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PURGING GOD’S PEOPLE AND PLACE:
LEVITICAL SACRIFICE AS A PROLEGOMENON
TO HEBREWS

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**PURGING GOD’S PEOPLE AND PLACE:
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To Kristin, Rose, and Lucy
for love, life, and laughter

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	vi
PREFACE.....	vii
Chapter	
1. FROM HEBREWS TO LEVITICUS.....	1
Need for This Study	2
Methodological Odds and Ends	4
Preview of Argument	5
Gauging Hebrews’ Interest(s) in Leviticus	6
The Day of Atonement	7
The High Priest as Sacrificial Officiant.....	9
“Daily” Sacrifices	12
The Inauguration of Covenant and Cult	13
Purifying God’s People and Place	14
Concluding Observations	20
2. READING LEVITICAL SACRIFICE.....	21
Creational Foundations and Canonical Precursors	21
Creational Foundations.....	22
Canonical Precursors	23

Chapter	Page
Covenantal Context.....	27
Survey of Levitical Sacrifices	33
The Burnt Offering	34
The Cereal Offering.....	36
The Peace Offering.....	37
The Purification Offering	38
The Reparation Offering.....	43
The Day of Atonement.....	46
Overview of Ritual Actions	46
Inner-Sanctum Purification Offerings	48
The Goat for Azazel.....	50
The Need for and Purpose of the Day of Atonement	53
The Forensic Logic of the Levitical Cult	55
Sacrifice, Priesthood, and Wrath	56
The “Blood Canon” of Leviticus 17:11	59
Sin-Bearing	63
Impurity: Both “Biological” and “Legal”	68
Conclusion.....	69
3. FROM LEVITICUS TO HEBREWS.....	71
Answers.....	71
Questions.....	74
BIBLIOGRAPHY	78

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text

PREFACE

For the past few years, issues related to atonement in Hebrews have been simmering on the back burner of my mind. As I have begun to wade through the book itself, as well as the literature devoted to it, I have become increasingly convinced that rightly understanding Levitical sacrifice is essential for rightly understanding Hebrews. I am grateful, therefore, for the opportunity this Th.M. thesis afforded to dig deeper into Levitical sacrifice in the hope of eventually digging deeper into Hebrews.

I am especially thankful to my supervisor, Dr. Thomas R. Schreiner, for his example, encouragement, and generosity—not only with his time, but in his reckoning of disciplinary boundaries. I am thankful to Dr. Jarvis J. Williams as well for some sharpening conversations on atonement in the Old and New Testaments. Most of all, I am thankful to my wife Kristin for her support and selfless devotion. I gladly dedicate this thesis to her and to our two delightful daughters. *Soli Deo Gloria*.

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CHAPTER 1

FROM HEBREWS TO LEVITICUS

With tongue only partially in cheek, one could say that Hebrews' appropriation of Levitical sacrifice is a riddle wrapped in an enigma. "The riddle of the New Testament" is the fitting, now-famous designation given to Hebrews by E. F. Scott.¹ And Leviticus is no less enigmatic: one of the most commented-upon aspects of the book is its near-total lack of interpretive commentary.² Leviticus seems generally content to assume the theological significance of various sacrificial actions rather than explaining them, which often leaves modern interpreters scratching their heads. This thesis, accordingly, is an attempt to unwrap some of Hebrews' enigmatic Levitical garb.

More specifically, this thesis offers an exegetical account of some of the leading features of Levitical sacrifice as a prolegomenon to the study of Hebrews' sacrificial theology. More than any other book in the New Testament, Hebrews interprets Jesus' sacrificial self-offering in categories adapted from the Levitical cult. In one sense Hebrews would lead us to understand Levitical sacrifice itself in light of the once-for-all work of Christ: the substance illumines the shadow (Heb 10:1). Yet there is also a sense in which Hebrews portrays Levitical sacrifice as a divinely ordained type which prefigures the work of Christ to come.³ Therefore it is crucial for interpreters of Hebrews

¹E. F. Scott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Doctrine and Significance* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1923), 1.

²For representative statements, see Stephen A. Geller, "Blood Cult: Toward a Literary Theology of the Priestly Work of the Pentateuch," *Prooftexts* 12 (1992): 100; Philip Peter Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 106 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 18.

³See Benjamin J. Ribbens, "Levitical Sacrifice and Heavenly Cult in Hebrews" (Ph.D. diss., Wheaton College, 2013).

to understand Levitical sacrifice in its own right before considering the theological use to which the author of Hebrews puts it. This brings us to the need for this study.

Need for This Study

This study is necessary for at least four reasons. First, given that the sacrificial system depicted in Leviticus is a crucial source for Hebrews' theological reflection, the enigmatic nature of Leviticus' textual witness to that sacrificial system calls for ongoing interpretive effort. There is always another piece to fit into the puzzle. Second, the rigid bifurcation that presently obtains between New Testament studies and Old Testament studies has tended to keep New Testament scholars from devoting sustained attention to studying Leviticus on its own terms.

Third, scholarship on Levitical sacrifice has blossomed in the wake of Jacob Milgrom's seminal studies.⁴ Milgrom and his many students and dialogue partners have illuminated crucial issues related to different types of Levitical sacrifice, the Day of Atonement, the phenomena of purity and impurity, and more. Even where scholars differ sharply with Milgrom, his work has been a crucial catalyst for most of the significant work on Levitical sacrifice undertaken in the past forty years. And the gains yielded by this scholarly bumper crop have been only partially incorporated into scholarship on Hebrews. This study, then, lays groundwork for a properly post-Milgrom reading of Hebrews.

Fourth, a number of crucial questions in current discussion of Hebrews turn, in large part, on how one understands Levitical sacrifice. The most pertinent example is the flurry of discussion surrounding David Moffitt's recently published thesis, which

⁴For a bibliography of Milgrom's works, see David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz, eds., *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), xiii–xxv.

occasioned a panel of respondents at both ETS and SBL in 2013.⁵ Arguing that Jesus' resurrection, rather than being assumed or denied, is in fact central to the book's argument, Moffitt proposes what he calls a "substantive rereading" of the entire epistle.⁶ Moffitt argues that Hebrews' references to Jesus offering himself and his blood in heaven are not metaphorical descriptions of the crucifixion, but instead refer to Jesus' bodily, post-resurrection presentation of himself to God in heaven.⁷

This leads Moffitt to conclude that Hebrews does not portray Jesus' death *per se* as the "*means* of redemption"; instead, "After his death and resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven, entered that tabernacle, and went into the inner sanctum where God's throne is. There he presented himself before God, alive and in his glorified, human body. Jesus' living, human presence was pleasing to God and accepted by God for atonement."⁸ Moffitt argues that this notion—life presented in the inner sanctum as means of atonement—is rooted in Levitical sacrifice, especially the Day of Atonement.⁹ To put it negatively, Moffitt argues that in Levitical sacrifice, "the death or slaughter of the victim, while necessary to procure the blood/life that is offered, has no particular atoning significance."¹⁰ And Moffitt is not the only one to argue this way. Christian Eberhart, for example, has written, "In sacrificial images, therefore, Christ's death is not the actual salvific event but the precondition for the availability of his blood."¹¹

⁵David M. Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Novum Testamentum Supplement Series 141 (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

⁶Ibid., 43.

⁷Moffitt's entire argument builds toward this conclusion, though see especially *ibid.*, 215–85.

⁸Ibid., 290, 296.

⁹Ibid., 256–77.

¹⁰Ibid., 271.

¹¹Christian Eberhart, "Characteristics of Sacrificial Metaphors in Hebrews," in *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods—New Insights*, ed. Gabriela Gelardini, Biblical Interpretation Series 75 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 58. It should be noted that, per his comments in a 2012 SBL Hebrews session, Eberhart has

According to Hebrews, when and where does atonement take place? What role does Jesus' death play in atonement? These questions are crucial to the interpretation of the entire epistle, and the answers depend in no small measure on how one understands Levitical sacrifice. In this light, the present study questions certain aspects of the reading of Leviticus offered by Moffitt, Eberhart, and other Old and New Testament scholars who argue that the Levitical focus on blood manipulation entails that the death of the animal has no particular theological significance.

Methodological Odds and Ends

At this introductory stage, four methodological issues require brief treatment: sources, terms, text form, and scope. First, the primary subject of study is the biblical book of Leviticus. For several reasons, this study bypasses source-critical questions. Whatever the value of the regnant source-critical hypotheses, a number of recent studies have demonstrated that Leviticus in its final, canonical form has its own literary and theological integrity.¹² Further, as needed, this study examines other portions of the Pentateuch which either explicate cultic actions or furnish illuminating background to those rituals.

Thus, as used here, the term "Levitical sacrifice" relates not only to sacrificial ritual prescribed in Leviticus, but to sacrificial rituals associated with the Levitical priesthood, which encompasses some material in Exodus and Numbers as well. For convenience, the designations "Leviticus" and "Levitical sacrifice" will be treated more or less interchangeably, since this study's specific interest in Leviticus relates to its atoning rituals, and our primary access to the sacrificial rituals designated as Levitical is the text of Leviticus. This is not to reduce Leviticus to sacrificial scripts or to imply that

since changed his position and now regards the death of Jesus as of more central atoning significance in Hebrews.

¹²See, e.g., John H. Walton, "Equilibrium and the Sacred Compass: The Structure of Leviticus," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 11, no. 2 (2001): 293–304.

Israel's actual sacrificial practice perfectly mirrored Levitical prescriptions.

As to text form, this study gives primary attention to the Masoretic Text of Leviticus as represented in *BHS*, since this essentially represents the closest extant approximation of the original text. Certainly, in order to account for Leviticus' impact on Hebrews one must pay careful attention to the LXX, with all its text-critical complexities. Since Hebrews never directly cites Leviticus, the question of exactly what text form of Leviticus the author read is not answerable with certainty.¹³ Yet one still must wrestle with the questions of whether, and how, the sense of the Hebrew text of Leviticus is altered at any points of relevance to Hebrews, and how this might affect the relationship between the two books. These questions will be revisited, albeit briefly, in chapter 3.

The scope of this study could be described as a portrait in pencil: a portrait to give a sense of the whole; pencil because space prohibits detailed brushstrokes. This study will sketch enough key features of Levitical sacrifice to uncover the theological rationales operative within it, yet the goal is coherence rather than comprehensiveness.¹⁴ As a prolegomenon to further study of Hebrews, this thesis will engage the text of Leviticus in somewhat more detail than a study of Hebrews would typically allow.

Preview of Argument

This thesis consists of three chapters. The remainder of this chapter briefly gauges Hebrews' interest(s) in Leviticus. This entails the twin tasks of measuring the overall level of Hebrews' interest in the sacrificial rites portrayed in Leviticus, and detailing the specific contours of its interests. Chapter 2 presents a fairly detailed portrait

¹³For an attempt to answer this question with respect to Hebrews' explicit citations, see Gert J. Steyn, *A Quest for the Assumed LXX Vorlage of the Explicit Quotations in Hebrews*, *Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments* 235 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

¹⁴Even a substantial study such as Roy Gane's *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005) covers only purification offerings and the Day of Atonement in almost 400 pages.

of Levitical sacrifice, first examining its creational foundations, canonical precursors, and covenantal context, then surveying the various types of sacrifices. Two topics that then receive more detailed attention are the Day of Atonement and the forensic logic running through the cult, as seen in (1) the links between priesthood, sacrifice, and wrath, (2) the “blood canon” of Leviticus 17:11, (3) the concept of sin-bearing, and (4) the “biological” and “legal” nature of impurity. Chapter 3 briefly sketches some of the answers this survey of Leviticus brings to the text of Hebrews, then details a number of questions it raises which subsequent study of Hebrews should engage.

Gauging Hebrews’ Interest(s) in Leviticus

The next task is to gauge Hebrews’ interest(s) in Leviticus. As indicated above, this entails the twofold project of taking the overall temperature of Hebrews’ interest in the rites prescribed in Leviticus and tracing the shape of individual rites and concepts in which Hebrews demonstrates interest. I will pursue the former by means of the latter, and then by offering a few summary observations evoked by the latter. The goal of this exercise is not to exhaustively analyze Hebrews’ appropriation of Leviticus—that is a task to which this entire thesis could serve as a prologue. Instead, the goal here is more modest: gauging Hebrews’ interest(s) in Leviticus provides a pathway into the text of Leviticus. To see what engaged the author of Hebrews’ attention in Leviticus provides at least one valid—because canonical, even though partial—guide to how Christian readers should approach the book. In other words, the point of this preliminary survey is to set up chapter 2 as an exercise in reading Leviticus in the wake of the author of Hebrews.¹⁵

¹⁵This image is borrowed from John Webster’s discussion of exegetical reasoning. Webster writes, “‘Following’ these texts is as it were a movement of intellectual repetition, a ‘cursive’ representation of the text, running alongside it or, perhaps better, running in its wake. To be taken into this movement is the commentator’s delight, tempered by the knowledge that we cannot hope to keep pace, because the prophets and apostles always stride ahead of us” (John Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* [London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012], 130). Webster is speaking about exegesis generally, but the image is doubly relevant to the task of describing biblical authors’ engagement with earlier canonical texts.

Before the survey commences, however, one more methodological note is in order: Hebrews nowhere explicitly “reads” Leviticus. That is, unlike its treatment of Jeremiah 31:31–33, Psalm 110, and a dense patchwork of other Old Testament passages, Hebrews never explicitly cites or quotes from Leviticus.¹⁶ Instead, Hebrews pervasively alludes to various Levitical rites and concepts. So Hebrews’ reading of Leviticus is less explicit than its reading of, for example, Psalm 110:4 or Psalm 95:7–11. Nevertheless, Hebrews’ pervasive interest in Levitical rites indicates a notable interest in the book, and the rites evoked by the author trace the shape of that interest.

Further, as this study will demonstrate, some of Hebrews’ references to the Levitical cult evidence a specific conception of how that cult functioned. Thus, even if Hebrews only indirectly refers to the actual text of Leviticus, its engagement with that text constitutes at least an implicit reading of it. In what follows, then, I will sketch the most notable features of Levitical sacrifice in which Hebrews demonstrates an interest. The first four items are specific features of Levitical sacrifice, and the fifth is a broader conceptual pattern derived from Levitical sacrifice. Following these five discussions, I will offer a few summary observations by way of conclusion.

The Day of Atonement

Hebrews’ most obvious interest in Leviticus lies in its development of the Day of Atonement as a typological lens for the atoning work of Christ (Lev 16:1–34; cf. 23:26–32).¹⁷ This is most evident in Hebrews 9:1–10, 11–14, and 23–28. In 9:1–10, the author provides a compact description of the “regulations for worship and an earthly

¹⁶For an introduction to Hebrews’ engagement with explicitly cited passages of Scripture, see R. T. France, “The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 47, no. 2 (1996): 245–76.

¹⁷Daniel Stökl ben Ezra suggests that Hebrews “evokes several scenes” from the Day of Atonement “in a typological exegesis” (*The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity: The Day of Atonement from Second Temple Judaism to the Fifth Century*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament I/163 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003], 180).

place of holiness” belonging to the “first covenant” (v. 1).¹⁸ After describing the tabernacle furnishings (vv. 2–5), Hebrews contrasts the priests’ regular ritual duties in the “first section” with the high priest’s once-a-year entrance into the “second” section on the Day of Atonement (vv. 6–7). On that occasion the high priest would take blood with him into the inner sanctum of the tabernacle, “which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people” (v. 7).

In verses 11 through 14, Hebrews depicts Christ as the eschatological counterpart of Israel’s high priest, effecting a heavenly Day of Atonement. Christ appeared “as a high priest of the good things that have come,” entering “through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation).” Rather than doing this yearly, Christ entered the heavenly holy of holies “once for all” (vv. 11–12). And rather than purifying “the flesh” (v. 13), Christ’s blood purifies the conscience and enables true service of God (v. 14). In verses 23–28, the author affirms that it was necessary for the heavenly sanctuary to be purified with a better sacrifice than those offered to purify the earthly worship apparatus (v. 23). Immediately following, verse 24 recapitulates verse 12’s discussion of Christ’s entrance into the heavenly holy of holies, indicating that the author is still elaborating his Day of Atonement typology.¹⁹ This comparison continues with a further contrast between the high priests’ yearly entrance and Christ’s once-for-all offering (vv. 25–28). Clearly, the Day of Atonement is a central lens through which Hebrews interprets Jesus’ saving work. Hebrews is manifestly interested in the high priest’s entrance into the holy of holies (Heb 9:7, 12, 24 // Lev 16:12, 15), the offering of blood there (Heb 9:7, 12, 25 // Lev 16:14–15), and the cleansing of both people (Heb 9:14 // Lev 16:17, 30, 33) and place (Heb 9:23 // Lev

¹⁸Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version.

¹⁹So William Lane: “The recapitulation of the theme of the heavenly sanctuary draws upon the Day of Atonement ritual, when it was the task of the high priest to appear before God” (William L. Lane, *Hebrews*, Word Biblical Commentary 47A–B [Dallas: Word Books, 1991], B:248).

16:16, 20).

The High Priest as Sacrificial Officiant

One prominent theme in Hebrews' exposition of Christ's work through the lens of the Day of Atonement is that Christ is considered to be an eschatological high priest (Heb 9:11). But this theme of Christ as high priest extends beyond contexts in Hebrews where the Day of Atonement is explicitly invoked. In Hebrews 2:17 Christ is said to have become "a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."²⁰ Jesus is also designated a high priest in the twin hortatory climaxes of 4:14–16 and 10:19–25: "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens . . ." (4:14); ". . . since we have a great priest over the house of God" (10:21).²¹ In 5:1–4, Hebrews characterizes the work and calling of high priests to establish Christ's correspondence to those patterns (οὕτως καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς; v. 5) in the following verses (vv. 5–10).

That Christ is called a high priest after the order of Melchizedek in 5:10 anticipates the substantial discussion of Christ's Melchizedekian high priesthood in 7:1–28. This discussion, in turn, leads to the climactic declaration: "Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven" (Heb 8:1). That this is the "main point" (Κεφάλαιον) of the author's discourse indicates that it is the point to which he has been arguing, and the point which he will henceforth elaborate.²² Therefore, Jesus' heavenly high priesthood

²⁰For detailed discussion of this verse, see Christopher A. Richardson, *Pioneer and Perfecter of Faith: Jesus' Faith as the Climax of Israel's History in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament II/338 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 28–49.

²¹In 10:21 Hebrews designates Jesus a ἱερεὶά μέγαν. Lev 21:10 and Num 35:25 and 28 (LXX) use a virtually identical descriptor (ὁ ἱερεὺς ὁ μέγας) to refer to the high priest, suggesting that this is another way for Hebrews to refer to Jesus' high priesthood. See Harold W. Attridge, *Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 287.

²²Ronald Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Arbeiten zur Literatur und

can legitimately be called the central proposition of Hebrews.

For purposes of this introductory survey, it will be sufficient to note the following two aspects of Hebrews' interest in the Levitical figure of the high priest. First, the high priest represents the people: he is appointed to serve on behalf of men in the things pertaining to God (ὕπὲρ ἀνθρώπων καθίσταται τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν; Heb 5:1). The high priest's representative role is simply part of the basic fabric of the Levitical cult. One can see this role particularly clearly, however, in the clothes he wears, specifically the breastpiece and turban. In Exodus 28, After a description of the breastpiece itself, we read, "So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment on his heart, when he goes into the Holy Place to bring them to regular remembrance before the Lord" (Exod 28:29). Similarly, on the high priest's turban there was to be a plate of pure gold, engraved with the words "Holy to the Lord" (Exod 28:36), fastened on the high priest's turban. The purpose? "It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall bear any guilt from the holy things that the people of Israel consecrate as their holy gifts. It shall regularly be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord" (Exod 28:38).²³ In Leviticus 8:5–9, these instructions were duly carried out when Aaron was anointed as the first high priest of Israel. According to Hebrews, Jesus, like the high priests of Israel, acted on behalf of the people. He was their representative before God, able to effect a purification for them which they could not effect themselves.

The second item to notice is that for both Israelite high priests and Jesus, this representative work involves the offering of sacrifice. Hebrews affirms that every high priest is appointed to act on behalf of man in relation to God, "to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins" (Heb 5:1). Because the high priest is beset with sin just as the people are, "...he

Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 127–29.

²³On the concept of "priestly immunity" in evidence in passages such as this, see Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 623, 638–39, 1048.

is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people” (Heb 5:2). The obligation of the high priest to offer sacrifice for himself is seen in Leviticus 9:7, and, in the context of the Day of Atonement, 16:6, 11, and 17. Jesus, however, “has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself” (Heb 7:27). What does Hebrews have in mind when it asserts that the high priests offered sacrifices daily (καθ’ ἡμέραν)? Though many proposals have been offered, no consensus has been obtained.²⁴ Tentatively, I concur with Ellingworth, who writes,

It seems more likely that the author was interested in the theology of sacrifice, and specifically in the significance of the Day of Atonement, rather than in details of the temple liturgy (9:4), and that he assimilated the meaning and ritual of the daily rites to those of the annual festival, assuming that the high priest, like other priests, would officiate in them all.²⁵

The Israelite priests were required to offer burnt offerings each morning and evening (Exod 29:38–42; Num 28:1–8), and the high priest was required to offer a cereal offering each morning and evening (Lev 6:12–16).²⁶ Yet the high priests were not required to offer the daily burnt offering, nor is an order between the daily cereal offering and burnt offering specified. So the author of Hebrews appears to be aware of these textual stipulations, or at least their real-life practice, yet he does not appear concerned with their exact details. Instead, he focuses on the pattern embodied in the Day of Atonement—sinful priests offering sacrifice first for themselves, then the people—as a point of contrast with the work of Christ. Whatever the details of this disputed allusion, the main

²⁴Compact surveys of the discussion can be found in Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 395; Lane, *Hebrews*, A:193–94; Attridge, *Hebrews*, 213–14.

²⁵Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 395.

²⁶The Hebrew versification differs from the English in this portion of Leviticus. Where this is the case, I will refer to the verse numbers associated with the Hebrew text.

point here is that the author of Hebrews views the offering of sacrifice as the high priest's central task, and this is crucial for Jesus' high-priestly role. Thus we read in Hebrews 8:3: "For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer."

"Daily" Sacrifices

The idea of "daily" sacrifices calls for further attention. As discussed above, Hebrews 7:27 refers to the daily offering of sacrifices, perhaps conflating certain aspects of the daily ritual with the Day of Atonement. But Hebrews 10:11 also says, "And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins." Here the reference to daily sacrifices appears to include not only the daily *tamid* offering (Lev 6:12–16; Num 28:1–8), but also the entire slate of sacrifices: the *אֶשֶׁם*, *עֹלָה*, *מִנְחָה*, *חֹטֵאת*, and *שְׁלָמִים* (Lev 1:1–7:38). While these were prescribed to be offered whenever need arose, rather than daily, the author seems to assume that they would be offered frequently enough to amount to a daily responsibility of the priests. And again, note that the author speaks here of "every priest," not simply the high priest. The author's point is that the entire Levitical sacrificial system was unable to decisively deal with sin.²⁷

This other, more explicit reference to regularly offered sacrifices shows that the author is concerned not only to typologically explicate Christ's work in light of the Day of Atonement, but to demonstrate how Jesus' sacrifice accomplishes what the entire Levitical system was unable to accomplish. Thus, while Hebrews 10:11 presents more contrast than comparison, it is important to recognize that when the author of Hebrews thinks of Levitical sacrifice, he has more in mind than the Day of Atonement.

²⁷Thus Gareth Cockerill writes, "He is no longer limiting himself primarily to the annual Day-of-Atonement sacrifice, but is explicitly including the ministry of the outer Holy Place so characteristic of the Old Covenant (see 9:6)" (Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012], 447).

The Inauguration of Covenant and Cult

In Hebrews 9:15–22, the author compares Jesus’ inauguration of the new covenant to Moses’ inauguration of the old. In verses 15 through 17, the author explains why Jesus’ death was necessary to, and effectual for, the inauguration of the new covenant.²⁸ In verses 18 through 21, the author turns to the inauguration of the Mosaic covenant and its concomitant cult, demonstrating the premise, “Therefore, not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood” (v. 18). In verse 19 the author draws on Exodus 24:3–8 to describe how Moses inaugurated the old covenant by sprinkling the book of the covenant and the people with blood. Yet the author also says that Moses sprinkled the people with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, details which are not present in the Exodus account. But Leviticus 14:4–7 enjoins the use of scarlet material and hyssop in the cleansing of a “leper,” and Numbers 19:1–7 enjoins the same in the red heifer ritual, which is also alluded to in Hebrews 9:13–14. Further, though it is not sprinkled, water plays a part in both Leviticus 14 and Numbers 19. So it appears that Hebrews has either given a loose account of the biblical narrative, or has deliberately read Exodus 24 in light of these other biblical accounts.²⁹

In addition, Hebrews 9:21 asserts, “And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship.” It is possible that the adverb *ὁμοίως* indicates that the connection between these actions and those referred to in verse 19 is logical rather than temporal.³⁰ Thus, Attridge writes that the purifying function of

²⁸This reading is, of course, disputed. For two differing accounts which would each substantiate this basic reading, see John J. Hughes, “Hebrews IX 15ff. and Galatians III 15ff.: A Study in Covenant Practice and Procedure,” *Novum Testamentum* 21, no. 1 (1979): 27–96; Scott W. Hahn, “A Broken Covenant and the Curse of Death: A Study of Hebrews 9:15–22,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2004): 416–36.

²⁹For detailed discussion, see Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 467–69.

³⁰If this sense of *ὁμοίως* is judged improbable, then the present passage provides yet another instance where the author of Hebrews conflates various sacrificial rituals, this time conflating two distinct occasions of inauguration. Yet even if this is deemed conflation, a theological rationale undergirds it, which the following discussion will probe.

blood “was seen to be operative in the establishment of the old covenant and in the various rituals subsumed in that inaugural event.”³¹ The biblical description of the consecration of the tabernacle is found, first, in Exodus 40:9–11, where Moses is told to anoint the tabernacle and all its furniture, including the altar, with oil. Second, in Leviticus 8:15, 23–24, and 30, when Moses consecrates the priesthood, he also sprinkles the altar with blood, consecrating the place of the priests’ work together with the priests themselves, in fulfillment of the instructions given in Exodus 29:12. Most likely, the latter set of passages influences the author here, since he asserts that the tabernacle and worship implements were sprinkled with blood.³² Thus, in describing the old covenant’s inauguration, the author closely conjoins covenant and cult. Hebrews includes the consecration of the tabernacle under the umbrella of the inauguration of the covenant. For Hebrews, then, the covenant is not complete without its cult, and the cult cannot be extricated from the covenant. Further, it is worth noting that, as with daily sacrifices, the author’s attention to the inauguration of covenant and cult demonstrate that his interest in Levitical sacrifice extends beyond the Day of Atonement.³³

Purifying God’s People and Place

While the first four items surveyed in this section are distinct features of Levitical sacrifice in its covenantal context, this fifth is a more synthetic observation: that is, Hebrews conceives of Levitical sacrifice as purifying God’s people and place. This is one of the most striking differences between Hebrews and the rest of the New Testament,

³¹Attridge, *Hebrews*, 258.

³²See discussion in F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 226.

³³Thus, although I disagree with the inference he draws from it, Christopher Richardson makes a valid point when he notes that “the author compares *and* contrasts Jesus’ actions with the Day of Atonement, the daily sacrifices (7.27; 10.11), and the ritual sacrifices that inaugurated the old covenant (9.15–21),” and that “[a]ll three ritual contexts inform the atonement of Jesus” (Richardson, *Pioneer and Perfector*, 42n115).

especially Paul. While depictions of salvation as purification are not absent from Paul (e.g., 1 Cor 6:11; Eph 5:26; Titus 2:14), he predominantly uses other imagery: the legal language of justification, the relational language of reconciliation, and so on. From first to last, however, purification is a central concept in Hebrews' exposition of the salvation Jesus accomplished. And this purification has two objects—God's people and place—both of which correspond to the author's own exposition of Levitical sacrifice. Thus, the survey that follows will highlight both the centrality of purification language in Hebrews as well as its twofold object, and will demonstrate how both are rooted in Hebrews' reading of Levitical sacrifice.

Of course, the concept of purity was integral to early Judaism and certainly current in earliest Christianity.³⁴ In what follows, therefore, I will not simply assume that any references to purity-related concepts derive directly from the text of Leviticus. However, the scriptural roots of these concepts are most densely concentrated in Leviticus, along with a few other relevant sections of the Pentateuch. So even if Hebrews is not drawing its concept of purity straight from Leviticus, the primacy of purity conceptions in Hebrews makes Leviticus' concept of purity a crucial item for the interpreter of Hebrews to understand. Further, the following discussion will demonstrate that Hebrews' soteriological deployment of purity concepts does in fact draw on the author's engagement with Levitical sacrifice.

The centrality of purification in Hebrews' soteriology is evident in the book's programmatic opening statement. The author tells us, "After making purification for sins (καθαρισμὸν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος), [Jesus] sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high" (Heb 1:3). It is noteworthy that in this opening exordium, Hebrews depicts Christ's atoning work as cleansing sins, signaling the prominent interest in

³⁴For a detailed study of the relationship between sin and impurity in the Hebrew Bible, other ancient Jewish literature, and the New Testament, see Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

purification which marks the entire epistle.³⁵ Here the object of purification is τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν, which could refer equally to both halves of the twofold object of purification the following discussion will uncover elsewhere in the epistle.

One of Hebrews' most detailed discussions of Christ's purifying work is found in 9:13–14: ¹³For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God." Here, Hebrews first appears to refer to sacrifices in general with the phrase "the blood of goats and bulls." Ellingworth rightly notes, "Since bulls are not mentioned in Lv. 16, their mention here, together with the following words, may indicate that the author is moving away from specific reference to the Day of Atonement liturgy to the underlying principles of OT sacrifice."³⁶ Ellingworth's observation is strengthened by the fact that Hebrews closely associates these sacrifices with the "red heifer" ritual of Numbers 19, in which a female cow was burned whole with cedar and hyssop and scarlet yarn (Num 19:2–6). When the cow was slaughtered, some of its blood would be sprinkled toward the tabernacle in order to consecrate the rest, which was burned with the cow. The resulting ash—which, significantly, included the burned blood—would be mixed with water and then sprinkled on one who had incurred corpse defilement (Num 19:4–9). Significantly, Numbers 19:9 says that this ritual is a חטאת, a "sin offering" or "purification offering."³⁷

³⁵On the programmatic significance of Hebrews' exordium and this phrase's role within it, see Attridge, *Hebrews*, 36, 45–46.

³⁶Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 454; contra, e.g., Lane, *Hebrews*, B:239, who sees a clear reference to the Day of Atonement with a possible broader reference to sacrifices in general.

³⁷For a detailed study of the red heifer ritual, see Jacob Milgrom, "The Paradox of the Red Cow (Num. xix)," *Vetus Testamentum* 31 (1981): 62–72. Milgrom insightfully unravels what he calls the "paradox of the red cow," namely, that the ashes which defile the impure persons on which they are sprinkled defile the pure persons who handle them. Milgrom convincingly argues that this paradox is explained by the red cow ritual's identification as a חטאת, and he helpfully locates the red cow ritual in

For present purposes, it is important to note that in Hebrews' conception, Levitical sacrifices in general and the red heifer ritual both purify individuals. Granted, Hebrews views this purification as only extending to "the flesh" (πρὸς τὴν τῆς σαρκὸς καθαρότητα; v. 13). Nevertheless, it is significant that Hebrews specifies persons as the object of cleansing, since in verse 14 the author similarly states that Jesus' self-offering purifies "our conscience" (τὴν συνείδησιν ἡμῶν), with the result that believers are now able to truly serve God. Thus, Hebrews closely associates the cleansing Jesus effects with the moral transformation and inner enabling brought about by the new covenant (cf. Heb 8:10). Nevertheless, it is significant that Hebrews describes this transformation in terms borrowed from the cult, namely, the sacrificial purification of individuals.

A similar conception is in evidence in Hebrews 10:1–2. First, the author asserts that the law, which prescribes the same sacrifices to be offered every year, can never "make perfect those who draw near." To justify this assertion, the author asks, "Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sin?" Benjamin Ribbens remarks, "The old covenant sacrifices cannot turn the conscience burdened by sin into a pure or good conscience. The insufficiency of the old covenant sacrifices, therefore, is their inability to remove the guilt of past transgressions."³⁸ Here conscience has a distinctly forensic function, reminding offerers of their guilt. And, despite the "purification of the flesh" which these sacrifices offered (Heb 9:13), the old covenant sacrifices could not eradicate the guilt of sin. Here, Hebrews' conception of Levitical sacrifice is less directly evident, since the author's focus is on what these sacrifices

relation to the leper cleansing of Leviticus 14 and the Day of Atonement. Yet his diachronic reconstructions relieve a pressure that is not a property of the text itself, but of his distinctive theory of the *תאֲזָזָה*. Gane's discussion of the red cow (*Cult and Character*, 181–91) has even more explanatory power, and convincingly integrates the discussion of the red cow with principles at play in the *תאֲזָזָה* and elsewhere. The significance of the *תאֲזָזָה* will be addressed in chap. 2.

³⁸Ribbens, "Levitical Sacrifice and Heavenly Cult," 263; see more fully 261–67.

couldn't accomplish. Nevertheless, Hebrews presents the (unfulfilled) goal of Levitical sacrifice as the effectual cleansing of the individual, and indicates through the following exposition, as in 9:13–14, that this effectual cleansing is what Christ's offering achieved. So, 10:10 reads, "And by that will we have been sanctified (ἡγιασμένοι ἐσμέν) through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

Yet for Hebrews, sacrifice purifies not only a people, but a place. As has already been seen, in 9:18–21 the author synthesizes the inauguration of covenant and cult, describing the latter with reference to Moses sprinkling the tent and the cultic implements with blood (v. 21). The author concludes, "Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood (ἐν αἵματι . . . καθαρίζεται), and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (v. 22). The purpose of sprinkling the tabernacle was its consecration, and for Hebrews, consecration is a species of purification. In this instance, blood purifies the place where the covenant will be maintained.

The idea of purifying a place is more strikingly evident in Hebrews 9:23, where the author concludes, "Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these."³⁹ Commentators have found this verse to be one of this enigmatic epistle's most enigmatic sayings.⁴⁰ Yet whatever the precise referent of these words, their sense is clear: Jesus' sacrifice purified the very dwelling place of God in heaven. Verse 24 indicates as much when it says, "For (γάρ) Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands . . . but into heaven itself." Verse 24 thus completes and supports the thought of verse 23. Corresponding to the earthly cultic apparatus' need for cleansing, the

³⁹Attridge rightly suggests that the verb καθαρίζω is a catchword linking 9:23 to the preceding section (*Hebrews*, 258n 60).

⁴⁰For a competent survey of the leading interpretations, see Richard Ounsworth, *Joshua Typology in the New Testament*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament II/328 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 152–57.

heavenly cultic space itself needed to be purified; this is the very place Jesus entered, in which he now appears on behalf of his people. George Guthrie points out that a Day of Atonement typology is at work here, just as it is in 9:11–12:

Leviticus explains that atonement had to be made for the holiest place and the tent of meeting because of the impurity and rebellion of the Israelites. Thus, in the case of the new-covenant offering of Christ, the heavenly tabernacle had to be cleansed because of the sins of the people who would be brought into the covenant. The heavenly tabernacle is cleansed in conjunction with the cleansing of God's people.⁴¹

Just as the earthly copy of the heavenly tabernacle needed to be cleansed of the defilement caused by the people's sins, so also the antitype itself (cf. Heb 8:5), the heavenly dwelling-place of God, needed to be purified.⁴²

In Hebrews, then, Christ's sacrifice is understood to Levitical sacrifice's twofold function of purging God's people and place. In both the inauguration of the Mosaic covenant and its cult and the Day of Atonement, sacrificial blood purifies sacred space. And in the red heifer ritual and old covenant sacrifice more broadly, sacrificial blood purifies God's people, cleansing them of their defilement. Christ's sacrifice fulfills this twofold pattern of purifying God's people and place.⁴³

⁴¹George H. Guthrie, "Hebrews," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 975. Jared Calaway also notes that idea of sanctuary cleansing in 9:23 corresponds to the earlier exposition of the Day of Atonement; see Jared C. Calaway, *The Sabbath and the Sanctuary: Access to God in the Letter to the Hebrews and Its Priestly Context*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament II/349 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 111–12.

⁴²Stökl ben Ezra writes, "The cleansing is a strange idea, but only if one considers the heavenly holy of holies perfect and unchangeable. The only reason for defilement of the heavenly sanctuary can be human sins. If sins can defile the earthly holy of holies, which is never entered other than to be purified, the concept that sins can equally defile a heavenly holy of holies is only a small step further. Accordingly, Christ's sacrifice purifies not our earthly bodies but our conscience, which equally cannot be reached by blood, and the true sanctuary (1:3; 9:14)" (*The Impact of Yom Kippur*, 184n180).

⁴³Grant Macaskill writes, "The eternal efficacy (stretching into the past and the future) of his sacrifice is stressed (9:25–6), by which the problem of sin is taken away and both the sanctuary (9:23) and those who will worship in it (10:2–3) are cleansed" (Grant Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013], 185; cf. 182).

Concluding Observations

Though Hebrews never cites Leviticus explicitly, it demonstrates a distinct interest in sacrificial rites depicted therein. Hebrews develops a fairly detailed typological exegesis of the Day of Atonement, refers to the calling and duties of high priests, alludes to various regularly offered sacrifices, including the red heifer ritual, discusses the inauguration of the old covenant and its cult, and draws on the broader Levitical pattern in which sacrifice purifies God's people and place. All of these cultic topics are rooted in the text of Leviticus—along with portions of Exodus and Numbers. So, while Hebrews never cites Leviticus, the argument is clearly informed by a firsthand knowledge of the book. The correspondences between Hebrews and Leviticus are too many and too detailed to simply reflect the general milieu of first-century Judaism and Jewish Christianity.

It is also worth underlining that Hebrews evidences a particular understanding of how Levitical sacrifice “works.” New Testament scholars are sometimes hesitant to base their interpretations of Hebrews or other New Testament texts on a particular understanding of Levitical sacrifice, since it is a matter of endless dispute among Old Testament specialists. Nevertheless, Hebrews itself offers at least the broad outline of an interpretation of Levitical sacrifice.⁴⁴ And for those who treat Hebrews as authoritative Scripture, its interpretation of Levitical sacrifice is equally authoritative. Therefore, even though Hebrews by no means provides an exhaustive commentary on the book, it at least provides a pathway into it. One of the most notable features of this pathway is that Hebrews understands Levitical sacrifice to purify God's people and place. This twofold pattern will be explored in more detail in chapter 2, which discusses the חטאת offering and the Day of Atonement as elements in a portrait of Levitical sacrifice.

⁴⁴Again, given its introductory function, this chapter has provided only a brief, partial account of Hebrews' interpretation of Levitical sacrifice. For a fuller treatment with which I am generally sympathetic, see Ribbens, “Levitical Sacrifice and Heavenly Cult,” esp. 199–218.

CHAPTER 2

READING LEVITICAL SACRIFICE

The goal of this chapter is to sketch a coherent portrait of Levitical sacrifice. The investigation will be tacitly informed, though not dictated, by the interest(s) Hebrews displays in Levitical sacrifice which discerned in chapter 1. The portrait will proceed in six steps. First, I will survey creational foundations of and canonical precursors to Levitical sacrifice. Second, I will examine Levitical sacrifice's covenantal context. Third, I will explore the significance of the primary types of Levitical sacrifice. For reasons given below, two of these, the חטאת and the אשם, will be discussed in detail, while the others will receive much briefer treatment. Fourth, I will discuss the significance of the annual Day of Atonement ritual. Fifth, I will trace the forensic logic that runs through the Levitical cult, examining several interrelated features of the cult: the threat of divine wrath as impetus for priesthood and sacrifice, the "blood canon" on Leviticus 17:11, the concept of sin-bearing, and the "biological" and "legal" nature of impurity.

Creational Foundations and Canonical Precursors

The first two sections of this portrait set Levitical sacrifice against the backdrop of three important biblical backgrounds: creational foundations, canonical precursors, and Levitical sacrifice's covenantal context. For convenience, the first two of these will be treated in tandem here. As mentioned in chapter one, scholars often remark on the theologically cryptic nature of Leviticus' cultic prescriptions. The writer seems to presuppose far more than he provides. Yet often, these same scholars' own critical presuppositions keep them from exploring other material in the Pentateuch which provides illuminating background for the functions of Levitical sacrifice. The first of

these relatively neglected backgrounds to be examined here is the theology of creation presupposed in, and engaged by, the Levitical cult.

Creational Foundations

Many scholars have discerned detailed parallels between the account of creation in Genesis 1–2 and the instructions for and creation of the tabernacle in Exodus 25ff. and 40.¹ For instance, just as the Garden was the place where God walked back and forth (מְהַלֵּךְ) with Adam and Eve (Gen 3:8), so also God promises to walk among his people (וְהֵתְהַלַּכְתִּי) by means of the dwelling he establishes in the tabernacle (Lev 26:11–12). Just as Adam is told to serve and guard the garden (לְעִבְדָּהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ; Gen 2:15), so also this verbal combination frequently refers to the priests who serve and guard the tabernacle (e.g., Num 3:7–8, 8:25–26, 18:5–6). Just as the cherubim guard the way to the tree of life (Gen 3:24), so also in the tabernacle cherubim stand guard over the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies (Exod 25:18–22).² Thus, the cosmos is a temple in which God will dwell, and the Garden of Eden is equivalent to the Holy of Holies.³

At least four relevant conclusions proceed from these parallels. First, a concern for maintaining sacred space is built into creation. Therefore, Leviticus' elaborate cultic theology is rooted in the Genesis account of creation, and represents one stage in God's response to the defilement and disorder introduced by sin. As John Walton puts it, the tabernacle was designed to restore equilibrium in a sacred space—God's presence on

¹For in-depth discussion of the inner-biblical parallels, Jewish interpretations thereof, and Ancient Near Eastern parallels thereto, see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 29–80.

²For these examples and several others see Beale, *The Temple*, 66–79; also Gordon J. Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story," in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 19–25.

³In addition to Beale and Wenham, see John H. Walton, "Equilibrium and the Sacred Compass: The Structure of Leviticus," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 11, no. 2 (2001): 295.

earth.⁴ Second, therefore, the wilderness tabernacle represents a proleptic restoration of the sacred space lost in Adam and Eve's sin and subsequent expulsion from the Garden.

Third, that the penalty for sin involves expulsion from God's presence is crucial to both the creation account and Levitical sacrifice. If Israel defiles the land, God will expel them from it just as he expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden (Lev 18:24–28). Thus, the tabernacle not only reinstates God's presence among his people, it also mediates a relationship between Israel and the Lord that is analogous to Adam and Eve's at this key point: sin will result in expulsion from their land.

Fourth, the Levitical cult as a whole provides the ongoing means whereby sinful, impure Israel is able to dwell in the presence of a holy God. Yhwh himself provides the means whereby his people's sins and impurities may be redressed, so that they may continue to dwell in the light of his presence.⁵ In sum, the connections between Genesis 1–3 and the Levitical cult demonstrate that the cult microcosmically restores order to creation by maintaining a setting in which God and his impure, imperfect people can dwell together in harmony.⁶

Canonical Precursors

Another crucial context in which to set Levitical sacrifice is the handful of

⁴Ibid., 295.

⁵This observation stands against the assertion of Jonathan Klawans that “attracting” the presence of God is one of the primary functions of Levitical sacrifice (*Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006], 68ff.). The issue is not attracting Yhwh, but preventing his departure.

⁶Frank Gorman's summary of these themes draws them together nicely: “In Israel, the order of creation—cosmic, social, cultic—was threatened by the sin of the people and the impurity that arises from that sin and defiles the sanctuary. The sin of the nation threatened Yahweh's continued presence in the midst of the community and brought about the possibility that Yahweh might be driven from their midst. If this were to happen, it would threaten the security and well-being of the community because it was Yahweh's dwelling in the sanctuary that brought about the security and well-being of the community” (Frank H. Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time and Status in the Priestly Theology*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 91 [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990], 45).

significant sacrifices or sacrifice-like acts which occur prior to the institution of the Levitical cult. Abel's offering (מִנְחָתוֹ) of the firstborn of his flock in Genesis 4:4 is enigmatic on many fronts, may not be a sacrifice, and will be passed over here.⁷ More relevant for present purposes is Noah's offering of burnt offerings (עֹלֹת) on an altar after the flood (Gen 8:20).⁸ Here Genesis describes Noah's offering with a term that will feature prominently in Leviticus. And the text relays to us Yhwh's response to this sacrifice: "And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done'" (Gen 8:21). Again, the term "pleasing aroma" features heavily in cultic legislation, and indicates that Noah's sacrifice renders God favorable.

This demonstrates that Noah's sacrifice is offered in view of the problem which Yhwh names in his response to Noah's sacrifice: the human heart is incorrigibly wicked, and even the judgment of the flood did nothing to improve it (cf. Gen 6:5). Therefore, Yhwh has the right to destroy sinful humanity again. However, as Yhwh pledges in his covenant with Noah, he will never again destroy humanity as he has in the flood. Noah's sacrifice, therefore, functions, in accord with Yhwh's own promise, to render Yhwh favorable to sinful humanity. This quasi-cultic episode indicates that the need to avert divine wrath frames the act of offering sacrifices. Whatever else sacrifice may also involve, placating God's righteous anger must not be excluded.

Yhwh's covenant-ratifying act in Genesis 15 may not be a direct precursor to Levitical sacrifice, but it does involve the ritual slaughter of several animals which

⁷For brief discussion see Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis*, New American Commentary 1A–B (Nashville: B&H, 1996), A:266–68.

⁸The discussion here follows Gordon J. Wenham, "The Aqedah: A Paradigm of Sacrifice," 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, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 94–95.

feature in Levitical sacrifice.⁹ Further, this covenant enactment shares at least some features in common with the covenant inauguration of Exodus 24:3–8, which more closely dovetails with Levitical rites. This suggests that the family resemblance between the covenant-inaugurating ceremonies indicates at least some connection to the Levitical rites which would later maintain the Mosaic covenant. This connection will be explored in the next section.

A more elaborate parallel with Levitical sacrifice is found in the Passover rite of Exodus 12, in which the Israelites were to smear the blood of a slaughtered lamb on the doorposts and lintel of their houses (Exod 12:7) and eat its flesh roasted (v. 8). The blood on the doorposts was to be a sign to Yhwh (v. 13), so that Yhwh would “pass over” his people and not destroy them as he destroyed the Egyptians. As Moses explains to the people: “For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you” (v. 23). Angel Rodriguez comments,

The biblical text strongly suggests that they were preserved through a substitute. The context in which the Passover is here required is one of divine judgment which results in death. The Hebrews escape that judgment through a bloody sacrifice. While in Egypt all the firstborn died, among the Hebrews an animal died. The idea of substitution is clearly implied. The Lord was willing to accept from the Hebrews a sacrificial animal instead of their firstborn.¹⁰

T. D. Alexander similarly writes, “Implicit . . . is the idea that Israelites were inherently no different from the male firstborn of the Egyptians. Without the atoning blood of the sacrifice they too would have been struck dead by the ‘destroyer.’”¹¹ The combination of

⁹Matthews, *Genesis*, B:170–71.

¹⁰Angel M. Rodriguez, *Substitution in the Hebrew Cultus and in Cultic-Related Texts*, Andrews University Dissertation Series 3 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1979), 272.

¹¹T. D. Alexander, “The Passover Sacrifice,” in *Sacrifice in the Bible*, ed. Roger T. Beckwith and Martin J. Selman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 17.

animal slaughter and blood manipulation—via hyssop, a common cultic implement (Exod 12:22; cf. Num 14:4, 49)—creates strong resonances with the Levitical rites that were soon to follow.¹² While no Levitical ritual is precisely parallel to the Passover, the common elements suggest a family resemblance. This family resemblance consists in what Jay Sklar calls a “כֶּפֶר-principle”: the life of the lamb ransoms the otherwise-forfeit life of the firstborn Israelites.¹³ As will become evident in the discussion of Leviticus 17:11, this כֶּפֶר-principle lies at the beating heart of the Levitical code.

While glimpses of sacrifice are relatively few and far between until the inauguration of the Mosaic law, these canonical precursors have shed some light on the nature of Levitical sacrifice. Noah’s burnt offering served to assuage God’s wrath in the face of man’s recalcitrant, rebellious hearts. Yhwh ratifies his covenant with Abraham in a sacrificial ritual that foreshadows both the inauguration of the Mosaic covenant and, to some degree, the sacrifices which will maintain that covenant. And, most elaborately, the Passover features a sacrificial ritual which effects the redemption of Israel’s firstborn by means of the taking and symbolic presentation of an animal’s life. It seems that these precursors to Levitical sacrifice provide signposts that should orient one’s reading of the texts pertaining to Levitical sacrifice—signposts which contemporary scholars too infrequently heed.¹⁴

¹²Stephen A. Geller points out that the full list of cultic requirements concerning the animal, slaughter, blood application, feast, and so on directly anticipate the Levitical code (“Blood Cult: Toward a Literary Theology of the Priestly Work of the Pentateuch,” *Prooftexts* 12 [1992]: 114).

¹³“Positively, a כֶּפֶר is a legally or ethically legitimate payment that delivers a guilty party from a just punishment that is the right of the offended party to execute or to have executed. The acceptance of this payment is entirely dependent upon the choice of the offended party, is a lesser punishment than was originally expected, and its acceptance serves both to rescue the life of the guilty and to appease the offended party, thus restoring peace to the relationship” (Jay Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions*, Hebrew Bible Monographs 2 [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005], 60).

¹⁴After surveying some of the same material covered here, Geller concludes, “This sequence of events at key positions, each associated with a cultic regulation, keeps the blood-sacrifice-covenantal theme firmly in the reader’s mind until he reaches P’s Sinaitic cultic system” (“Blood Cult,” 114).

Covenantal Context

Perhaps the most significant and illuminating context for the Levitical cult is the covenant—that is, the Mosaic covenant ratified in Exodus 19–24. In one sense, this is rather obvious: the Levitical cult is inaugurated shortly after the ratification of the Mosaic covenant, and is an integral component of that covenant. As seen in chapter 1, for the author of Hebrews, the Mosaic covenant would not have been complete without its cult, and Hebrews’ sensibility here derives directly from the Pentateuch. Yet the significance of the relationship between covenant and cult demands that more be said. Hence, this section will briefly explore four interrelated theses regarding the relationship between the Levitical cult and the Mosaic covenant.

First, the cult is the ritual means by which the goal of the covenant is realized. Describing the purpose of the tabernacle, Yhwh declares, “I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God” (Exod 29:45–46; cf. Lev 26:11–12). The goal of God’s redemption of his people from Egypt—the goal, therefore, of the covenant to which that redemption led—is that God would dwell among his people and be their God.¹⁵ And the means by which this goal is realized is the ritual provision of the tabernacle and its concomitant cult. By dwelling in the tabernacle, Yhwh dwells among his people.¹⁶

That the cult realizes the goal of the covenant is also seen in the links between the tabernacle and the Sinai theophany. As many scholars have noted, the tabernacle

¹⁵Nehemiah Polen writes that “the purpose of the Exodus from Egypt . . . is theocentric: so that God might abide with (לְשֹׁכֵנִי) Israel, as if God had arranged the entire Exodus drama so that he might find a home among his people” (“Leviticus and Hebrews . . . and Leviticus,” in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham et al. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 216).

¹⁶This, of course, is a proleptic restoration of the fellowship with God which Adam and Eve lost in Gen 3. The story of Israel nests in the story of all creation. Polen again: “The dwelling of the Glory in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle is at least a partial reversal of the banishment of Adam from the Garden and the divorce of God from his human creation” (ibid., 216).

made the Sinai theophany permanent and mobile. Jared Calaway writes,

The presence of God, his glory, first depicted as a dense cloud upon Sinai, fills and dwells in the tabernacle. In both places the cloud ‘covers’ (וִיכַס תַּעֲנֶנּוּ; [Exod] 24:15; 40:34) the mountain and the tabernacle, and is depicted as God’s glory (כְּבוֹד; 24:16; 40:34); afterward, the Lord calls out Moses (וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה; 24:16; Lev 1:1). In addition to reflecting creation, or a reflection of creation, the tabernacle becomes a mobile Sinai.¹⁷

In a similar vein, Christophe Nihan argues that there is a “complex set of intertextual references” between Leviticus 16—the one yearly occasion on which the high priest may enter God’s dwelling in the Holy of Holies—and the Sinai theophany. Nihan argues that the censer-rite in Leviticus 16:2 and 13 constitutes “*a ritual reenactment of the inaugural revelation of Yahweh to Israel at Mt Sinai.*” He continues, “*Indeed, the initial theophany that accompanied the formation of Israel as a priestly nation in P (Exod 24; 40; Lev 9) has now become a permanent feature of Israel’s cult.*”¹⁸ And Stephen Geller points out concerning the fire of Leviticus 9,

Since the fire on the altar was . . . never allowed to die, it remained, like the ‘eternal light’ within the shrine, a permanent guarantee of the Presence. In a sense, the visible sight of the column of smoke arising from the sacred compound was, for all ages, a counterpart of the ‘pillar of fire and cloud’ that guided Israel in the wilderness. . . . The flames visible to Israel represent that One in the Holy of Holies visible only once a year to the High Priest, and then only furtively, as a side-glance through a cloud of incense.¹⁹

Together, these Sinai-tabernacle parallels amount to the conclusion that the relational goal of the Mosaic covenant—Yhwh’s intimate dwelling with his people—is achieved in the tabernacle and the rituals which maintain its sacred character.²⁰

¹⁷Calaway, *The Sabbath and the Sanctuary*, 41. Citing Exodus 20:24, Gary A. Anderson similarly writes, “Whereas prior to the revelation at Mt. Sinai, God had appeared to his chosen only sporadically, now this divine presence could be . . . made available on a regular basis” (“Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings (OT),” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman [New York: Doubleday, 1992], 5:877).

¹⁸Christophe Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus*, *Forschungen zum Alten Testament II/25* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 378–79, italics original; cf. Calaway, *The Sabbath and the Sanctuary*, 167–68.

¹⁹Geller, “Blood Cult,” 108–9.

²⁰In view of many of these parallels, and others he adduces, theologian Thomas F. Torrance

A second thesis relating covenant and cult: the covenant provides the relational and legal framework in which the cult operates. This is seen, for instance, in the simple fact that sacrifice is to be offered when one has transgressed “any of the Lord’s commandments about things not to be done” (Lev 4:2). What are these commandments? They are the stipulations revealed through Moses, the legal terms of the Sinai covenant. As Yitzhak Feder puts it, the laws of the Mosaic covenant function in this passage as an objective basis for determining guilt, whether or not the offender had malicious intent.²¹ And Gary Anderson’s comments on the issue are simple but on-point: “In P, sins are forgiven through a system of sacrificial atonement. The sins envisioned to fall within this framework are those acts of disobedience which are committed within the context of a larger covenantal bond.”²² The point here is simply that the Levitical cult provides the ritual remedy for sin and impurity *as defined by the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant*.

This point leads directly to the third thesis, which is implicit in the second: the Levitical cult provides the ritual means by which breaches in covenant fellowship may be repaired. The circumstances precipitating the investiture of the Levitical priesthood gesture toward this breach-repairing mandate: when the people sinned in the golden calf incident, the sons of Levi were the ones who carried out Moses’ mandate to execute those who sinned (Exod 33:25–28). In response, Moses said, “Today you have been ordained for the service of the Lord, each one at the cost of his son and of his brother, so that he might bestow a blessing upon you at this day” (v. 29). The Levites responded righteously to this paradigmatic rupture of the covenant, and as a result are invested with the responsibility to ritually maintain the covenant in the face of future breaches of loyalty.

labels the cult the “liturgical extension” of the covenant-inaugurating event of Sinai (*Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009], 15–16).

²¹Yitzhak Feder, *Blood Expiation in Hittite and Biblical Ritual: Origins, Context, and Meaning*, Writings from the Ancient World Supplement Series 2 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 107.

²²Anderson, “Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings (OT),” 5:882.

In other words, the cultic rites are oriented toward the maintenance of the covenant. As Meredith Kline writes,

The distinctly covenantal character of the sizeable segment of laws dealing with the cultus becomes evident when it is observed that in Israel the cultus absorbed various vital features of covenantal administration which elsewhere were not cultic but matters of state. The uniquely religious nature of the Yahweh-Israel covenant naturally and necessarily transformed the political into the cultic. . . . The sacrificial system of the cult was a means of making amends for offenses against the treaty stipulations and, in general, it was through Israel's participation in the cult that they most immediately experienced the covenant as a personal relationship with the Lord God.²³

Transgressions against the covenant incurred guilt for the offenders. This guilt endangered the offender's among God's covenant people, and ultimately endangered the status of God's people as a whole.

This brings the fourth thesis into view, which restates the third from a complementary angle: the Levitical cult addresses the defilement resulting from sin which, left unchecked, would result in the people suffering the covenant curse of expulsion from the land.²⁴ Non-sinful acts, such as childbirth, could incur impurity; the ritual remedy for these was usually a *חֲטָאָת*. Yet if this ritual remedy was neglected, the impure person would incur guilt and would be in danger of extirpation (*כרת*).²⁵ In addition, however, it is axiomatic to the Levitical cult that sin not only incurs guilt but defiles the offender, the land, and Yhwh's sanctuary. Leviticus 18:24–25 speaks of sin's defiling effect on the sinner and the land: “Do not make yourselves unclean by any of

²³Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 49–50.

²⁴On the relationship between impurity and sin in the Levitical cult see especially Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 21–42; David P. Wright, “The Spectrum of Priestly Impurity,” in *Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel*, ed. Gary A. Anderson and Saul M. Olyan, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 125 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 150–81; and the survey of literature in Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement*, 141–53.

²⁵“Only if a person fails to avail himself/herself of the ritual remedy does the condemnation of extirpation fall for failure to obey Yhwh's command regarding decontamination” (Gane, *Cult and Character*, 145).

these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.” And Leviticus 20:3 says that sacrificing one’s children to Molech defiles Yhwh’s sanctuary: “I myself will set my face against that man and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given one of his children to Molech, to make my sanctuary unclean and to profane my holy name.” And again, even ritual impurities not resulting from sin have the potential to defile Yhwh’s sanctuary if their ritual remedies are neglected. After prescribing the ritual remedies for various types of discharges, Yhwh declares, “Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst” (Lev 15:31). And again, if a person who has become unclean by corpse contamination “does not cleanse himself, that person shall be cut off from the midst of the assembly, since he has defiled the sanctuary of the Lord” (Num 19:13; cf. v. 20).²⁶

What does all this have to do with the relation between cult and covenant? Consider that for an individual, both sin and ritual impurity result in defilement for the individual, the land, and ultimately Yhwh’s sanctuary. If this defilement not redressed, the individual faces the penalty of extirpation: being “cut off” from among the people. So the cult’s ritual remedies for both sin and impurity provide the opportunity for these breaches of covenant fellowship to be addressed. If the individual offers the appropriate sacrifices as an expression of repentance (in the case of sin) and submissive loyalty to the covenant (in the case of impurity), then the individual will continue to enjoy the covenant blessing of dwelling with Yhwh. If the sinner refuses to repair the effects of his sin and impurity, he will be cut off.

²⁶In this respect, then, I agree with one of the central claims of Jacob Milgrom’s seminal article, “Israel’s Sanctuary: The Priestly ‘Picture of Dorian Gray,’” *Revue Biblique* 83 (1976): 390–99. See discussion in Gane, *Cult and Character*, 144–51, who concludes, “Milgrom’s conclusion with regard to Lev 20:3 and Num 19:13, 20 remains unrefuted: sins pollute the sanctuary from a distance when they are committed” (149).

This individual pattern is a microcosm for the fate of the nation of Israel as a whole. Again, Leviticus 18:26–29 reads,

But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you (for the people of the land, who were before you, did all of these abominations, so that the land became unclear), lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. For everyone who does any of these abominations, the persons who do them shall be cut off from among their people.

Note first that Yhwh is threatening national expulsion in return for defiling his sanctuary by their sin: the entire nation will be “vomited out” of the land as a punishment for their sins, just as the land vomited out the land’s previous inhabitants when Yhwh punished them for their sins (v. 25). This is the penalty of exile, being cut off from Yhwh’s place and presence. And this national judgment operates on the same rationale as that of an individual being cut off from the people. Note the וְ connecting verses 28–29: if the people defile Yhwh’s land they will be cut off from it, *because* everyone who commits these abominations will be cut off from the people. The cutting off of individual and nation proceed on precisely the same judicial basis.²⁷ And this cutting off of the nation is precisely the curse of the covenant (Lev 26:14–39; cf. Deut 28:15–68). If the Israelites scorned the cult, the curse of the covenant would fall upon them.²⁸

In this sense the Levitical cult is both thermostat and thermometer of Israel’s covenant relationship to Yhwh. By participating in the cult as an expression of repentant loyalty, Israel availed itself of the means for repairing breaches of the covenant which

²⁷Calaway, *The Sabbath and the Sanctuary*, 54.

²⁸Helpful here is Milgrom’s discussion of מַעַל as trespass against sancta and the violation of the covenant oath. Milgrom writes, “The two categories of *ma’al* are really one. Both trespasses are against the Deity. Moreover, trespass upon sancta is simultaneously trespass upon the covenant since reverence for sancta is presumed in the covenant relationship. . . . That destruction and exile on a national scale follow in the wake of the *ma’al* of oath violation is clear from the structure of the covenant itself (Lev 26:14 ff.; see explicitly Neh 1:5)” (*Cult and Conscience: The Asham and the Priestly Doctrine of Repentance*, Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity 18 [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976], 17–21; here 20–21). As Milgrom rightly argues, to violate the sanctuary is to violate the covenant, bringing the covenant curse upon those who show contempt for the cult.

Yhwh himself graciously supplied. Hence the cult is, as it were, a thermostat for Yhwh's covenantal dwelling with his people: proper participation in the cult ensured that Yhwh's sanctuary remained livable for him, and the land therefore remained livable for the Israelites. But the cult is also a thermometer of the covenant. The people's sins have cultic consequences, defiling the sanctuary of Yhwh. Therefore the state of Yhwh's sanctuary reflects the state of the people. And if the temperature gets too hot—that is, if the defilement of Yhwh's sanctuary reaches its tipping point—he will set his face against his people and expel them from their land.

To review, the Mosaic covenant provides crucial context for the Levitical cult in at least four senses: (1) the cult is the ritual means by which the goal of the covenant is realized; (2) the covenant provides the relational and legal framework in which the cult operates; (3) the Levitical cult provides the ritual means by which breaches in covenant fellowship may be repaired; and (4) the Levitical cult addresses the defilement resulting from sin which, left unchecked, would result in the people suffering the covenant curse of expulsion from the land. Covenant and cult are so intertwined as to be mutually inextricable. The cult maintains the covenant, and the covenant frames the cult.

Survey of Levitical Sacrifices

With these backgrounds sketched in, we may now turn to the portrait proper. This section will survey the various sacrifices prescribed in the Levitical code. The first thing to note about this survey is that it will be selectively succinct. That is, some of the sacrifices will be treated very briefly, sketching in only the basics of their ritual procedure and meaning. Other sacrifices will be treated in more detail. In general the principle guiding my degree of interest in a particular sacrifice is twofold. First, which sacrifices contribute most to understanding the whole system? Here, for instance, the **תִּשְׁבָּע** is crucial because of the role it plays in the Day of Atonement. Second, which sacrifices are most relevant for understanding Hebrews' appropriation of the Levitical

cult? This brief survey does not attempt to account for the entire book of Leviticus, or even its main themes. Instead, with an eye toward the exegesis of Hebrews, I am simply surveying the primary types of sacrifice offered, noting the contexts in which they are offered, and sketching something of the theological rationale for each. Without further ado, the following sacrifices will be discussed: the burnt offering (עֹלָה), cereal offering (מִנְחָה), peace offering (שְׁלָמִים), purification offering (חַטָּאת), and reparation offering (אָשָׁם).

The Burnt Offering

Instructions for the burnt offering (עֹלָה) are given in Leviticus 1:1–17 and 6:1–7.²⁹ Along with the cereal offering, the burnt offering was to be offered daily (Num 28:3, 6). Unlike the instructions for certain other offerings, the circumstances under which an individual should offer a burnt offering are not specified. To offer a burnt offering, an Israelite would take an unblemished male animal (including bulls, sheep, goats, or even pigeons), bring it to the entrance to the tent of meeting, lay his hand on the head of the animal, and slaughter the animal (Lev 1:2–5a). Then the priests would splash the animal's blood around the altar, skin the animal, cut it into pieces, arrange fire on the altar, and burn all the pieces of the animal on the altar minus its entrails and legs (Lev 1:5b–9).³⁰ The distinctive feature of the burnt offering compared with other animal sacrifices is that the animal is essentially burned in its entirety, instead of reserving some of the meat for the priest or offerer to consume.

While the text does not explicitly specify the purpose of the burnt offering, several cues, taken together, clarify the rite's theological significance. First, the burnt

²⁹Again, in the latter, verse numbers in the MT differ from the English versions. Where they do, I follow the MT.

³⁰For an overview of the performance of the burnt offering, see Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 51–54.

offering is said to “be accepted” for the offerer “in order to make atonement for him” (וְנִרְצָה לוֹ לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו; Lev 1:4). As noted in chapter 1, Jay Sklar has persuasively argued that the piel of כָּפַר, used in contexts of both sin and impurity, signifies the effecting of a כָּפָר, that is, a legally legitimate payment which delivers a guilty party from a just penalty that is the right of the offended party to execute.³¹ This understanding of “make atonement” (לְכַפֵּר) fits with, and is confirmed by, several other details of the text. First, an Israelite is instructed to bring a burnt offering to the tent of meeting לְרַצְנוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה (Lev 1:3). The English Standard Version translates this phrase “that he may be accepted before the Lord.” Wenham argues that the phrase refers to the general aim of the sacrifice, which is that the offerer would obtain peace with God.³² However, this phrase is parallel with וְנִרְצָה לוֹ in Leviticus 1:4, which clearly refers to the animal being accepted. And it may be best to understand the phrase in Leviticus 1:3 in light of its longer equivalent in Leviticus 22:20, בִּי-לֹא לְרַצּוֹן יְהוָה לָכֶם.³³ If this is so, then the referent of the third person pronoun in Leviticus 1:3 would be the animal, not the offerer, yielding the sense, “that it [the animal] may be accepted before Yhwh.” Yet even if this reading of the syntax is correct, verse 4 specifies that the animal “shall be accepted *for him*,” that is, for the offerer (וְנִרְצָה לוֹ), in order that it may make atonement for him. This dovetails perfectly with Sklar’s understanding of atonement as the effecting of a כָּפָר-payment. The offerer brings the animal to Yhwh in order that it would be accepted by Yhwh as a legitimate sacrificial payment on his behalf.

Another piece of evidence that the burnt offering functions as a legitimate payment to avert the exaction of a penal sanction is found in the repeated phrase רִיח־נִיחֹחַ

³¹Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement*, 44–101.

³²Wenham, *Leviticus*, 55.

³³Jacob Milgrom, review of *The Book of Leviticus*, by G. J. Wenham, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100 (1981): 628.

לִיהוָה, “a pleasing aroma to Yhwh” (Lev 1:9; cf. vv. 13, 17). This description of the burnt offering echoes the effect of Noah’s burnt offerings observed in Genesis 8:20–21 above.³⁴ As Frank Gorman comments, “This suggests that the sacrifice must be understood primarily by its effect upon Yahweh, and this as part of the *kipper* process.”³⁵ As seen in the goal of acceptance with Yhwh and rendering up a placating aroma to Yhwh, the עֹלָה is clearly offered in order to effect atonement by assuaging Yhwh’s wrath against sin.³⁶

The Cereal Offering

Instructions for the cereal offering (מִנְחָה) are given in Leviticus 2:1–16. Cereal offerings may be made of grain that is either uncooked (vv. 1–3) or cooked (vv. 4–10). To make a cereal offering, an Israelite was to bring some grain, either loose or as a cooked cake, pour oil and incense on it, and bring it to the priests (vv. 1–2). Next, a portion of the offering, with the oil and incense, was to be burned on the altar (v. 2).³⁷ The rest of the offering belonged to Aaron and his sons, for their consumption (v. 3). Like the burnt offering, the cereal offering constitutes a “pleasing aroma to the Lord” (vv. 3, 9). The cereal offering was offered daily, together with the burnt offering (Num 28:5, 8).

³⁴For a survey of texts in which the burnt offering similarly functions to avert the wrath of God (incl. 2 Sam 24:25, Job 1:5, and 2 Chr 29:7–8), see Wenham, *Leviticus*, 57–58.

³⁵Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 125.

³⁶Again Gorman is helpful: “The עֹלָה is then undertaken to insure that the wrath of Yahweh is averted and that the threat of a destructive reaction by Yahweh is negated” (ibid., 127). Thus, the textual details observed here argue against Gary Anderson’s contention that the atonement language in Leviticus 1:4 “is a vestigial usage because nowhere else does P spell out how this atonement would work” (“Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings [OT],” 878).

³⁷While I disagree with some of the conclusions he draws from this, I agree with Christian A. Eberhart’s judgment that “the burning rite on the altar is the element common to all types of sacrifice, as well as the feature that distinguishes the sacrifice as an ‘offering for YHWH’” (“A Neglected Feature of Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible: Remarks on the Burning Rite on the Altar,” *Harvard Theological Review* 97, no. 4 [2004]: 485).

The significance of the cereal offering is elusive even by Levitical standards. Outside of the Levitical code, מִנְחָה can simply refer to a gift, even a non-cultic gift.³⁸ More specifically, it can refer to a tribute paid by a vassal king to his overlord (2 Sam 8:6), or by someone seeking to ingratiate themselves with another whom they have cause to fear (Gen 32:19ff.).³⁹ Further, מִנְחָה can refer, as in Genesis 4:3–5, to “offerings” of various types.⁴⁰ So, while מִנְחָה is clearly a technical term in Leviticus 2, its broad usage elsewhere renders tenuous any inferences of meaning from usage alone. Yet there are at least some hints in the text as to the meaning of the rite. First, while honey and leaven are forbidden from being added to the מִנְחָה, the text explicitly indicates that salt is to be included (v. 13). John Hartley suggests, “Salt symbolizes the binding power of the covenant, a solidarity that prevents any animosity from breaking the bond of fellowship between the parties of the covenant.”⁴¹ Further, since the cereal offering typically followed the burnt offering, one could see it as symbolizing renewed loyalty and obedience to the Lord who forgives sin. Wenham writes, “It was an act of dedication and consecration to God as Savior and covenant King. It expressed not only thankfulness but obedience and a willingness to keep the law.”⁴²

The Peace Offering

The peace offering (שְׁלָמִים) was not a regularly scheduled sacrifice, but was offered whenever an individual Israelite chose. Leviticus 7:11–18 enumerates that someone could offer a peace offering as an act of thanksgiving, to fulfill a vow, or as a freewill offering. The primary instructions for the peace offering are given in Leviticus

³⁸Anderson, “Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings (OT),” 874.

³⁹Wenham, *Leviticus*, 69.

⁴⁰John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary 4 (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 29.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 33.

⁴²Wenham, *Leviticus*, 71.

3:1–17; the discussion here will highlight only what is most distinctive. First, the peace offering is an animal sacrifice that involves blood manipulation, namely, the priest throwing the blood against the sides of the altar (v. 2). Unlike the burnt offering, only the kidneys and various fat portions were burned (vv. 3–4); the breast and right thigh were given to the priest (Lev 7:31–36), and the rest of the animal was to be eaten by the Israelite offering the animal and those accompanying him. As one might expect, the theological significance of the peace offering is somewhat difficult to pin down.⁴³ As just noted, however, one of the distinguishing features of the peace offering is that it is consumed by the offerer and his companions. Although loose ends remain, this seems to suggest that the primary purpose of the peace offering is to express celebration and thankfulness to Yhwh.⁴⁴ This makes sense of the three circumstances in which the peace offering is offered, as well as its role on feast days and its prohibition on days of mourning.⁴⁵

The Purification Offering

The prescriptions for the purification offering (תִּטְּחֶה) are set out in Leviticus 4:1–5:13. The purification offering is also discussed in Numbers 15:22–31, something of its rationale is exposed in Leviticus 10:16–20, and a version of it features prominently in the Day of Atonement ritual. Because of this connection with the Day of Atonement, and because the purification offering has received considerable attention in recent scholarship, the discussion here will delve into more detail. The first question to ask is, how should we translate תִּטְּחֶה? The traditional translation, as far back as the LXX, is

⁴³Gary Anderson writes, “The translation and interpretation of this sacrifice has bothered scholars for many years” (“Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings [OT],” 878).

⁴⁴So, with some variation, Baruch A. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord: A Study of Cult and Some Cultic Terms in Ancient Israel*, Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity 5 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 27–35; Hartley, *Leviticus*, 41–42; Wenham, *Leviticus*, 76–81.

⁴⁵Anderson, “Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings (OT),” 878.

“sin offering” (περὶ ἁμαρτίας). Yet, as countless scholars have now noted, the חֲטָאת is offered in response to many cases of ritual impurity in which no sin is involved, such as childbirth (Lev 12) and bodily discharge (Lev 15). Further, when the verb חָטָא is used in conjunction with the חֲטָאת it always takes the piel stem, which carries the privative meaning of “decontaminate” or “purify” (e.g., Lev 8:15). Since these arguments were classically set forth by Jacob Milgrom over forty years ago, scholars have tended to translate חֲטָאת as “purification offering.”⁴⁶

But if the חֲטָאת is a purification offering, who or what does it purify? According to Milgrom, the חֲטָאת purifies not the offerer of the sacrifice, but the sanctuary.⁴⁷ Milgrom notes that the purgative blood is applied only to the sanctuary and its apparatus, not to the offerer of the sacrifice. Further, he argues that when the object of purification is something other than a person, the piel of כָּפַר can take a direct object, as well as the prepositions עַל or ב. Yet when the object of כָּפַר is a person, that person is never the direct object, but rather the object of the preposition עַל or בְּעֵד, both signifying “on behalf of.” Milgrom concludes, therefore, that the חֲטָאת is not carried out *on* the offender but *on his behalf*. Instead of the offerer, then, what is the object of the חֲטָאת purification? Milgrom answers,

The above considerations lead but to one answer: that which receives the purgative blood, i.e., the sanctuary and its sancta. By daubing the altar with the *hatta't* blood or by bringing it inside the sanctuary (e.g., *Lev.*, *XVI*, 14–19), the priest purges the most sacred objects and areas of the sanctuary on behalf of the person who caused their contamination by his physical impurity or inadvertent offense.⁴⁸

So, for Milgrom, the חֲטָאת purges the sanctuary of the impurity which the people’s sin or uncleanness has caused to accumulate there. Thus, for Milgrom, Israel’s sanctuary is like

⁴⁶Jacob Milgrom, “Sin-offering or Purification-offering?,” *Vetus Testamentum* 21 (1971): 237–39.

⁴⁷The next four sentences summarize Milgrom, “Israel’s Sanctuary,” 390–91.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 391.

Oscar Wilde's "Picture of Dorian Gray": "sin may not leave its mark on the face of the sinner, but it is certain to mark the face of the sanctuary, and unless it is quickly expunged, God's presence will depart."⁴⁹

These assertions have not gone unchallenged. Milgrom's student Roy Gane has offered the most comprehensive response to Milgrom's theory of the חטאת, challenging the contention that the חטאת purges the sanctuary and not the offender.⁵⁰ Instead, Gane argues that the חטאת purifies the offender and not the sanctuary.⁵¹ In a thorough study of every instance where כפר is used in conjunction with the purification offering, Gane demonstrates that the preposition מן is decisive for understanding the goal of the purification, and that in instances of both physical and moral impurity, the preposition has a privative force. Gane treats the common formula "evil ← מן ← offerer ← על" (e.g., Lev 4:26, 4:35, 5:10, 5:13, 16:34) as a unit, resulting in the sense, "He shall make atonement on his/their behalf *from* their sin." That is, the atonement effected benefits the individual in that it removes from them the evil they have committed.⁵² Gane further points out that the relative phrase אשר-הטא which sometimes follows the evil specified by מן demonstrates that "the moral evil remedied by the כפר process is an *act* rather than an impure *state*."⁵³ Thus, Gane concurs with Baruch Levine, who writes, "The object of the *hatta't*, usually translated 'sin offering,' was to remove the culpability borne by the

⁴⁹Ibid., 398.

⁵⁰The following summarizes the main thrust of Gane, *Cult and Character*, 106–29.

⁵¹For a brief response from Milgrom, see his article, "The Preposition מן in the חטאת Pericopes," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, no. 1 (2007): 161–63; for Gane's counter-response, see his article, "Privative Preposition מן in Purification Offering Pericopes and the Changing Face of 'Dorian Gray'," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 2 (2008): 209–22.

⁵²Gane, *Cult and Character*, 128; cf. Adolph Büchler, who argues concerning Lev 4:26 that "על refers to the person who committed the sin and for whom the priest is atoning, and points to the sin from which he is cleansed" (*Studies in Sin and Atonement in the Rabbinic Literature of the First Century* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928], 266).

⁵³Gane, *Cult and Character*, 123.

offender, that is, to purify the offender of his guilt.”⁵⁴ This is confirmed by Yhwh’s promise to forgive the sin of the offerer in response to their offering (e.g., Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35). That the verb סלח is always passive in these contexts indicates that Yhwh, not the priest, is the one who grants forgiveness, and that the כפר process is prerequisite to forgiveness, but does not automatically grant it.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, that forgiveness is the ultimate goal of the ritual process is one more indication that the goal of the חטאת is to remove the stain of sin from the individual and restore his relationship to Yhwh. In sum, Gane has argued—compellingly, I would suggest—that the חטאת purifies the one who offers it by removing either the impurity or the moral evil for which the sacrifice provides a ritual remedy.

But if the חטאת purifies its offerer, how exactly does this purification work? One place to begin an answer is with the dynamic properties of the חטאת: its blood renders whatever it touches impure (Lev 6:20–21). From where does it contract this impurity? The חטאת derives this impurity from the offerer it purges.⁵⁶ One ritual mechanism which illumines this transfer of impurity is the gesture of hand-leaning, in which the offerer lays his hand on the animal to be sacrificed (e.g., Lev 4:4, 24, 29). Probably a cogent explanation of the significance of hand-leaning involves at least two factors. First, hand-leaning identifies the owner of the animal and thereby indicates the

⁵⁴Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 18, cf. 23–24; cf. John G. Gammie, who writes that most purification offerings “purge from their sins or uncleannesses the *person* or *persons* in whose behalf they were presented” (*Holiness in Israel*, Overtures to Biblical Theology [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989], 39); and Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, who argues that “usual” purification offerings purge those on whose behalf they are offered (*The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 56 [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987], 93–94).

⁵⁵Gane, *Cult and Character*, 125.

⁵⁶Noam Zohar, “Repentance and Purification: The Significance and Semantics of חטאת in the Pentateuch,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107, no. 4 (1988): 609–18. Gane critiques a number of Zohar’s arguments but arrives at the same conclusion (*Cult and Character*, 164–76).

beneficiary of the ritual that is about to be performed.⁵⁷ Second, hand-leaning signifies the end of ownership, the legal transfer of the animal from the offerer's possession to Yhwh's.⁵⁸ Since the animal is identified as the offerer's and transferred to Yhwh's possession, with the result that the offerer is purged of his evil, it is necessary to infer that the animal contracts impurity by transfer of evil from the offerer. Thus Gane concludes, "It is not simply the blood that acts as a detergent. Rather, the offering material as a whole, whether it consists of an animal or grain item, absorbs evil from the offerer, thereby purifying him/her."⁵⁹

What happens to the impurity that is removed from the offerer? It is transferred to Yhwh's sanctuary when the priests sprinkle the חַטָּאת blood on the veil and daub it on the altar (e.g., Lev 4:5–7, 16–18).⁶⁰ By ritually applying the embodied defilement to Yhwh's sanctuary, the חַטָּאת creates a new state of affairs in which the defilement is no longer the offerer's problem, but Yhwh's.⁶¹ As John G. Gammie points out, this results in a reconfigured and even heightened version of Milgrom's "Dorian Gray" theory:

Under Milgrom's view the slate was constantly being wiped clean, so to speak, with every sin offering. Under the view argued above, the sanctuary for the priestly writers was far more a portrait of Dorian Gray than Milgrom's own theory would allow. The sin offerings purged the people from their sins, but only the sin offerings once a year on the Day of Atonement purged the tent of meeting and only the sin offerings at ordination purged the outer altar. Thus we may conclude: *Sanctuary and*

⁵⁷David P. Wright, "The Gesture of Hand Placement in the Hebrew Bible and in Hittite Literature," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106 (1986): 433–46. This interpretation coheres with the fact that there is no hand-leaning associated either with offering birds or grain items (e.g., Lev 5:7–13), since ownership would be obvious, or with prescribed calendric sacrifices (e.g., Lev 16:11, 15), since the law specified in advance who was to participate in the ritual and thus receive its benefits (see Gane, *Cult and Character*, 54–55).

⁵⁸Rolf Knierim, *Text and Concept in Leviticus 1:1–9: A Case in Exegetical Method*, *Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 36–40; Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 121–22.

⁵⁹Gane, *Cult and Character*, 176.

⁶⁰Zohar, "Repentance and Purification," 614–15.

⁶¹In Gane's happy turn of phrase, the imperfection is now in Yhwh's ballpark (*Cult and Character*, 177).

*sancta indeed reflected the state of the people's sinfulness precisely because the uncleannesses that the former accrued were not removed at every hatta't offering.*⁶²

But how can Yhwh allow his sanctuary to accumulate defilement from his people? What happens to that accumulated impurity? We will answer this question when we consider the Day of Atonement. First, however, we must round out this survey of Levitical sacrifice by examining the reparation offering.

The Reparation Offering

The final sacrifice to be considered is the זָבַח , or reparation offering. Instructions for this offering are given in Leviticus 5:14–26 and 7:1–7. Like the peace offering, in the זָבַח the animal is slaughtered, cut to pieces, and its fat is burned on the altar. Priests may eat of it, but not the offerer (Lev 7:2–7). And unlike any other sacrifice, the זָבַח is commutable to silver (Lev 5:15, 18, 25). The following discussion will first address the semantics of the זָבַח , then its significance.

According to Rolf Knierim, there are two basic foci in the Old Testament's use of the root זָבַח : “a situation of guilt obligation, in which someone gives something,” and a “situation in which someone is or becomes obligated to discharge guilt by giving something.”⁶³ In non-cultic contexts, the verb occurs with the sense of “incur guilt obligation” (Gen 26:20; Judg 21:22), and the adjective form means “be in a state of guilt obligation.”⁶⁴ Thus, for example, Joseph's brothers interpret Joseph's harsh demands as delayed recompense for their unresolved debt of guilt (Gen 42:21). Knierim explains, “The primary viewpoint is the situation of obligation that follows a judgment, the state of

⁶²Gammie, *Holiness in Israel*, 40–41, emphasis original.

⁶³Rolf Knierim, “ זָבַח ,” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 192–93.

⁶⁴Commenting on the verb, Feder writes, “. . . it implies an objective wrong committed that will bring about punishment” (*Blood Expiation*, 106).

being obligated, and its fulfillment.”⁶⁵ Thus, while עֵן conceptualizes the weight or burden of guilt, אָשָׁם highlights its obligatory restitution.

This means that the אָשָׁם sacrifice is a means of guilt-resolution via compensatory restitution. The fundamental significance of the אָשָׁם is that it compensates damages, chiefly damages to Yhwh. In support of this understanding, Milgrom points out that, unique among Levitical sacrifices, אָשָׁם is used with the verb שׁוּב, which in the hiphil means “restore.” Therefore, “The inference may at once be drawn that the context of the *asham* is a legal situation: damage has been done and restitution is ordered.”⁶⁶ Hence the common term “guilt offering” is partially correct, though possibly misleading. A term such as “liability offering” or “reparation offering” better conveys the idea of redressing the objective guilt-liability which results from sin.

Thus, the אָשָׁם portrays guilt-liability before God as a state of indebtedness. What is common to all uses of the root אָשָׁם is “the obligation, the duty, the liability, that results from incurring guilt.”⁶⁷ To redress this liability requires payment; the אָשָׁם constitutes this payment. Milgrom further explains this by pointing out that מַעַל—discussed briefly above—is “the legal term for the wrong which is redressed” by the אָשָׁם. And in every case, מַעַל denotes a sin against God (e.g., Lev 5:15, 21; Num 5:6).⁶⁸ The two primary categories of מַעַל are sancta trespass and violation of an oath. Both constitute trespasses against Yhwh: sancta trespass defiles his property, and oaths are sworn in his name.⁶⁹ Further, both types of מַעַל “call for a similar retribution. Both

⁶⁵Knierim, “אָשָׁם,” 192.

⁶⁶Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience*, 13–14. Milgrom strengthens this inference by noting that in the one place where the restitution is itemized, שׁוּב is used in parallel with שָׁלַם, meaning “repay,” and that the אָשָׁם is the only sacrifice commutable to silver.

⁶⁷Knierim, “אָשָׁם,” 193.

⁶⁸Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience*, 16.

⁶⁹Ibid., 17–20.

trespasses provoke God’s consuming wrath on the family and community of the sinner.” The debt sin incurs endangers the sinner: the individual first, and ultimately the whole people, since the destruction of exile follows the מַעַל of covenant violation.⁷⁰ Since מַעַל is what engenders the dangerous condition for which the שָׁטָט is a ritual remedy, the שָׁטָט averts divine retribution by means of a divinely warranted compensatory payment.⁷¹

This sense is clear in most of the situations in which the שָׁטָט is prescribed (Lev 5:14–16, 17–19, 23ff; 19:20–22; Num 5:5ff.). But it is difficult to see why the “leper” who is cleansed must offer an שָׁטָט (Lev 14:10–32).⁷² Milgrom proposes that the cured man has to offer an שָׁטָט because his leprosy may have been a divine punishment for מַעַל (cf. Num 12:9ff; 2 Kgs 5:27; 2 Chr 26:17ff.).⁷³ He argues further that the שָׁטָט is “the key sacrifice in the ritual complex for the purification of the leper” since, among other reasons, the שָׁטָט is never replaced by a less expensive offering, the leper’s שָׁטָט is not commutable to silver like the ordinary שָׁטָט, and the leper is daubed with the blood of the שָׁטָט rather than that of any other sacrifice.⁷⁴ Alternatively, Wenham suggests that the reparation offering could have compensated God for the loss of the “sacrifices, tithes, and firstfruits which the afflicted man had been unable to present during his uncleanness.”⁷⁵ While it is difficult to decide between these two suggestions, for present purposes it is sufficient to note that both preserve the sense of compensation bound up with the שָׁטָט.

⁷⁰Ibid., 21.

⁷¹Thus the שָׁטָט also fits Sklar’s description of the “כַּפָּר-principle” (*Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement*, 60).

⁷²After noting that the full complement of sacrifices are required in this instance (minus the always-voluntary peace offering), Wenham comments, “Only the presence of the reparation offering is unexpected in this list” (*Leviticus*, 209–10).

⁷³Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience*, 80–82.

⁷⁴Ibid., 82.

⁷⁵Wenham, *Leviticus*, 210.

The Day of Atonement

I now pick up a thread left dangling in the discussion of the **תִּשְׁטָף**: what happens to the impurity that accumulates in Yhwh's sanctuary as a result of the frequent **תִּשְׁטָף** offerings which transfer it there? The answer to this, along with a knot of other tightly related questions, is found in the yearly Day of Atonement ritual described in Leviticus 16. This section will survey the Day of Atonement's constituent ritual acts, explore the ritual significance of the Day of Atonement's most prominent rituals, the **תִּשְׁטָף** sacrifices offered on behalf of priest and people (Lev 16:6–19) and the goat sent away to Azazel (vv. 20–22), and will explain the unique significance of the Day of Atonement within the Levitical cult, a significance reflected in the day's heightened holiness.

Overview of Ritual Actions

Leviticus 16 opens by portraying the instructions for the Day of Atonement as a response to the death of Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1–2): Yhwh prohibits Aaron from coming into the holy of holies on pain of death, since that is where Yhwh dwells in a cloud (Lev 16:1–2).⁷⁶ But when Aaron does enter the most holy place—once a year, on the day prescribed (v. 29)—he shall assemble the necessary animals, wear special garments for the day, undergo purification rituals, and designate the roles of the two required goats by lot (vv. 3–10). Leviticus 16:11–28 then describes the main ritual actions of the Day of Atonement, including the core actions of the purification offerings and goat for Azazel (vv. 11–25), and tasks that are prerequisite to these two sets of activities (vv. 26–28). The chapter closes in verses 29–34 with prescriptions for all Israelites to abstain from work and engage in self-denial in recognition of the atonement that is being performed for them and for Yhwh's sanctuary.

⁷⁶This overview of the Day of Atonement's ritual actions closely follows the fuller discussion of Gane, *Cult and Character*, 217–21.

Included in the core section of verses 11–25 are five main rituals that are bound together as a unit. First are two elaborate, interwoven purification offerings on behalf of the priest and his family and on behalf of the whole community. These are interwoven in that the second begins before the first ends, and activities belonging to both rituals alternate (vv. 11–19). What is distinct about these purification offerings—which merge into one when the mixed bloods of both animals are applied to the outer altar (vv. 18–19)—is that their blood is applied to the inner sanctum, the holy of holies (vv. 12–16a). Next, the high priest verbally confesses the sins of the Israelite while leaning both of his hands on the goat designated “for Azazel,” and then the goat is led away into the wilderness (vv. 20–22). Following the “scapegoat” ritual, the high priest offers a burnt offering each for priests and people (v. 24; cf. vv. 3, 5). Only after the scapegoat ritual and the burnt offering are completed is the fat of the purifications offering burned. The scapegoat ritual and burnt offerings are nested within the performance of the purification offerings. Thus “all five rituals are structurally bound together as a unified system.”⁷⁷ Further, since the inner-sanctum purification offerings and the scapegoat ritual are only rites unique to the day, suggesting that the key to the day’s ritual significance is found in them.⁷⁸ This is confirmed by Philip Jenson’s observation that in the Levitical cult, only these two rituals engage the “two extreme poles of the spatial dimension of the Holiness Spectrum”—that is, the inner sanctum and the wilderness, the most holy and least holy places.⁷⁹ The Day of Atonement enacts a ritual merism: it removes sin from the most holy place and banishes it to the least holy place, thereby effecting decisive purgation.

⁷⁷Ibid., 219.

⁷⁸Geller, “Blood Cult,” 104–5.

⁷⁹Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 201–2.

Inner-Sanctum Purification Offerings

The nature of this decisive purgation will be teased out through examining the two distinctive rituals of the Day of Atonement: first, in this section, the inner-sanctum חֲטָאת offerings, then the scapegoat ritual in the next. The first thing to note is that, as indicated above, there are two חֲטָאת offered which merge into one. This is seen structurally in that their performance is chronologically interwoven: the second begins before the first is completed, and their blood is combined to sprinkle the altar (vv. 18–19). Yet the semantics of these חֲטָאת offerings confirms the point as well. In Exodus 30:10 and Numbers 29:11 this dual ritual complex is referred to by the collective singular term חֲטָאת הַכִּפּוּרִים, “the purification offering of purgation.”⁸⁰

What is the purpose of the inner-sanctum purification offerings? Repeatedly the text uses a piel form of כָּפַר followed by three parts of the sanctuary—the inner sanctum, outer sanctum, and outer altar—as either the direct object or object of the preposition עַל (vv. 6, 11a, 16, 17b, 18a, 19b, 20a, 30, 32–34).⁸¹ This indicates that the Day of Atonement purification offerings purify Yhwh’s sanctuary. This, of course, differs from the regular חֲטָאת throughout the year, which purge the offerer. A second difference from regular חֲטָאת is evident in the goal formula of 16:30, which describes the entire Day of Atonement ritual complex: כִּי־בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכָּפֵר עֲלֵיכֶם לְטָהֵר אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל חַטֹּאתֵיכֶם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה תִּטְהָרוּ, “For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the Lord from all your sins.” Recall that the regular חֲטָאת is prerequisite to forgiveness of sins (סָלַח; e.g., Lev 4:26), yet on the Day of Atonement, the ritual purgation of Yhwh’s sanctuary results in the people obtaining *purity* from their sins.⁸² Apparently, the regular חֲטָאת provided for forgiveness, yet left a remainder of defilement

⁸⁰Gane, *Cult and Character*, 221.

⁸¹For this and the following, see *ibid.*, 230–33.

⁸²Milgrom writes, “. . . as the sanctuary is polluted by the people’s impurities, their elimination, in effect, also purifies the people” (*Leviticus 1-16*, 1056).

which, if it did not exactly cling to the people, was nevertheless chargeable to their account. This dovetails with the earlier observation that the regular *חטאת* transfers impurity from the offerer to Yhwh's sanctuary. Now, with the cleansing of Yhwh's sanctuary, the people receive cleansing (*טהרה*) from their sins, a state of purity which extends beyond forgiveness.

This purgation of Yhwh's sanctuary is, in effect, a divine housecleaning.⁸³ Since the two *חטאת* are interwoven rather than executed sequentially, the blood manipulations for each are carried out in the three sacred spaces (inner sanctum, outer sanctum, and outer alter) in decreasing order of holiness.⁸⁴ The movement is equivalent to the way one would sweep out a room: start from the area farthest from the door, so that no dirt is backtracked into an already-cleaned area. And in this cleaning project, unlike at other times, the *חטאת* sacrifices function as ritual sponges to absorb evils from Yhwh's sanctuary.⁸⁵ Milgrom finds this unpersuasive: "... the *חטאת* blood changes its nature from a pollutant to a purifier; erstwhile impure blood now purifies the entire sanctuary and its sancta. The chameleonic ability of the *חטאת* blood to switch its nature *in media res* is an unsupportable proposition."⁸⁶ Yet Gane denies that purification-offering blood switches its nature. Instead,

Like blood in the circulatory system of a living body, it is always a carrier: Throughout the year (stage 1), it carries defilement away from offerers, thereby secondarily contaminating the sancta to which it is then applied. On Yom Kippur (stage 2), the blood of unique purification offerings is directly applied to the sancta to absorb the accumulated defilement and carry it away.⁸⁷

Since the Israelites have presumably been purged of their sins and impurities by *חטאת*

⁸³Gane, *Cult and Character*, 237.

⁸⁴Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 204.

⁸⁵Gane, *Cult and Character*, 240.

⁸⁶Milgrom, "Preposition *בן*," 163.

⁸⁷Gane, "Privative Preposition *בן*," 222.

sacrifices throughout the year, there is no *a priori* reason why תִּטָּחַת blood must in this case be seen as carrying defilement, or as unable to purge defilement. If the תִּטָּחַת is a suitable vehicle for regularly purging persons, it is not hard to see it as a fit vehicle for purging Yhwh's sanctuary on this unique occasion.

The Goat for Azazel

We now consider the rite performed upon the goat designated לְעִזָּאֵזֶל, “for Azazel” (Lev 16:8), the instructions for which are given in Leviticus 16:7–10, 20–22. Aaron is to present two goats to Yhwh at the tent of meeting and cast lots over them, designating one for Yhwh and the other for Azazel (vv. 7–8). The goat whose lot falls for Yhwh is presented as a purification offering, but the goat whose lot fell for Azazel “shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel” (vv. 9–10). This rite, then, takes place after the high priest has purged the tabernacle and the altar (v. 20). Aaron presents the goat before Yhwh, lays both of his hands on its head, and “confesses over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins.” But these sins are not merely confessed over the goat, but are placed on him: “And he shall put them on the head of the goat and sent it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness” (v. 21). In so doing, “The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness” (v. 22).

The first question these passages present is: who or what is Azazel? Interpretations number almost as many as interpreters.⁸⁸ Some have appealed to a putative etymology combining עֵז, “goat,” and אָזַל, “go away,” resulting in the meaning “escape-goat” (in older English, “scapegoat”). This is ruled out by the fact that, rather

⁸⁸For a brief overview of representative positions, see Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, New American Commentary 3A (Nashville: B&H, 2000), 216–17; for a more detailed survey and evaluation, see Gane, *Cult and Character*, 247–52, and the literature discussed therein. My assessment of the options follows Gane.

than being identified as Azazel, the goat is sent to Azazel (Lev 16:10, 26).⁸⁹ Others propose that the name refers in one way or another to the location to which the goat departed. This is rendered difficult by the fact that in verse 8, לַיהוָה and לְעִזָּאֵזֶל are set in parallel. The former clearly uses a לְ of possession to indicate that the goat to be used in the purification offering belongs to Yhwh. This strongly suggests that “Azazel,” like Yhwh, is a legal party capable of ownership. And, “The fact that Yhwh is supernatural could be taken to imply that Azazel is also some kind of supernatural being.”⁹⁰ The most common critique of this view is that, on this understanding, the Azazel goat becomes an offering to a demon. Yet the following discussion will demonstrate that this critique misses the mark: the Azazel goat ritual is not a sacrifice but a unique purification ritual which returns moral faults to their personified source.

The first crucial action in the Azazel goat ritual is the confession of the people’s sins the high priest makes while leaning both his hands on the goat’s head (v. 21). This action is explicated by the following clause: וְנָתַן אֹתָם עַל-רֹאשׁ הַשָּׂעִיר, “and he shall put them [that is, the sins he confesses] on the head of the goat.” Aaron’s act of confession and hand-leaning serves to concretize the people’s sins and place them onto the goat so that they may be sent away to the wilderness: וְשָׁלַח בְּיַד-אִישׁ עֹתִי הַמִּדְבָּרָה, “...and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness.” As Frank Gorman rightly argues, this is not a merely symbolic act:

The sins are ritually placed on the goat so that it may carry them into the wilderness (certainly not a symbolic carrying, which, if taken to extremes, might eventuate in a symbolic goat!). The high priest actualizes or concretizes the sins through confession and puts them on the goat, which carries them into the wilderness, away from the camp.⁹¹

In a similar vein, Gane comments that “nonmaterial evils are treated as if they can be

⁸⁹Gane, *Cult and Character*, 247–48.

⁹⁰Ibid., 250.

⁹¹Frank H. Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community: A Commentary on the Book of Leviticus*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 97.

loaded onto an animal and toted away on this ‘tote-goat’ as if it were material baggage.”⁹² This reveals the central purpose of the Azazel goat ritual: to banish all the Israelites’ moral faults (כָּל-עֲוֹנוֹתָם; v. 22) to the wilderness, where their effects can no longer trouble the camp.⁹³

Rather than being a sacrifice, the Azazel goat ritual is a cultic act of waste-disposal. By definition, a sacrifice was something wholly given over to Yhwh and his purposes; by contrast, this goat is designated for Azazel. The sole purpose of the Azazel goat is physically remove Israel’s sins from the premises.⁹⁴ Thus, while the goat is sent to Azazel, this is far from an offering—just the opposite: “The ritual is a singularly unfriendly gesture toward Azazel. It would be like sending someone a load of chemical or nuclear waste.”⁹⁵ That Azazel is indeed a personal, supernatural being is rendered more likely by Leviticus 17:7’s testimony to goat demons (שְׂעִירִם) dwelling in the wilderness (cf. Isa 13:21).⁹⁶ This gesture, then, represents Azazel as a source of temptation for the Israelites: the Azazel goat ritual bundles up the evils of the Israelites and ships them off in a package marked “return to sender.”

⁹²Gane, *Cult and Character*, 243.

⁹³“In confessing the offenses of Israel over the goat and sending the goat out into the wilderness, Aaron banishes the offenses of the people to a place outside the camp where they cannot again affect the sanctuary. Thus, the kipper-act must be understood in this context to include the act of banishment, and reflects a concern with the effects that sin has *on the people*, and not only its effects on the sacred precincts. It is clear, however, that in this ritual, these two aspects are inseparable” (Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 98).

⁹⁴In this respect the Azazel goat ritual is analogous to capital punishment, which purges (כָּפַר) the community by removing the evil from its midst (cf. Lev 16:10; 24:14, 23; Num 25:6–8, 14–15). Gane comments on Phineas’ slaughter of Zimri in Num 25: “This purgation did not benefit Zimri, even though he was an Israelite. Rather, the purgation (כָּפַר) was done upon him, the offender, and removed him from among the Israelites, just as purgation upon (כָּפַר עָל) Azazel’s goat, the vehicle of the offender, gets rid of the goat (Lev 16:10) and Israel’s moral faults along with it” (*Cult and Character*, 265).

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 250.

⁹⁶Baruch A. Levine, “René Girard on Job: The Question of the Scapegoat,” *Semeia* 33 (1985): 127–28.

The Need for and Purpose of the Day of Atonement

With the significance of the two central rituals of the Day of Atonement in view, we can now ask two interrelated questions: what is the overall purpose of the Day of Atonement, and why was it necessary? In answer to the first, one may say that the purpose of the Day of Atonement is to completely remove the stain of sin and impurity from Yhwh's sanctuary. This accumulation of evil in Yhwh's sanctuary is the result of at least two processes. First, as seen above, throughout the year **תָּאָחַד** offerings transfer sin and impurity from their offerer to Yhwh's sanctuary. Even in Yhwh's gracious provision of purgation, the people's sin leaves its mark on his dwelling. Second, Numbers 15:30–31 describes defiant, “high-handed” sins which merit cutting off from the people and for which no ritual expiation is provided. It would seem that the references to the **פְּשָׁעִים** which are purged from the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:16, 21) overlap significantly with this category of sins.⁹⁷ There are sins which defile Yhwh's sanctuary (Lev 20:3; Num 19:13, 20) and whose perpetrators may receive no expiation. The Day of Atonement, then, provides the yearly ritual remedy for this state of affairs in which Yhwh's sanctuary is defiled both by non-expiable sins and by the expiatory process itself.

The Day of Atonement sweeps Yhwh's house clean yearly so that its defilement does not reach the tipping point that would drive him away from Israel's camp and drive Israel out of its land.⁹⁸ As Milgrom puts it, “The merciful God will tolerate a modicum of pollution. But there is a point of no return.”⁹⁹ In this light, John Walton

⁹⁷Gane, *Cult and Character*, 294–300.

⁹⁸Commenting particularly on the need for inexpressible, defiant sins to be purged from Yhwh's sanctuary, Baruch J. Schwartz writes, “On the other hand, *even though* wanton sins cannot be eradicated, they must not be allowed to accumulate in the divine abode. They *must* be driven away, so that the divine Presence will not be driven away” (Baruch J. Schwartz, “The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature,” 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, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995], 21).

⁹⁹The full statement is illuminating: “Finally, why the urgency to purge the sanctuary? The answer lies in the postulate: the God to Israel will not abide in a polluted sanctuary. The merciful God will

describes the Day of Atonement as resetting the equilibrium of Israel's sacred compass.¹⁰⁰ The Day of Atonement restores Yhwh's sanctuary to a state of holiness so that Yhwh and Israel can continue to dwell together in fellowship.¹⁰¹ Ultimately, the Day of Atonement restores Israel's camp to the harmony of "creation regained" in which God dwells with man.¹⁰² As Stephen Geller puts it, drawing these themes together, "the Day of Atonement restores the shrine to its original state of purity on the day of dedication, when it was a fit repository of the Glory of the Presence. . . . Owing to the connection of the shrine to creation, the Day of Atonement may be said to leap over all history and return the cult to a closeness with God mankind experienced only before the rebellion in Eden."¹⁰³ The Day of Atonement purifies God's place so that he may dwell with his people in Edenic intimacy.

This, of course, already explains why the Day of Atonement was necessary.

But we can profitably restate the point in a more theological idiom: the Day of

tolerate a modicum of pollution. But there is a point of no return. If the pollution continues to accumulate the end is inexorable. 'The cherubim lifted their wings' (*Ez.*, xi, 22). The divine chariot flies heavenward and the sanctuary is left to its doom" (Milgrom, "Israel's Sanctuary," 396–97).

¹⁰⁰“Once each of the concentric zones of the sacred compass has been addressed, chap. 16 offers a description of the annual ritual that was designed to reset the equilibrium of the entire sacred compass. The rituals of the day were intended to disinfect sacred space from whatever desecration had occurred that had not been cared for by specific rituals throughout the year. The ritual prescribed for Yom Kippur features the high priest's moving into the center of the sacred zone, bringing the accumulated impurities out, and finally sending them outside the camp” (Walton, “Equilibrium and the Sacred Compass,” 301).

¹⁰¹Gorman writes, “It is the annual, communal ritual by which sacred space can be restored to a state of purity and holiness so that Yahweh can remain in the midst of Israel” (*The Ideology of Ritual*, 52).

¹⁰²Gorman also suggests that the Day of Atonement “must be seen primarily as a ritual of restoration—it serves to restore the community to its prescribed and founded state. Thus, restoration will include in this context the idea of re-founding—a return to the founded order of creation” (*ibid.*, 61). Similarly, Calaway traces the points of contact between the Day of Atonement as a “Sabbath of Sabbaths” (Lev 16:31), and the Jubilee year (Lev 25), which is a “Sabbatical of Sabbaticals”: “As the Day of Atonement, which is a ‘Sabbath’ and a ‘Sabbath of solemn rest,’ restores the temple to its original state of holiness, so the land’s Sabbath (also a ‘Sabbath’ and a ‘Sabbath of solemn rest’) restores the land back to its original state, allowing the divine presence to dwell among the people” (*The Sabbath and the Sanctuary*, 87). In other words, that the Day of Atonement restores creational order to Israel's cult is clarified by its parallel with the Jubilee, which restores creational order to Israel's land.

¹⁰³Geller, “Blood Cult,” 109.

Atonement reveals that there is a cost to Yhwh's kindness and demonstrates the justice of Yhwh's mercy. When Yhwh forgives his people's sins in response to the people faithfully offering the ritual remedy for those sins, he himself bears the harmful residue of those sins in his sanctuary, his "earthly administrative center."¹⁰⁴ Therefore, on the Day of Atonement, Yhwh

. . . has all effects of human imperfections—physical impurities, defiant sins, and forgiven sins—removed from himself, as enacted by the transfer of evils from his sanctuary and priesthood (16:16, 21). Since pollution of the sanctuary by forgiven sins (חטאות) represents Yhwh's responsibility for having forgiven guilty persons, removal of this defilement presumably signifies vindication of his justice with regard to the favorable decisions that he has granted them.¹⁰⁵

The Day of Atonement is an enacted theodicy: it demonstrates the justice of Yhwh's mercy. By cleansing his sanctuary, Yhwh clears his name.

So Yhwh graciously forgives his people's sin, and on the Day of Atonement vindicates his own holiness in doing so, yet the people themselves may not presume on that forgiveness. On the Day of Atonement, they must refrain from work, fast, and engage in ritual self-denial, in acknowledgement of the purgation being effected on their behalf (Lev 16:29–30). Those who do not enact their loyalty to Yhwh by honoring the Day of Atonement are cut off from the people (Lev 23:29, 31). Only those who show loyalty to Yhwh receive its benefits. This further demonstrates the justice of Yhwh's mercy, in that his lavish mercy is not extended to those who scorn his covenant, but to those who, by faith, are loyal.¹⁰⁶

The Forensic Logic of the Levitical Cult

The Day of Atonement's purpose of squaring Yhwh's mercy and justice

¹⁰⁴Gane, *Cult and Character*, 319.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 322; Jenson gestures in the same basic direction when he writes concerning the Day of Atonement, "It would be appropriate to have some sort of cultic ritual which acknowledges the implications for God of human sin" (*Graded Holiness*, 208).

¹⁰⁶For broader discussion of the themes treated in these two paragraphs, see Gane, *Cult and Character*, 305–54.

provides a natural transition to the final aspect of the Levitical cult this chapter will survey, namely, the forensic logic that runs through it. By “forensic” I mean matters pertaining to legal standing, righteousness judicially conceived, and punishment as judicial retribution. Many scholars deny or downplay the presence of these themes in the Levitical cult. For instance, Noam Zohar argues that the “notion of substituting ‘life for life’ in the sense of vicarious or ransom killing” is a misunderstanding of the cult.¹⁰⁷ And Eric Gilchrest, who rightly argues that the purpose of the scapegoat ritual is to decontaminate the Israelite camp, wrongly infers that this ritual in no sense appeases Yhwh’s wrath.¹⁰⁸ By contrast, this section will demonstrate that averting wrath is intrinsic to Levitical sacrifice, and that certain sacrifices accomplish this end by substitutionarily enacting on an animal the penalty due to its offerer. More than that, this section will establish that forensic patterns of thought in fact form a frame on which a variety of Levitical material may be woven together in conceptual harmony. In order to illustrate the forensic logic framing the Levitical cult, I will argue and illustrate four theses.

Sacrifice, Priesthood, and Wrath

First, sacrifices which accomplish כִּפּוּר are a response to the threat of divine wrath; indeed, the priesthood itself is established in order to avert divine wrath. The function of כִּפּוּר in averting wrath can be seen, first, in its use in non-cultic contexts. In Genesis 32:21, Jacob sends a gift ahead to Esau in hope of appeasing him (אֶכְפֹּרָה פָּנָיו). Proverbs 16:14 reads, “A king’s wrath is a messenger of death, but a wise man will appease it (וְאִישׁ חָכָם יְכַפֵּרֶנָּה).” In both instances, כִּפּוּר denotes assuaging anger, averting wrath.¹⁰⁹ Further, Numbers 17:11–13 (Eng. 16:46–48) and 25:11–13, while not cultic

¹⁰⁷Zohar, “Repentance and Purification,” 616n34; cf. 613n22.

¹⁰⁸Eric Gilchrest, “For the Wages of Sin Is . . . Banishment: An Unexplored Substitutionary Motif in Leviticus 16 and the Ritual of the Scapegoat,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 85, no. 1 (2013): 36–51.

¹⁰⁹Feder comments on these passages, “In these non-priestly texts, anger is the direct object of

texts per se, describe cultic-related activities and personnel averting wrath by means of כָּפָר. In the former passage, Yhwh has become infuriated with the Israelites because of their grumbling, and sends a plague to consume them. In response, Moses commands Aaron to put fire and incense in his censer, and וַיִּכָּפֶר עָלֵיהֶם, because wrath has gone out from Yhwh (Num 17:11). So Aaron did as Moses commanded, with the result that וַיִּכָּפֶר עַל-הָעָם (Num 17:12). The passage concludes: “And he stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was stopped.” In this passage, Aaron’s offering of incense appeases Yhwh’s just anger and averts the punishment he had begun to inflict on the people. The quasi-cultic act of offering incense served to atone for the people to assuage the wrath of Yhwh.

In Numbers 25, Yhwh’s anger is kindled against the people because of their worship of Baal, so he sends a plague to punish them (vv. 1–5, 9). Yet Phinehas executed the chief offenders, Zimri and Cozbi (vv. 6–8, 14–15), turning back Yhwh’s wrath from the people (הָשִׁיב אֶת-חַמְתִּי מֵעַל בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל; v. 11). Thus Phinehas made atonement (וַיִּכָּפֶר) for the people (v. 13).¹¹⁰ As a reward for his zeal, Yhwh grants to Phinehas and his descendants a covenant of perpetual priesthood. Gane points out the parallel here with the Levitical priesthood as a whole:

The case of Phinehas, a priest from the tribe of Levi, reminds us that his tribe had gained the right to serve YHWH at the sanctuary because they had loyally carried out his punishment on other Israelites who were running wild at the time of the golden calf episode (Exod 32:25-29). So the role of the Levites as cultic personnel served as an ongoing reminder of YHWH’s retributive justice.¹¹¹

This trail of texts connects the notion of כָּפָר as appeasement not just to the quasi-cultic act of offering incense, but to the grant of a priesthood which parallels the original grant of the Levitical priesthood. This conceptual chain strongly suggests that the sense of כָּפָר

כָּפָר, implying that כָּפָר signifies a means of assuaging anger, generally to avoid a life threatening danger” (*Blood Expiation*, 172).

¹¹⁰Ibid., 173.

¹¹¹Gane, *Cult and Character*, 331.

as appeasing wrath is woven into the fabric of the entire Levitical system.

The priests' role in appeasing Yhwh's wrath and averting the threat of death is also confirmed by their role in guarding Yhwh's sacred precincts, lest the people trespass and die. In the wake of yet another judgment from Yhwh, the people of Israel complain, "Everyone who comes near, who comes near to the tabernacle of the Lord, shall die. Are we all to perish?" (Num 17:12–13, Eng.). In response, Yhwh instructs Aaron that his house will "bear iniquity connected with the sanctuary" and with the priesthood (Num 18:1). The Levites are to join them (v. 2), so that they may keep guard over the tent and priesthood, so that no outsider encroaches (v. 4). The priests themselves are to "keep guard over the sanctuary and over the altar, that there may never again be wrath on the people of Israel" (v. 5).

Here Aaron's one-time role of standing between the living and the dead (Num 16:48, Eng.) is given permanent, institutional form as Yhwh describes the overall charge of the priests and Levites as that of guarding the sacred precincts against trespass by unauthorized Israelites. The priests and Levites must do this because to trespass on Yhwh's sanctuary is to evoke his wrath and die (vv. 3, 7). Gorman's conclusion is apt:

There is a consistent theme in these chapters that those who encroach upon the realm of the holy are liable to death. This is the response of Yahweh to encroachers who cross the boundaries of the sacred improperly. . . . The priests have stood in the breach between life and death and now live to act as mediators between the sacred and the non-sacred, and between life and death. Israel's existence depends upon the continued integrity of the sacred order, but to enter it without proper ritual safeguards is certain death.¹¹²

Again, as with the investiture of Phinehas, the threat of death from Yhwh's wrath plays a central role in this programmatic statement about the function of the priesthood. Their entire ministry is framed by the threat of death at Yhwh's hands if either they or the people encroach upon or mishandle Yhwh's sacred territory (cf. Lev 10:1–2). The institution of the priesthood is itself Yhwh's gracious provision to keep his own wrath at

¹¹²Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 134–35.

bay. Finally, since the priesthood is commissioned to avert wrath, and the central cultic verb כָּפַר denotes the appeasement of wrath in non-cultic and quasi-cultic settings, the burden of proof lies with those who would excise the notion of appeasement from cultic כָּפַר.

The “Blood Canon” of Leviticus 17:11

This concluding observation naturally leads to a consideration of the central כָּפַר text is the Levitical code, namely, Leviticus 17:11. Because this verse provides the most explicit account of the function of blood in the sacrificial process, it has been the subject of intense study and debate. Given the scope and interests of this study, the treatment here will be necessarily selective.¹¹³ Following and grounding a prohibition against the Israelites eating any animal flesh still containing the blood, Leviticus 17:11 reads:

כִּי נַפֶּשׁ הַבָּשָׂר בַּדָּם הוּא וְאֲנִי נָתַתִּיו לָכֶם עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְכַפֵּר עַל-נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם
כִּי-הָדָם הוּא בְּנַפֶּשׁ יִכָּפֵר

For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

In this section I will argue that Leviticus 17:11 speaks of the life of an animal, embodied in its blood, as the price which ransoms the lives of the Israelites; that is, sacrificial blood is the כָּפַר which effects כָּפַר.

There is a growing consensus among scholars that “the atonement referred to by the verb כָּפַר in Lev. 17.11 is characterized by ransom.”¹¹⁴ This conclusion is supported by the fact that the phrase עַל-נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם לְכַפֵּר occurs in only two other places,

¹¹³For detailed treatments with which I am in substantial agreement, see Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement*, 163–82; Baruch J. Schwartz, “The Prohibitions Concerning the ‘Eating’ of Blood in Leviticus 17,” in *Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel*, ed. Gary A. Anderson and Saul M. Olyan, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 125 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 34–66.

¹¹⁴Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement*, 168. Among those Sklar cites are Levine, *Leviticus*, 115; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 707–708; Schwartz, “Prohibitions,” 55; and Wenham, *Leviticus*, 115.

Exodus 30:15–16 and Numbers 31:50. Both passages refer to the offering of a monetary sum in the context of a census, with the idea that the Israelites redeem their lives at the specified cost. Milgrom points out that this connection between כָּפַר and כֹּפֶר is especially clear in Exodus 30:15–16, where the result of the כָּפַר-action is described as a כֹּפֶר נָפְשׁוֹ (Exod 30:12).¹¹⁵ Given the association of the phrase לְכַפֵּר עַל-נַפְשֵׁיכֶם with ransom (כֹּפֶר) in these two other contexts, the verbal phrase should be understood as “to effect ransom on their behalf” here as well.

With this in view, the logic of the verse as a whole may be briefly probed. A number of scholars have pointed out that the first two clauses of the verse each ground the prohibition against eating blood: first, the life of the animal is in the blood; second, Yhwh has given the blood for a unique purpose, namely, to perform the כָּפַר-rite upon the altar.¹¹⁶ The verse’s third clause combines the first two, asserting that the blood בְּנִפְשׁוֹ יִכָּפֵר. Yet Schwartz points out that the third clause does more than merely combine the first two: “It provides the logical connection between clause 1 and clause 2; it says that clause 2 is true *because of* clause 1. How does blood מִכַּפֵּר? בְּנִפְשׁוֹ.”¹¹⁷ It is the life of the animal, offered in the blood, which effects ransom for the offerer.

This raises the question of the meaning of the preposition בְּ in the phrase בְּנִפְשׁוֹ יִכָּפֵר.¹¹⁸ A *beth pretii* is grammatically possible, in which case the blood is said to effect ransom *in exchange for* the life of the offerer (cf. the commercial contexts of Gen 29:18, 37:28).¹¹⁹ But given how this clause ties together the preceding clauses, the referent of

¹¹⁵Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 708.

¹¹⁶Karl Elliger, *Leviticus*, Handbuch zum Alten Testament (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1966), 220; Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement*, 166–67; Schwartz, “Prohibitions,” 47.

¹¹⁷Schwartz, “Prohibitions,” 47.

¹¹⁸See the in-depth discussion in Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement*, 168–74. The conclusions here follow his.

¹¹⁹Emile Nicole argues for this view in Emile Nicole, “Atonement in the Pentateuch: ‘It Is the Blood That Makes Atonement for One’s Life’,” in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical &*

בַּנֶּפֶשׁ is much more likely the animal's life than the offerer's.¹²⁰ A second possibility is *beth essentiae*, which results in the sense, "it is the blood, *as* life, that effects expiation." This is grammatically possible and contextually plausible. The third view, *beth instrumenti*, is favored by most commentators, and renders the phrase "it is the blood that makes atonement *by means of* the life."¹²¹ The main support for this view is that in the vast majority of the other occurrences of the phrase כֶּפֶר בְּ, the preposition functions instrumentally. So while all three views are grammatically possible, the latter two fit the flow of the whole verse better, and the last one, *beth instrumenti*, has most external support. However, nothing decisive is at stake here, since all of these judgments regarding the preposition are compatible with the sense of כֶּפֶר as ransom noted above.¹²²

Given that the animal's life is offered in place of the offerer's life, it is clear that the outcome to be averted in the כֶּפֶר-rite is judicially mandated death. Milgrom, for instance, concludes, "Thus Lev 17:11 implies that human life is in jeopardy unless the stipulated ritual is carried out."¹²³ In other words, Leviticus 17:11 embodies the talionic principle of נָפֶשׁ תַּחַת נָפֶשׁ, life for life (Lev 24:18).¹²⁴ The offerer's own life is forfeit, so he must present another life in place of his own. The idea of substitution, therefore, is a necessary corollary of the talionic principle operative here: instead of receiving punishment on talionic grounds, the one who offers a blood sacrifice thereby ransoms his life, legitimately escaping the punishment due to him. Yet even as this talionic principle

Practical Perspectives, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 36–41.

¹²⁰Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement*, 170.

¹²¹Scholars who hold this view include Elliger, *Leviticus*, 218; Schwartz, "Prohibitions," 47; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 706; Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering*, 105–106; and Hartley, *Leviticus*, 261.

¹²²Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement*, 170–73.

¹²³Jacob Milgrom, "A Prolegomenon to Leviticus 17.11," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90 (1971): 150.

¹²⁴Feder, *Blood Expiation*, 204; Elliger, *Leviticus*, 228.

is operative in blood sacrifice, it is also mitigated; Yhwh chooses to accept a lesser price, an animal's life, in place of the human life.¹²⁵ This is in keeping with Sklar's observation's regarding the nature of a כִּפּוּר:

In this regard the life (נִפְשׁ) of the offerer is *ransomed* by means of the life (נִפְשׁ) of the animal, which is a payment that the offended party (the LORD) has agreed to (and indeed, provided), which is less than the penalty the offerer originally expected (viz. their own life), and which both rescues the offerer and restores peace to their relationship with the LORD.¹²⁶

In sum, according to Leviticus 17:11, the sacrificed animal ransoms the life of the offerer by means of the life embodied in its blood.

But how broadly relevant is the theological rationale provided by this verse?

Both Jacob Milgrom and Herbert Brichto have recently challenged the prevailing view that Leviticus 17:11 articulates a general principle relevant to all blood sacrifices. Instead, these scholars argue that the rationale offered here applies only to the peace offering.¹²⁷ However, both scholars' arguments fail to account for the fact that the prohibition in verse 10 speaks against eating any blood, not merely blood in the peace offering. Further, the twofold rationale offered by verse 11 is universally relevant: it specifies the only legitimate human use Yhwh has assigned for blood, namely sacrificial offering, which rules out any other use. There is, then, no compelling contextual reason to limit the focus of Leviticus 17:11 to the peace offering.¹²⁸ To put it positively, Leviticus 17:11 is a broadly applicable rationale which evidences a clear forensic logic at the very heart of the cult. Yhwh has graciously condescended to accept blood offerings in the place of judicially forfeit human lives, because the life-bearing property of blood renders it a fit

¹²⁵Schwartz, "Prohibitions," 56–57.

¹²⁶Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement*, 173–74.

¹²⁷Milgrom, "Prolegomenon," 149–56; Herbert Chanan Brichto, "On Slaughter and Sacrifice, Blood and Atonement," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 47 (1976): 19–28.

¹²⁸See the detailed analysis of Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement*, 174–81.

medium of exchange.¹²⁹

Sin-Bearing

Another component in the Levitical cult's forensic frame is the pervasive concept of sin-bearing. The phrase **נשא עון** treats sin metaphorically as a burden to be borne.¹³⁰ It envisions an act of sin as creating a load that, as it were, rests on the shoulders of the sinner, unless and until someone or something else can bear it for him. Thus the phrase can be used in two basic ways: to denote a sinner's state of objective, unrelieved guilt, and to refer to another's assumption of that burden with the result that it no longer rests on the sinner. Baruch Schwartz's summary is helpful:

When the sinner himself 'bears' his sin, he *may* suffer its consequences if such there be. In this usage, the phrase is a metaphor for the sinner's unrelieved guilt. . . . However, when and if another party—most often, but not necessarily, God—'bears' the sinner's burden, it no longer rests on the shoulders of the wrongdoer; the latter is relieved of his load and of its consequences, once again if such there be. In this second usage, the "bearing" of the sin by another is a metaphor for the guilty party's release from guilt. The phrase has two *uses*, but only one *meaning*.¹³¹

Therefore, contrary to scholarly consensus, **נשא עון** is not part of a broader trend in which terms for sin also convey sin's punishment. Rather, **נשא עון** denotes a state of liability to punishment.¹³²

The next question to answer is, "In cultic contexts, who bears sin, and how?" First, people bear their own sin when they break any of Yhwh's laws. Leviticus 5:1 is paradigmatic in this regard: one who witnessed a crime, heard an adjuration to testify, and failed to do so will bear his sin (**וְנָשָׂא עוֹנוֹ**). He is thus in "a dangerous state of bearing his own culpability" unless and until "he is relieved of it through sacrificial expiation

¹²⁹Feder, *Blood Expiation*, 203–204.

¹³⁰The treatment here is indebted to Schwartz, "The Bearing of Sin," 3–21.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, 9.

¹³²*Ibid.*, 8–9.

officiated by a priest (v. 6).”¹³³ Leviticus 19:17 offers an interesting variation on this: “You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin (וְלֹא-תִשָּׂא עָלֶיךָ חֲטָא) because of him.”¹³⁴ Here the verb נִשָּׂא is used, but its object is חֲטָא, the more generic term for sin. This evidently synonymous version of the idiom recurs in Leviticus 22:9 and Numbers 18:32, as well as in Isaiah 53:12.¹³⁵ What all of these instances of sin-bearing have in common is that the sinner enters a state of guilt and liability to punishment through transgressing Yhwh’s commands. A crucial point to note here is that bearing sin denotes a state of judicial liability to punishment. The metaphor of sin-as-burden evidences a forensic conception of guilt liability: sin evokes Yhwh’s displeasure, and the judicially specified consequences of that displeasure hang over a sinner’s head unless and until someone can remove them for him.¹³⁶

Second, in a number of places the priests are said to bear sin for the people’s sake. The most important of these is Leviticus 10:17, where priests are said to bear the sin of the congregation (לְשֵׂאת אֶת-עֹן הָעֵדָה) by eating the purification offering (אֶת-הַחֲטָאֹת). This verse has generated no small debate, but the following support an exegesis in which the priests bear sin by eating the flesh of the purification offering.¹³⁷ First, in the clause

¹³³Gane, *Cult and Character*, 102. Similar instances of the phrase occur in Lev 5:17, 17:16, 20:17, 20:19, 20:20, 24:15; Num 5:31, 15:31.

¹³⁴See Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 1646–50, for detailed exegesis of the verse.

¹³⁵Another interesting variation on this pattern, this time conceptual rather than lexical, is found in Numbers 30:16 (Eng. v. 15): a husband who initially foregoes his right to nullify his wife’s vow but later prevents her from fulfilling it “shall bear her iniquity” (וְנִשָּׂא אֶת-עֲוֹנָהּ). Here the husband incurs guilt along with his wife, since he is responsible for her failure to keep her word. See Schwartz, “The Bearing of Sin,” 12.

¹³⁶Feder (*Blood Expiation*, 80) notes parallels between sin-bearing and phrases in the vein of “his blood is on him,” concluding, “These idioms refer to a situation where one is culpable for one’s own demise.”

¹³⁷For extensive exegesis and interaction with opposing arguments, see Gane, *Cult and*

preceding the mention of sin-bearing, the pronominal suffix **הוא** and the direct object marker with pronominal suffix **אתה** both refer back to the portion of the purification offering which the priests were enjoined to eat in the sacred precincts. That the eaten portion of the purification offering is in view, rather than the whole ritual, is evident in that **אֶת־הַחֹטֵאֵת** is the direct object of the verb **אָכְלֶתֶם**. Second, in the phrase **לִשְׂאֵת אֶת־עֹן** in Leviticus 10:17b, the preposition **לְ** most naturally designates purpose.¹³⁸ That is, the purification offering has been given to the priests to eat *in order that* they may bear the sin of the congregation, to make atonement for them before Yhwh. This indicates “that the eating serves as the activity vehicle for priestly bearing of **עֹן** rather than simply as a perquisite for earlier bearing of officiating responsibility.”¹³⁹ Thus, by eating the purification offering, the priests of Israel bear the culpability of the congregation.

A handful of parallel texts clarify what this priestly sin-bearing entails. First, consider Numbers 18:1, in which Aaron and his sons bear the iniquity (**תִּשְׂאוּ אֶת־עֹן**) of the sanctuary and the priesthood (**בְּהִנָּתְכֶם . . . הַמִּקְדָּשׁ**). As noted above, this passage is an answer to the people’s fearful exclamation, “Everyone who comes near, who comes near to the tabernacle of the Lord, shall die. Are we all to perish?” (Num 17:13, Eng.). Because of their divine appointment, the priests are able to do what the people cannot, namely, enter the sacred precincts with impunity—provided they do so in the proper state, according to Yhwh’s instructions. In context, therefore, the phrase **תִּשְׂאוּ אֶת־עֹן** seems to refer to the priestly task of bearing the sin of the congregation, as well as the priests’ culpability for the congregation’s trespassing on the sacred precincts (Num 18:2, 4–5, 7). Because the priests are appointed to bear sin, the people may dwell safely with Yhwh in

Character, 91–105. The treatment here follows his closely. See also Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement*, 93–95.

¹³⁸Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering*, 48.

¹³⁹Gane, *Cult and Character*, 101. Note Gane’s “simply.” Along with Gane (*ibid.*, 69–70), I affirm that the purification offering is a priestly prebend, in addition to serving as a postrequisite component of the expiatory process (Lev 6:19[26], 22[29], 7:6).

their midst. Yet precisely because the priests are appointed to bear sin, they themselves incur liability when anyone encroaches upon the sacred precincts or sacred gifts which belong to Yhwh.

In Numbers 18:23, the Levites are said to *ישאו עונם* through their service in the tent of meeting. Immediately prior, the Levites were said to serve in the tent of meeting (v. 21) so that the people of Israel would not come near the tent of meeting, lest they bear sin and die (*אֶל־אֱהֹל מוֹעֵד לִשְׂאת חַטָּא לָמוּת*; v. 22). The Levites' sin-bearing is the alternative, and the solution, to the people's sin-bearing.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, the potentially ambiguous third person plural pronominal suffix in verse 23 refers to the Israelites' sin, not the Levites'.

In what sense can the Levites be said to bear the sins of the people? A final passage may clarify the matter. In Exodus 28:36–37, Moses is instructed to craft a gold plate and fasten it on the front of Aaron's turban. Verse 38 reads, "It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall bear any guilt from the holy things (*וְנָשָׂא אֶהְרֹן אֶת־עֹן הַקִּדָּשִׁים*) that the people of Israel consecrate as their holy gifts. It shall regularly be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord." Here Aaron is said to bear guilt from that which the Israelites consecrate. Presumably the guilt results from imperfections which, though overlooked by offerer and priest alike, may nevertheless be visible and displeasing to Yhwh. Aaron bears this guilt by virtue of the gold plate on his turban, a token of priestly holiness. As a result, the people's gifts are accepted by Yhwh. Taken together, these passages illustrate the concept of priestly immunity.¹⁴¹ By virtue of their uniquely holy status, the priests (and Levites) are able to absorb liability which otherwise would cling to the people.

¹⁴⁰For brief comment see Schwartz, "The Bearing of Sin," 12.

¹⁴¹On which see Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 623, 638–39, 1048.

Finally, Yhwh declares that he himself bears his people's sin. In his paradigmatic self-revelation to Moses, Yhwh proclaims that he maintains covenant loyalty to thousands, **נָשָׂא עֹן וּפְשַׁע יִרְחָטָהּ** (Exod 34:7; cf. Num 14:18, Isa 33:24, Hos 14:3). Instead of wiping out his people for their transgressions, Yhwh himself takes on the burden of their sin. The parallels with Leviticus 10:17 should not be overlooked. Just as in his covenant loyalty Yhwh bears his people's sin, implying forgiveness,¹⁴² so Yhwh's priests bears the congregation's sin as part of the expiatory process whose ultimate result is forgiveness (cf. Lev 4:20, 26, etc.). Thus Klaus Koch observes that the use of the term **עֹן** in Leviticus 10:17 "is one example among many demonstrating that the legislative concerns of the Priestly document focus on institutionalizing God's own activity in removing guilt."¹⁴³ With the proviso that the guilt is borne rather than "removed," this is an illuminating observation. As Milgrom puts it in his comments on Leviticus 10:17, the priest "serves as a divine surrogate on earth."¹⁴⁴ The priest is Yhwh's representative. He is part of the divinely ordained, institutional means by which Yhwh bears his wayward people's sin.

In brief, then, the phrase **נָשָׂא עֹן** refers to bearing the culpability that results from disobeying Yhwh's commands. This state renders one liable to punishment, even death—unless, that is, someone or something else bears the culpability instead. Further, in cultic and cultic-related contexts, sinners bear their own guilt upon commission of sin; the priests bear the people's sin in their cultic mediation, especially through consuming the purification offering; and God himself bears his people's sin, that is, he forgives it.

All of these related uses of the concept of sin-bearing evidence a type of

¹⁴²So all major translations.

¹⁴³Klaus Koch, "עֹן," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 559.

¹⁴⁴Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 623.

forensic logic. Guilt-liability is an objective state resulting from disobedience to Yhwh's law. The very objectivity of this state is what enables it to be metaphorically conceived as a burden to be borne, or, alternatively, a burden to be lifted from one set of shoulders and transferred to another. Thus the notion of sin-bearing attests not only to guilt-liability's objectivity, but to its transferability. By the grace of Yhwh, the priests and even Yhwh himself bear the people's sin, so that the people bear it no more.

Impurity: Both “Biological” and “Legal”

A final aspect of the Levitical cult's forensic logic to note is that the concept of impurity is both “biological” and “legal.” Both terms are in scare quotes here to note that both have metaphorical elements.¹⁴⁵ Impurity is “biological” in that it is conceived of as a quasi-physical, objective state. Sins defile Yhwh's sanctuary (Lev 15:31, 20:3; Num 19:13, 20); even from afar, they pollute it like a sewage spill pollutes a city block. Impurity's “biological” nature is further seen in its cleansing by material substances at a physical structure. On the other hand, impurity is also “legal” in that whether or not something is impure occasionally depends on the pronouncement of a priest. For instance,

A scale-diseased (“leprous”) house contaminates all that is contained in it, but this contamination does not take effect until the priest inspects the house and verifies that it is, in fact, ritually impure. Anything removed from the house before that point is exempt from defilement (Lev 14:36). So, although this pollution has a physical manifestation (cf. vv. 34–35), its “contagious” effect on contents of the house is legal rather than physical in nature.¹⁴⁶

In other words, in this case the state of impurity depends on the legal verdict of the priest.¹⁴⁷ As Gorman comments concerning the broader regulations surrounding scale disease, the priest's pronouncement is “delocutive”: the words effect they state which

¹⁴⁵This discussion follows Gane, *Cult and Character*, 160–62.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁴⁷This is a more satisfying explanation of the passage than Milgrom's equation of cleansing and exorcism (Milgrom, “Red Cow,” 92).

they pronounce.¹⁴⁸ In this sense, then, even the distinctly cultic notion of impurity is not opposed to or incommensurate with forensic conceptions, but in fact depends on them. Treating the consequences of sin in general (which overlaps with, though is not identical to, impurity), Gane argues, “The ‘legal’ aspect has quasi-biological ramifications, and the ‘biological’ is at the same time legal.”¹⁴⁹ These conceptions of sin’s consequences are not disparate attempts to account for the same reality, but complementary facets of the same reality—indeed, at times, they are mutually interpreting.

This section has investigated four features of the forensic framework informing the Levitical cult: priesthood and sacrifice as responses to the threat of wrath, the “ransom” concept operative in the blood canon of Leviticus 17:11, the pervasive concept of sin-bearing as (transferable) guilt-liability, and the mutually interpreting notions of impurity as “biological” and “legal.” In complementary ways, these four features of the Levitical cult demonstrate that Yhwh’s judicial displeasure at the breaking of his law is an immovable fixture in the logic of his cult. Further, both the penalties for sin and its ritual remedies operate on a logic that can rightly be dubbed “forensic”: the cult is never far from the courtroom, especially since the law itself was physically present within the ark of the covenant (Exod 25:16, 21; 40:20).¹⁵⁰ In the Levitical code, the cult accomplishes judicial ends: it transfers the burden of guilt from the people to Yhwh’s appointed delegates, and its proper performance results in a right standing before Yhwh and within the community.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted a reading of Levitical sacrifice, a cohesive though

¹⁴⁸Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 156–57.

¹⁴⁹Gane, *Cult and Character*, 160.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 161.

far from exhaustive portrait of the whole. The Levitical cult is rooted in creation and proleptically restores the creational equilibrium that was lost when Adam sinned. Its canonical precursors demonstrate that sacrifice can turn away the wrath of Yhwh. Its covenantal context indicates that the goal of the cult is the realization and maintenance of covenant fellowship between Yhwh and his people. Its diverse sacrifices demonstrate a range of functions and address a variety of ritual and moral problems in the life of the community. The Day of Atonement, the most solemn yearly cultic activity, decisively purges Yhwh's dwelling place of the people's sins and impurities, thereby vindicating Yhwh's holiness and squaring his mercy with his justice. Finally, as evident in the links between sacrifice, priesthood, and wrath, the "blood canon" of Leviticus 17:11, the concept of sin-bearing, and the "biological" and "legal" nature of impurity, forensic concepts serve as a frame for many key aspects of cultic practice.

All of these conclusions are important for understanding Leviticus in its own right. But this study has the added goal of preparing the way for an examination of Hebrews' cultic theology that is informed by a more detailed account of Levitical sacrifice. So, the brief concluding chapter to follow will briefly summarize some of the relevance of this study's findings to Hebrews, and then trace trajectories and possible pitfalls involved in moving from Leviticus back to Hebrews.

CHAPTER 3

FROM LEVITICUS TO HEBREWS

The preceding chapter's conclusions provide a few clear markers to direct the path from Leviticus back to Hebrews, but they also point out some hazards and pitfalls along the road which call for careful attention. In this chapter, therefore, I will first summarize a few answers this survey of Levitical sacrifice brings back to the text of Hebrews, then probe a number of questions it raises as well. As such, this concluding chapter is not so much a substantive study as a sketch for future work.

Answers

Since this study first gauged Hebrews' interest(s) in Levitical sacrifice, the detailed survey of the same in chapter 2 brings greater clarity and definition to Hebrews' appropriation of the Levitical cult. Chapter 1 noted that Hebrews conceives of Levitical sacrifice as purging God's people and place: the ritual mix of blood and ash sanctified persons' flesh (Heb 9:13–14), and the precursors to Christ's sacrifice purified the earthly copies of the heavenly sancta (9:23). Chapter 2's discussion of the purification offering demonstrated that this sacrifice, at least, purified its offerer from the sin or impurity which clung to him, resulting in forgiveness and ritual purity.

Further, chapter 2, following Milgrom, briefly noted that the red cow ritual of Numbers 19 is referred to as a חטאת, and operates on the same logic. Thus, Hebrews' conflation of (presumably) the purification and the red cow ritual is not arbitrary; nor does it demonstrate a lack of concern for the distinct function and concrete details of various sacrificial acts. Instead, it is more plausible to suggest that Hebrews perceived the identical ritual logic evident in both rites, and was likely aware that the same title was

applied to both, so that Hebrews' reference here applies equally to both rites and indeed succinctly summarizes the ritual logic they share in common.

Regarding the purging of God's place, chapter 2's study of the Day of Atonement confirms that this idea is indeed central to this key Levitical rite. The Day of Atonement purification offerings purge the Holy of Holies, the inner altar, and the outer altar (Lev 16:16, 18, 24). The entire operation may be accurately described as a divine house-cleaning, yearly sweeping out the Israelites' accumulated sins and impurities, and restoring Yhwh's house—and therefore his intimate dwelling among his people—to a state of equilibrium. Thus, chapter 2's study of the Day of Atonement furnishes a more detailed understanding of what Hebrews means when it refers to the purification of the earthly worship apparatus (Heb 9:23).

Chapter 2 also establishes that, in Leviticus at least, forensic logic is not alien to the cult but in fact pervades it and underpins it in key ways. This suggests that students of Hebrews should not treat forensic and cultic concepts as incommensurate or opposed, but instead should probe the epistle for ways in which forensic logic may be integral to Hebrews' cultic exposition of the death of Christ. Two examples of the former strategy suffice for illustration. In his comments on ἄφεσις in 9:22 William Johnsson asserts that “‘forgiveness’ is a category outside the conceptual scheme of Hebrews.”¹ In other words, because of Hebrews' preoccupation with cultic concepts, forgiveness should be regarded as simply foreign to its concerns. Yet chapter 2's study of the purification offering has demonstrated that, far from being alien to the cult, forgiveness is in fact the goal of the proper performance of the sacrifice (Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16, 18, etc.). And the same forgiveness formulas are used in conjunction with the guilt offering (Lev 6:7 [Eng.

¹William G. Johnsson, “The Cultus of Hebrews in Twentieth-Century Scholarship,” *Expository Times* 89, no. 4 (1978): 106. See also Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 472–74; Craig R Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 420.

5:26], 19:22). Forgiveness, then, is not alien to the cult but rather integral. This suggests that any account of the Levitical cult which dispenses with forgiveness has underestimated the significance of Yhwh's personal anger at sin and the need to turn away his just wrath in order to restore a sinner to fellowship with him.

A second example concerns the allusion to Isaiah 53:12 LXX in Hebrews 9:28: ὁ Χριστὸς ἅπαξ προσενηχθεὶς εἰς τὸ πολλῶν ἀνενεγκεῖν ἁμαρτίας. Otfried Hofius argues that this allusion makes it sound “as though Hebrews 9:28 is saying, fully in keeping with the sense of Isaiah 53, that Christ bore the penal consequences of sin substitutionarily for many.” Yet Hofius argues that “such an understanding of the clause taken from Isaiah 53 is excluded by the preceding and more important statement that Christ ‘was offered (as a sacrifice).’” Instead, “The author understands this self-sacrifice as an event of atonement that sets aside the reality of sin and grants access to God.”² On Hofius' reading, this cultic conception of atonement is incompatible with the notion of Christ bearing the penal consequences of sin for others.

But as chapter 2 of this study demonstrates, the idea of bearing the penal consequences of sin for others is not alien to the cult but integral to it, as evidenced by the pervasive concept of sin-bearing. Indeed, the institution of the priesthood and the entire Levitical system are presented in the Pentateuch as an elaborate, unified means by which Yhwh and his appointed delegates bear the consequences of the people's sin so that the people will not bear those consequences in judgment. Rather than revealing disparity between Hebrews' cultic conceptions and the forensic thought of Isaiah 53, this allusion shows that the logic of sin-bearing draws a straight line from the Levitical cult, through Isaiah 53, to Hebrews.

In sum, the forensic logic framing the Levitical cult puts the burden of proof on

²Otfried Hofius, “The Fourth Servant Song in the New Testament Letters,” in *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources*, ed. Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher, trans. Daniel P. Bailey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 184.

those who would discount any similar forensic logic operating in Hebrews. Instead of treating cultic and forensic conceptions as incommensurate and mutually exclusive, scholars who have taken sufficient stock of Levitical sacrifice itself should come to the text of Hebrews expecting to find these conceptions intertwined rather than opposed.

Questions

In addition to the answers it suggests, this study also raises a number of questions for one who would give an account of Hebrews' cultic theology. The first, and perhaps most acute, is: from where, exactly, did Hebrews obtain its theology of Levitical sacrifice? It is clear that Hebrews interacts extensively with a form of the LXX, and there is no clear evidence that the author engaged the proto-MT Hebrew tradition. Of course, it is impossible to prove that the author did not know Hebrew or was unaware of the Hebrew text; nevertheless, the text of Scripture which seems to exert the most tangible influence on him is the LXX.³ Thus, if Hebrews' understanding of Levitical sacrifice depends on Scripture, the Scripture on which it depends is, in all probability, the LXX.

This raises the question of the extent to which the LXX preserves the theology of Levitical sacrifice this study has discerned in the MT. If the LXX substantially diverges from the MT at significant points, then one can be less sure that Hebrews' appropriation of Levitical sacrifice coheres with the MT at those points. Such issues will need to be examined on a case-by-case basis. My point here is simply that, while this study has focused on the MT, any in-depth study of Hebrews' theology of Levitical sacrifice would need to consider the extent to which LXX's rendering of the Levitical code has shaped Hebrews' understanding of it.

Another question this study leaves unanswered is, how exactly does Hebrews'

³On the LXX's influence on Hebrews, see Radu Gheorghita, *The Role of the Septuagint in Hebrews: An Investigation of Its Influence with Special Consideration to the Use of Hab. 2:3-4 in Heb. 10:37-38*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament II/160 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

appeal to Levitical sacrifice “map” onto the events of Christ’s saving work? Here the two main options are what we may call a “metaphorical” and a “realist” reading.⁴ The metaphorical reading asserts that Hebrews’ appeal to the Day of Atonement provides a conceptual lens that reveals the heavenly significance of what Jesus’ earthly death accomplished. Thus, to speak of Jesus cleansing heaven, whatever the specific significance of the phrase, need not imply that Jesus was physically present in heaven at the time of the cleansing. On the other hand, the realist reading sees Hebrews’ references to Jesus’ heavenly offering as speaking to his bodily, post-resurrection ascension into heaven. On this reading, Hebrews portrays Jesus’ atoning work as commencing with the cross and culminating with his entrance into heaven at the ascension.

While there are significant differences among proponents of each of these readings, there is something of a fault line between the two. Certainly the survey of Levitical sacrifice in chapter 2 of this study does not speak decisively to the issue either way. However, it may be that the exposition of the Day of Atonement in chapter 2, taken together with the specific points of contact Hebrews draws between Christ and the Day of Atonement (Heb 9:1–28), may exert some pressure toward a realist reading. Since the high priest purged the inner sanctum by entering it with blood, and Hebrews explicitly unpacks Jesus’ cleansing of heaven in terms of his entrance into that realm (9:24) it may be that the author of Hebrews has constructed his typology not just on the basis of theological parallels, but on the basis of the event of Christ’s entrance into heaven.⁵

⁴The metaphorical view is the majority position; representative exponents include Harold W. Attridge, *Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989); William L. Lane, *Hebrews*, Word Biblical Commentary 47A–B (Dallas: Word Books, 1991); Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993). Exponents of the realist reading include David M. Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Novum Testamentum Supplement Series 141 (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Benjamin J. Ribbens, “Levitical Sacrifice and Heavenly Cult in Hebrews” (Ph.D. diss., Wheaton College, 2013); and Jody A. Barnard, “Ronald Williamson and the Background of Hebrews,” *Expository Times* 124, no. 10 (2013): 469–79.

⁵It may be that exegetes’ preference for the metaphorical reading can be explained, in part, by underestimating the importance of sacred space, and hence physical presence within sacred space, for

One final question to register is whether chapter 2's more detailed account may shed light on any interpretive cruxes at specific points in Hebrews. For instance, scholars debate whether λυτρ- words in Hebrews denote merely rescue, or redemption by means of the payment of a price.⁶ If Leviticus 17:11 does indeed explain blood sacrifice as a ransom, operating on the talionic principle of life in exchange for life, this would seem to weigh in favor of the meaning "redemption by payment of a price" in similarly cultic contexts in Hebrews. Similarly, one may ask whether Hebrews' aphoristic statement in 9:22 is intended to echo the formula of Leviticus 17:11, and, if so, what light this sheds on the disputed sense of the Hebrews passage.⁷ Tentatively, I would suggest that since 9:15–22 opens with a mention of Jesus' death "for redemption," and 9:22 says that αἱματεκχυσία is necessary for forgiveness—a clear parallel—then Hebrews seems to be paralleling Jesus' giving his own life in death with the life of the animal given in death. Thus, Hebrews could be offering a theological comment on the significance of Leviticus' talionic life offered in exchange for a life forfeit in light of the ultimate exchange effected by Christ.

As a prolegomenon, it is fitting for this study to end with this set of questions to explore. Some light, at least, has been shed on Hebrews, Leviticus, and the paths that run between them. Much in both books remains a mystery; certainly much of Hebrews' enigmatic Levitical garb remains to be unraveled. Yet the answers this study offers, together with the questions it prompts, should offer some direction for those who seek to

Hebrews' Leviticus-shaped worldview. If there is any merit in this suggestion, a helpful corrective can be found in Nehemiah Polen's comments: "It is helpful to think schematically of the entire Israelite encampment as a nested sequence of rectangles. Within the camp is a partitioned space defining the tabernacle's courtyard where the large bronze altar stood. Within that is the Tent of Meeting; then the innermost part of the Tent, the Holy of Holies; and finally the Ark of the Covenant with its cover, the Kapporet and Cherubim. Atonement or restoration is found by going to a location beyond one's normal domain" (Nehemiah Polen, "Leviticus and Hebrews . . . and Leviticus," in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham et al. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 221).

⁶See discussion in Ribbens, "Levitical Sacrifice and Heavenly Cult," 240–49.

⁷For representative discussions, see Lane, *Hebrews*, B:245–47; Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 471–74.

mine the riches of Hebrews and Leviticus, and who therefore seek fresh paths between the two.

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ABSTRACT

PURGING GOD'S PEOPLE AND PLACE: LEVITICAL SACRIFICE AS A PROLEGOMENON TO HEBREWS

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Chapter 1 first establishes the study's methodology, then explores Hebrews' interest(s) in Leviticus as a pathway into Leviticus itself, sketching Hebrews' appropriation of the Day of Atonement, the high priest as sacrificial officiant, "daily" sacrifices, the inauguration of covenant and cult, and the twofold conception of purifying God's people and place. Chapter 2 offers a portrait of Levitical sacrifice, first examining its creational foundations, canonical precursors, and covenantal context, then surveying the various types of sacrifices. Following this, two topics which receive more detailed attention are the Day of Atonement and the forensic logic running through the cult, the latter seen in (1) the links between priesthood, sacrifice, and wrath, (2) the "blood canon" of Leviticus 17:11, (3) the concept of sin-bearing, and (4) the "biological" and "legal" nature of impurity. Chapter 3 briefly outlines some of the answers this survey of Leviticus brings to the text of Hebrews then details a number of questions it raises which subsequent study of Hebrews should engage.

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