of defects regarding testicles, they conclude that the issue concerns sex ambiguity and androgyny.¹⁰

For the following they do not slaughter—neither in the Temple nor outside the Temple: If it had non-persistent white spots in its eye, or non-persistent tearing or if its inner gums are missing a piece but not uprooted, or if it had eczema, a wart or boils or if it was old or sick or smelled bad, or if a sin [of bestiality] was committed with it or if it killed a man [as determined] by the word of one witness or by the owner's admission, a *tumtum* [an animal with recessed sexual organs whose sex is therefore impossible to determine] or an *androgynos* [an animal with both male and female sexual organs], neither in the Temple nor outside it. Rabbi Yishmael says, there is no blemish greater than this [i.e., being an *androgynos*]; but the Sages say it is not a first-born and can be sheared and worked. (m. Bechorot 6:7)¹¹

9. Cited in Nicole J. Ruane, *Sacrifice and Gender in Biblical Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 69 n. 107 from Joseph M. Baumgarten, "A Fragment on Fetal Life and Pregnancy in 4Q270," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, ed. David P. Wright et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 445.

10. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, "Bodily Perfection in the Sanctuary," in *Torah Queeries: Weekly Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Gregg Drinkwater, Joshua Lesser, and David Schneer (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 123–28.

11. Fonrobert notes that the rabbis extend disqualifications for immoral behavior as well.

Fonrobert summarizes:

The discussion concerns the identity of the doubly sexed animal, whether it is to be treated as a first-born of doubtful gender identity or whether it should be regarded as a male animal with a blemish (Mishnah Bekhorot 6:12, Bekhorot 41a–43b, Tosafot Bekhorot 42a *almah*), or, as the medieval commentator Rashi glosses this minority opinion, “because the place of femininity (*makom nekevut*, i.e., the female genitalia) is like a blemish” (Rashi, ad loc., 41a). This tannaitic opinion engenders considerable disagreement in the talmudic discourse. However, it reinforces a semiotic system in which the male organ has greater signifying force than the female organ. Discussions in the United States about the practice of surgical gender assignment for babies born with ambiguous genitalia demonstrate a similar practice of privileging anatomical maleness over femaleness.¹²

In other words, a male sacrificial animal must be uncontestably male.

Hand-Leaning

Leviticus 1:4 instructs the offerer to lay a hand (or “hand pressing”)¹³ on the head of the animal so that the offering will be acceptable to atone for the offerer. In other words, in order for the offering to fulfill its function, the offerer must lay a hand on the head of the animal before slaughtering it. The meaning of the laying on of a hand is contested among scholars. Debates regarding this custom have included explanations such as the following: transference of sin from person to animal; identification or vicarious substitution; declaration of one’s sins or purpose in bringing the offering; and demonstration of the offerer’s ownership of the animal.¹⁴ Leviticus 16:21 provides the most detailed description of the laying on of hands or hand-leaning ritual and so has influenced our understanding of this act in other texts. Leviticus 16 provides the only case, however, in which both hands are to be set upon the animal. In all other cases, the offerer places one hand upon the animal’s head. Milgrom notes that the laying on of hands is not required when bringing a bird or a grain offering or for the guilt offering. He argues the difference is that the offerer is hold-

12. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, “Gender Identity in Halakhic Discourse,” *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, March 1, 2009, *Jewish Women’s Archive*, <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/gender-identity-in-halakhic-discourse>.

13. James W. Watts, *Leviticus 1–10*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 189.

14. See Kiuchi, *Leviticus*, 56 for an argument that favors identification of the self with the animal, representing a version of vicarious punishment.

ing the meal offering or the bird with his hands already and that with the guilt offering, the offerer may bring money in place of an animal offering. He concludes that the purpose of the hand-leaning is to designate ownership of the animal, to ensure that the offerer gets credit for the offering.¹⁵

Coordination of Priest and Laity

An important key to understanding the ritual description is taking note of the participants in the ritual. Most English translations of the Hebrew obscure the role of the offerer in the ritual by translating the third-person masculine singular verbs as general passives rather than 3ms active verbs in which the subject must be the offerer. When we translate the verbs as general passives, we diminish the role of the offerer, if not excise the offerer altogether. The text reads very differently if we stay true to the Hebrew and translate the 3ms verbs as active. Compare the following (my translation) to the NRSV:

The offerer shall slaughter the bull before YHVH. Aaron's sons the priests shall offer the blood. . . . The offerer shall flay the burnt offering and cut it up into pieces. The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar. . . . Aaron's sons shall arrange the parts, with the head and suet on the wood. . . . The offerer shall wash its entrails and its legs with water. Then the priest shall turn the whole into smoke on the altar as a burnt offering.

The Hebrew text gives the layperson a significant role in the ritual and places both the priest and the layperson within the outer court of the tabernacle working together. The priest manages the altar while the layperson does the rest. Ezekiel 44:10-11 attempts to remove the layperson's role altogether, assigning slaughter to the Levites; nonetheless, Leviticus is clear on the central role of the offerer.

In postbiblical interpretation, the focus is always on the role of the priests, but the text prescribes the ritual offering as a joint project. Viewed through James Watts's lens, the priests may have presented robust participation of the layperson in order to make it more likely that the people would accept the priestly torah. Conversely, it could be that priests from a later period projected themselves into earlier practices conducted primarily by laity. By commanding that blood be sprinkled on the altar, and by limiting access to the altar to the priests alone, P makes the inclusion of priests necessary.

15. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 151–53.

Finally, it is important to remember that sacrificing animals—that is, the slaughtering and butchering—is extremely physically demanding. If both men and women offered sacrifices, then both men and women were engaged in intense physical labor.

Regarding the use of an animal from the flock, the procedure is the same except for the manner of slaughter. Here the slaughter is on the north side of the altar before YHVH. It is important to note that this second section is less detailed than the description of the herd animals, not because there were fewer steps, but because the P writer assumes that the reader carries forward information already given.

A Sliding Scale (1:14-17)

Leviticus 1:2 does not mention birds in the introduction to the *עלה* unit, and this has led some scholars to suggest that the section on birds was added later to make provision for the poor in the community.¹⁶ This is likely given that the instructions for skin conditions and the parturient are explicit about the use of a bird if the person cannot afford a sheep (see Lev 5:7-10; 12:8; 14:21-22). The procedure for the bird offering is different from that of the offering from the herd or flock. The bird is not “slaughtered,” but, rather, the priest nips off the bird’s head and drains the blood of the animal down along the side of the altar. Ironically, the procedure for offering the bird does not give the layperson a role in its slaughter. This may be due to the size of a bird; regardless, instruction on this offering confers a less active role on the part of the offerer. Those who can afford the ideally required animal get a more significant role in the ritual.

This highlights the tensions that often arise between aiding the impoverished and maintaining their dignity. This difference in the manner of slaughter highlights some of the same socio-economic dynamics we experience today. On the one hand, the text recognizes that not everyone is able to give equally, so it offers alternatives to enable the poor to participate. On the other hand, the poor do not have an equal role in the ritual; the person with more financial assets is the one who gets to participate most fully in the ritual. Is the inclusion of the birds an example of faux inclusion or an earnest attempt at maximal participation?¹⁷

16. *Ibid.*, 166–67.

17. The Mishnah relates a story about the prohibitively high price of birds for sacrifice in the late Second Temple period. According to the story, Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel, noticing the high price for birds, adjusted laws regarding women’s impurity so that fewer sacrifices would be needed, and indeed, the price for sacrificial birds dropped dramatically (m. Ker 1:7).

Lev 1:14-17

¹⁴If your offering to the LORD is a burnt offering of birds, you shall choose your offering from turtledoves or pigeons. ¹⁵The priest shall bring it to the altar and wring off its head, and turn it into smoke on the altar; and its blood shall be drained out against the side of the altar. ¹⁶He shall remove its crop with its contents and throw it at the east side of the altar, in the place for ashes. ¹⁷He shall tear it open by its wings without severing it. Then the priest shall turn it into smoke on the altar, on the wood that is on the fire; it is a burnt offering, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD.

TRANSLATION MATTERS

Interpreters usually translate the last segment of verse 9 as “an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD” (NRSV). Rendering the Hebrew אש as “by fire” assumes that this word is related to the word א (“fire”). Milgrom notes, however, that this word is used in connection with the wine libation (Num 15:10) and the showbread (Lev 24:7, 9), neither of which is associated with fire. In addition, other offerings that are burned on the altar are not called אש. This evidence calls the general translation “by fire” into doubt. Milgrom argues that the root may be connected to the Ugaritic word *’itt*, which means “gift,” and that we should translate אש as “food gift.”¹⁸ Watts helpfully points out that we should “not ignore the apparent etymological connection between the offering name and the common noun א (“fire”) when the P writers use them in close juxtaposition with every indication that they were conscious of the link.”¹⁹

The Grain Offering (2:1-10)

The מנחה (“grain offering,” NRSV) is well attested in biblical texts outside of P. The term מנחה was not restricted to grain offerings. In fact, מנחה simply means a present or a gift. Most often, in non-P texts, the grain offering accompanied other offerings and was presented to God in the form of smoke (e.g., Judg 13:19; 1 Kgs 8:64; 2 Kgs 16:13, 15; Isa 19:21; Jer 14:12; Amos 5:22). There are biblical and extrabiblical sources that describe the offering of loaves to a variety of gods. In these cases, the grain is completely burnt up. It is possible that P restricted the מנחה usage to specific types of grain offerings in order to curb the use of the

18. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 162. See Hartley, *Leviticus*, 22–23 for a brief discussion of the power of scent and smell in ritual.

19. Watts, *Leviticus 1–10*, 210.

Lev 2:1-10

^{2:1}When anyone presents a grain offering to the LORD, the offering shall be of choice flour; the worshiper shall pour oil on it, and put frankincense on it, ²and bring it to Aaron's sons the priests. After taking from it a handful of the choice flour and oil, with all its frankincense, the priest shall turn this token portion into smoke on the altar, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD. ³And what is left of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons, a most holy part of the offerings by fire to the LORD.

⁴When you present a grain offering baked in the oven, it shall be of choice flour: unleavened cakes mixed with oil, or unleavened wafers spread with oil.

⁵If your offering is grain prepared on a griddle, it shall be of choice flour mixed with oil, unleavened; ⁶break it in pieces, and pour oil on it; it is a grain offering.

⁷If your offering is grain prepared in a pan, it shall be made of choice flour in oil. ⁸You shall bring to the LORD the grain offering that is prepared in any of these ways; and when it is presented to the priest, he shall take it to the altar.

⁹The priest shall remove from the grain offering its token portion and turn this into smoke on the altar, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD. ¹⁰And what is left of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the offerings by fire to the LORD.

מנחה in popular Israelite worship. P also mandates that the grain offering not be burnt up entirely but that only a token portion goes on the altar, while most of the grain goes to the priests. In P texts, the grain offering can serve as a standalone offering²⁰ or as an offering that accompanies a burnt offering or a well-being offering.

Leviticus 1 names the offerer of a burnt offering an אדם, which indicates any person regardless of gender. Leviticus 2 identifies the offerer as נפש (“anyone,” NRSV). In this context, נפש signifies any person, but since the word itself is grammatically feminine, it requires the verb to take the feminine form. Thus, the first chapter begins with יקריב (masc. sg. “brings,” in 1:2, NRSV), while the second chapter begins with תקריב (fem. sg. “presents” in 2:1, NRSV). The interchange of grammatically feminine and masculine forms within the discourse on sacrificial animals and their offerers helps to raise the question of gender inclusivity for feminist readers today.

20. For example, bread loaves are prepared as the showbread (Lev 24:5-9), grain is brought as a purification offering if one cannot afford to bring an animal (Lev 5:11), and the high priest's daily offering takes the form of a grain offering (Lev 6:12-16).

Grain on the Altar

The instruction begins with a description of an uncooked grain offering. The offerer brings a high-quality grain (סלת), pours oil on it, and places frankincense on it. The priest scoops up a handful of the mixture along with the entirety of the frankincense and offers it up on the altar. The portion that is burned on the altar is called the אזכרה. There is no agreement as to the meaning of this word. The term also appears in Numbers 5, where a man who suspects his wife of adultery brings the woman to the priest along with a grain offering of barley flour without any oil or frankincense. During the Sotah ritual, the priest places the grain offering in the woman's hand and then later takes a portion for burning on the altar; this portion is called the אזכרה. While the ingredients for the two rituals are different, in both cases a portion of the offering is placed on the fire of the altar as an אזכרה. The root of the word is זכר, which evokes the concept of memory or notice.²¹ While there is not sufficient evidence to make sense of this term accurately, some suggest a memorial of some sort or perhaps an invocation (from the *hiphil* form, which can mean "to pronounce"). Milgrom suggests that the term may be related to remembrance, "referring to the fact that the entire cereal offering should really go up in smoke, and that the portion that does is *pars pro totus*: it stands for the remainder; in other words, it is a 'token portion.'"²² To this day, before challah is braided and baked, a token portion of the dough is thrown directly into the oven accompanied by a blessing. This token portion may be similar to the biblical אזכרה.

After the portion is offered up on the altar, the remaining grain goes to the priests for their sustenance. This food source is called "a holy part" to indicate that it must be eaten only by the priests in a holy space. In other words, the offering is made to YHVH, and the priests partake of the sanctified meal. Leviticus 22 enumerates who from the priest's household may eat the sacred food.

Leviticus 2:4 shifts from third person to second. The text calls directly to the offerer, thereby bringing the reader more fully into the role of participant. This is the first time in Leviticus that the offerer is addressed directly. This verse also introduces toasted/fried/baked grain. Three forms of preparation are permitted: grain and oil baked in an oven, grain and oil prepared on a griddle and crumbled into pieces, and grain

21. The same three Hebrew letters also signify "male."

22. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 182.

and oil prepared in a pan. In contrast to instructions for raw grain (Lev 2:1-3), frankincense is not designated for the cooked grain offerings; it is likely that frankincense would have been prohibitively expensive for the poor. Again, a portion is offered up to God and the rest is given to priests as holy sustenance.

Women and Grain

The preparation of the meal offering situates the offerer's labor outside of the tabernacle precincts. Animal sacrifices would have required the slaughter to take place in close proximity to the priests, but the preparation of unleavened breads could have taken place anywhere. Biblical texts never indicate a specific location for the preparation of the grain offerings. It is possible that the grain offerings were prepared in domestic quarters, and if this was the case, then it is likely that women prepared the breads. The task of preparing bread was usually assigned to women (Gen 18:6; Lev 26:26; 1 Sam 8:13). The association of women with baking affirms women's participation in the cult.

Jeremiah 44 highlights the important role that women played by baking bread used in cultic practices. In a rare instance of hearing directly from women in opposition to a prophet, the women proudly own their role in preparing cakes, and they describe the role that their husbands and sons have in gathering the wood for the fires. As described in Jeremiah 44, everyone in the family has a role in the preparation of grain offerings. In the Jeremiah passage, the women are baking cakes to the queen of heaven. We can only wonder whether the priestly writers associated women's baking with pagan practices.

In postbiblical Jewish texts, the responsibility for baking bread was assigned as women's work. Naftali Cohn cites many rabbinic texts that set a scene with a woman baking bread, borrowing utensils, and grinding grain. *m. Ketubbot* 5:5 reads: "The following are the tasks a woman does for her husband: She grinds flour, bakes, launders, cooks." Notice how baking is set apart from the other tasks of cooking. *m. Hallot* 4:1 addresses what portion of bread is to be set aside for God. The text distinguishes between the case of personal, domestic baking and professional baking in large quantities, and it lists both men and women as bakers in the public arena.²³ Eventually baking challah with the ritual separation

23. Cynthia M. Baker, *Rebuilding the House of Israel: Architectures of Gender in Jewish Antiquity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 80–82; and Naftali S.

of a portion of the dough for God landed in the domain of women in traditional Jewish practice.

Salty, not Sweet! (2:11-16)

Leviticus 2:11-13 has two miscellaneous rules related to the category of grain offerings. The first law prohibits the accompaniment of leaven or honey with grain offerings. Such breads may be brought to the tabernacle as gifts of the first fruit offerings, but no portion of the dough can be offered on the altar. Leaven is forbidden for the grain offering (Lev 2:11) and for the bread that accompanies sacrificial meats (Lev 6:17). In Leviticus 23:17 the people offer loaves to the priests during the festival of Weeks, and Leviticus 7:13 commands that people should bring loaves of bread for the priests when they bring their offerings of thanksgiving. In both of these latter cases, the bread does not end up on the altar; the priests receive it as food.

The second law mandates that salt must be included with grain offerings. The NRSV suggests that there are two components to this verse: first, you shall not omit from your grain offerings the salt of the covenant with your God, and second, with all your offerings you shall offer salt. But there are three verbal clauses in the verse: first, you must salt your grain offerings; second, do not omit the salt of the covenant with your God; and third, offer salt with all your offerings. Obviously, this threefold repetition of salt emphasizes the importance of salt with the grain offerings. Watts argues that verses 11-13 stand apart from the rest of the chapter because of shifts in grammatical structures and the use of repeated terms. Watts suggests that verse 13 builds on verses 11-12 but also shifts to the singular address so that, rhetorically, this “highlights the individual’s obligation to prepare offerings with salt.”²⁴

Most commentators believe that salt was required on all offerings in P’s system, perhaps as a preservative to counter the risk of leavening. This assertion is based on verse 13 and supported by only one other biblical text, Ezekiel 43:23, which mandates the sprinkling of salt on meat

Cohn, “Domestic Women: Constructing and Deconstructing a Gender Stereotype in the Mishnah,” in *From Antiquity to the Postmodern World: Contemporary Jewish Studies in Canada*, ed. Daniel Maoz and Andrea Gondos (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 38–61, esp. 45, which notes that the man is given a professional title while the woman is simply called a “woman.”

24. Watts, *Leviticus 1–10*, 263.

Lev 2:11-16

¹¹No grain offering that you bring to the LORD shall be made with leaven, for you must not turn any leaven or honey into smoke as an offering by fire to the LORD. ¹²You may bring them to the LORD as an offering of choice products, but they shall not be offered on the altar for a pleasing odor. ¹³You shall not omit from your grain offerings the salt of the covenant with your God; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.

¹⁴If you bring a grain offering of first fruits to the LORD, you shall bring as the grain offering of your first fruits coarse new grain from fresh ears, parched with fire. ¹⁵You shall add oil to it and lay frankincense on it; it is a grain offering. ¹⁶And the priest shall turn a token portion of it into smoke—some of the coarse grain and oil with all its frankincense; it is an offering by fire to the LORD.

for a purification offering. While Ezra 6:9 and 7:22 describe the need for massive amounts of salt to be delivered to the temple, the text does not specify the purpose for the salt. The only evidence for the use of salt on all sacrifices, both animal and grain, is Leviticus 2:13. If in fact this verse commands salting all offerings, its placement in the text is quite unusual because the mandate of salt should appear in the instructions for meat offerings. One could argue that verse 13 applies only to grain offerings and not to animal sacrifices.

In Numbers 18:19, the requirement of offering salt with sacred gifts for YHWH is followed by the phrase ברית מלה עולם, “an everlasting covenant of salt.” The coupling of “salt” with “covenant” has led to investigations regarding the role of salt in ancient Near Eastern treaties and other texts. While salt clearly had many practical and symbolic uses, it is not clear that our text has anything to do with these. Salting practices likely had apotropaic functions as well. Salt functions as a healing agent in Ezekiel 47:11, and it is used by Elisha to make a spring in Jericho wholesome (2 Kgs 2:19-22). A number of Semitic birth rituals include sprinkling salt around the baby or the home to avert the evil eye.²⁵

The last verses of Leviticus 2 introduce two additional offerings: the first processed offering קרבן ראשית, which was baked leavened bread

25. A. M. Honeyman, “The Salting of Shechem,” *VT* 3 (1953): 192–95 also suggests an apotropaic function for salt. Note also the Sumerian “Incantation against Gall,” which mentions the use of salt in conjunction with an incantation to counter an illness: “When you take a lump of salt in your hand, When you cast the spell, When you place (the salt) in his mouth, then . . .” (Piotr Michalowski, “Carminative Magic: Towards an Understanding of Sumerian Poetics,” *ZA* 71 (1981): 4.

that did not go upon the altar (vv. 11-12), and the grain offering of first fruits (מנחת בכורים) described in verses 14-16. The first fruit meal offering consisted of coarse corn grain with roasted sheaves, or as my colleague Rabbi Vivie Mayer has said, “Popcorn!” In Leviticus 2:14-16, the coarse grain is mixed with oil and frankincense and then offered up to YHVH. This text is a part of a larger amalgam of texts that prescribe “first fruits” to be offered to YHVH through the medium of a priest.²⁶

The Well-Being Offering (3:1-17)

Leviticus 3 has not played a big role in subsequent biblical interpretation. Apart from worries among rabbinic interpreters about the practical implementation of the ban on consuming fat, Jewish and Christian readers have only occasionally tried to allegorize that ban. Modern historians have seized on the fact that amity slaughter offerings are shared meals between deity and worshippers to theorize about the origins of Israelite or human rituals, religion and culture. But that is precisely the aspect of this offering that Leviticus 3 ignores almost entirely. As a result, the chapter has for the most part lain fallow while interpreters cultivated other biblical ground.²⁷

While commentary on Leviticus 3 has been sparse in comparison to other chapters, the use of the term שלמים (“well-being offering”) appears regularly throughout the Bible. Most references to well-being offerings appear in Deuteronomic narratives that describe the kings offering burnt offerings along with well-being offerings. In Judges 20:26, the community offers burnt and well-being offerings after fasting in order to inquire of YHVH. During Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 8), well-being offerings are sacrificed. In the view of some scholars, this statement, in the context of the dedication ceremony, establishes the meaning of the word שלמים as a sacrifice intended to reaffirm the covenant between God and the Israelite community.

Cognates of this root appear in Akkadian as *shulmānu*, “gift of greeting” from a vassal to his overlord.²⁸ Comparative evidence suggests that the term שלמים originally meant “tribute.” Baruch Levine suggests

26. Israel Knohl (*The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007], 23–27) makes a compelling argument that these two offerings reflected popular religious practices that P and H incorporated into their festival calendars. See discussion on Leviticus 23 for more detail.

27. Watts, *Leviticus 1–10*, 207.

28. CAD, “Shin,” 3:244–47.

that in the Israelite cult “the well-being assumed the form of an animal sacrifice offered to God when one came before Him to greet Him at a sacred meal. It was adopted as the name of a particular sacrifice because it expressed the fellowship experienced by the worshipers and priests in God’s presence, as they greeted their divine guest.”²⁹ Since P uses key words with precise technical meanings, we cannot know with certainty what the term שלמים meant in P’s system. Neither cognates nor other biblical narratives shed light on this at present.

The Mechanics of the Well-Being Offering (3:1-17)

Leviticus 3 is coherent and clearly organized and follows closely the form of chapter 1. Without stating a subject (e.g., נפש or אדם), Leviticus 3 begins: “if a well-being is his/her offering, then . . .” Given the gender inclusivity of Leviticus 1 and 2, I assume that the 3ms possessive suffix on קרבנו is not just masculine but rather a generic reference. It would be difficult to explain why burnt offerings and grain offerings would be offered by men and women while well-being offerings would be restricted only to men. This type of offering is similar to that of the burnt offering insofar as the offerer may use animals from the herd or the flock. The offerer places his hand on the animal and slaughters it, and then the priest dashes the blood on the altar. The primary difference between the two sacrifices is that the burnt offering is cut up and offered in its entirety on the altar while the well-being offerings provide God with the fat and vital organs. There is no mention as to the treatment of the rest of the animal in this chapter, but other references (e.g., Lev 7:15, 18, 20, 32; 10:14; 19:6-7) to the well-being offering indicate that the rest of the meat was eaten by the priests and the offerer.

Sacrificial Animals and Gender

In Leviticus 1, we are taken back to P’s creation account, which uses the term אדם to represent the whole of humanity (see Gen 1:26-28). Leviticus 3 evokes another part of that same creation text: distinction between “male” and “female.” A feature of this chapter is that the text designates the use of either a male or a female animal, while the burnt offering must be male only. The phrase אם זכר אם נקבה is a part of the protasis (the “if” clause) of verse 1: “If the offering is a sacrifice of well-being” and “if you

29. Baruch Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord: A Study of Cult and Some Cultic Terms in Ancient Israel*, SJLA 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1974).

Postscript

As I reflect on years of immersion with Leviticus, feelings arise before thought. The book of Leviticus feels as much a mystery to me today as it did many years ago. Now that I have finished the commentary, I feel that I may be ready to begin studying it again.

This book of the Hebrew Bible continues to be elusive because it is so foreign to the modern mind. As a feminist who is mindful of the power of the hegemonic voice in shaping our perceptions of everything in this world, I have some concern about the power of the commentator's voice in defining the reader's experience of the text. So my advice to students of Leviticus is to read the text with an open and curious mind, to be both judgmental and nonjudgmental, to read many commentaries without giving up your own authority, and to let yourself relish in the multiplicity of interpretations. As a famous rabbinic dictum states:

אלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים, "These and those are the words of the living God" (b. Eruvin 13b).

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